

VILLAGE VIEW

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Not so very long ago (at least it seems that way), people were asking me what I wanted to be when I grew up. Those were the days when aviation was sweeping the country as man's newest advance in technological achievement. Women, too, were piloting airplanes. Amelia Earhart, not Carol Lombard, was my ideal. Other little girls might want to become movie stars, but I wanted to grow up to be an aviatrix like Miss Earhart and Anne Morrow Lindberg who flew with her shy handsome husband, Charles, world hero as the result of his solo transAtlantic flight in *The Spirit of St. Louis*.

Then came the difficult days of the 1930s. As the years passed, and Cape Cod remained stuck fast in the mire of the Great Depression even after other parts of the country began to recover, I grew from child to teenager and advanced through grammar school to Jr. High and Barnstable High School.

Reality dictated a goal less glamorous than aviation. Girls without unlimited financial resources had slim choices in careers: teaching, nursing, stenography. None appealed especially to me, but as early as my freshman year in high school, I was expected to reach a decision.

"Learn to do something. Then, if you ever need to, you can support yourself," I was advised. Accordingly, I opted for a business course. Although I did well in shorthand, I flunked bookkeeping. Typing seemed almost beyond my physical capability. Years later, after taking a dexterity test, I found I hadn't been blessed with the muscular coordination to become an expert typist. By that time, though, I'd mastered the practice; even so, I'll never be expert.

Concluding I wasn't cut out for stenography, I switched to a science course in my junior year. Perhaps I'd make a better nurse than secretary. Chemistry was my Nemesis. Without algebra (I'd missed that when I took bookkeeping) to help decipher formulae, I was lost.

A year of the sciences convinced me perhaps I should become a teacher. It was then, at the beginning of my senior year, I discovered that if I hoped to enter teacher's college, I'd need a year of algebra and one of a foreign language. Other than English, French was the only language offered at Barnstable High; I signed up for French I and algebra, as well as for the other four courses all seniors were required to complete for graduation.

When June of '41 rolled around, I had the credits needed to get my diploma and enter teacher's college. I also had an educational base marked by fits and starts. And I still had no clear idea of what I wanted to be when I grew up. Looking

back, I wonder now many high school seniors today feel similarly uncertain.

In my case, there followed another six years of intermittent schooling and work-experience before I eventually earned a B.A.

A week or so ago I asked myself, "What would I do differently were I setting goals today? How would the intervening forty years change my aims? Would I be better prepared to earn a living or to continue my education if I were just out of high school now than then?"

While I'm not sure I know the answers (because I recognize that much of my own difficulty resulted from lack of direction and conviction), I conclude that youngsters today have, or at least have at their disposal, many more options and have access to a great deal more information about possible careers than were available to me.

A recent article by David T. Kearns, published in the *Christian Science Monitor*, July 20, 1982, summarizes a speech made by the president and chief operating officer of Xerox Corporation at the American Business Press meeting in Boca Raton, Florida. His is a message I hope every high school student receives. It is an example of advice that people need to make decisions that will determine their future successes or failures.

Although Kearns' entire article is important, the point made is that this country is changing from an industrial society to one that handles information. Of our work force, 75% now collects, manipulates and disseminates information, while only 22% is employed in manufacturing.

The president of Xerox agrees with the Technocrats that the automated factory of the future won't provide enough industrial jobs for our population. "General Motors says," he points out, "that within five years, computers will control 90% of their production machinery." On the other hand, the picture is not entirely bleak.

Automation creates new jobs--and more of them--in new sectors of the economy, he believes. He explains how, why and what our response should be. Workers must shift to information handling and services. In the past decade, this sector of our economy has nearly quadrupled, and will continue to grow and generate new jobs that require special skills. Most in demand will be computer and office machine technicians, and computer programmers and operators. "Workers will have to shift from old skills to new skills."

The president of Xerox proposes that industry take the lead in retraining workers, "because it knows best where the jobs are and the skills needed to do them." He suggests tax incentives would help industry retrain workers; he suggests universities and vocational schools adjust curricula to the needs of the job market.

His appeal is for a nationwide concerted effort to, first, recognize that retraining, rather than reindustrialization, is needed, and then to meet the challenge of an economic revolution as fundamental as the Industrial Revolution, and as far-reaching.

In accepting his analysis and relating to it my own experiences in education and the world of business, I heartily endorse his views.

Quoting writer-economist Lester Thurow, "You can't build a high-quality economy with low-quality components." Yet, he says, that's exactly what we're trying to do today with the most important component of our economy--the quality of the workforce.

Were I establishing my goals today, were I choosing a career-plan now, I'd seriously consider obtaining all the training I could muster in information-handling, in computer maintenance or its operation. American business and industry spend billions of dollars, every year, to educate and train employees. After I'd acquired all the training and education I could afford, I'd look to business and industry for further assistance.

Today, with more than 50% of the female population between the ages of 20 and 65 employed full time, women need to be as qualified as men. Information handling is a field where women can qualify and can move rapidly up the corporate and economic ladder. If I were back in high school, my choices would not be limited to teaching, nursing or stenography. Banking, insurance, hotels and restaurants, airlines, medicine, law, engineering, publishing are all using computers. In our homes, computers will soon be as commonplace as telephones and television sets.

And I'd want to know how to operate them, fix them, use them to help me become a valuable employee so I could "do something, if I ever needed to, to support myself."