REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST—FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

(Remarks by Leslie M. Reid at the RPTS Spring Banquet in April, 1995)

INTRODUCTION (music: Tevye, Fiddler on the Roof)

I understand I have only a brief time, so there is no opportunity for jokes or hilarity.....

The Banquet Committee requested some comments on "Reflections on the Past—Focus on the Future. I haven't prepared formal remarks—just an outline of thoughts to keep me somewhat on track as we go.

I asked Susanna to set the tone for me by playing a few bars of music from Fiddler on the Roof in which Tevye's theme is TRADITIONS..... I intend to talk a bit about traditions because Texas A&M is widely known as a bastion of traditions.

Traditions are incredibly important. They foster Stability.....Predictability.....Continuity

Even our RPTS department has its own traditions. In May, 1970, Andy Sansom, who was then a senior Park Administration student at Texas Tech University and also Executive Secretary of NRPA's Student Branch, was Keynote Speaker at our Spring end-of-year banquet. Incidentally, that event was an outdoor BBQ at Hensel Park. And by the way, Andy Sansom is currently the Executive Director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

More recently, in 1990, we celebrated the 25th anniversary of this department with a Silver Anniversary event. And later tonight, some of the awards presented will have the weight of tradition associated with them.

But the Banquet Committee asked me to present some things to think about--some ideas to chew on. I will. But the problem with new ideas is that sometimes new ideas can be unsettling or uncomfortable--especially if they challenge the status quo or upset the usual order of things.

RPTS DEPARTMENT

I am aware some of you here tonight were born since 1965, the year our Recreation and Parks Department began operations. Huge changes have taken place at Texas A&M since then. TAMU enrolled about 8,000 students that year--almost all required to be in the Corps of Cadets. Hardly any students were female, except for a few persons designated as "hardship cases". There was little air-conditioning on campus, and most correspondence was done on manual typewriters. Hand-cranked ditto machines--NOT Xerox machines or laser printers--were used to duplicate course materials.

When I arrived at Easterwood Airport on a hot August day in 1965 to interview for the position of Department Head, I was met by the Assistant Dean of Agriculture. He was selected to meet me because he was the one person whose Ford sedan was equipped with an under-the-dash add-on A/C unit.
A SMALL SLICE OF HISTORY

Our Department began, not as an offshoot from a pre-existing curriculum--but by the decision of then-President General Earl Rudder to create a free-standing department in the College of Agriculture. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board was petitioned for approval of BS, MS, and PhD degree, but agreed to initially grant only the BS and MS degrees. The Department Head of Range Science agreed to hold records of our entering Master's candidates until we received authority to report them.

So this new program was assigned one 9 X 11-foot office on the 3rd floor of the Plant Sciences Building. In the Spring semester of 1966 we offered three undergraduate courses with the much-needed assistance of a hurriedly-hired part-time instructor (Carroll Dowell), and a talented do-everything secretary.

We started that semester with 17 Fish and transfers from several other Ag College departments. Most of those students, hailing from Texas farm, ranch or small town, were looking for a career in the outdoors. By the end of the semester we had a total of 23 majors and celebrated with a cookout at Carter Lake with a campfire, guitars, hotdogs and beer under the stars.

One of those first students (Walt Dabney) went on to become Chief Ranger for the entire US National Park Service. He was honored here two years ago as the first recipient of our Outstanding Alumnus Award. Members of that first class (1969 -1970) as a group are now in mid-career executive positions, and a credit to Texas A&M University.

The next five years saw constant growth in the Department--approval of the PhD degree, higher enrollments, increased faculty and staff positions, and more classroom courses and lab sections. So we were constantly moving to obtain bigger and better space. In fact, we became known as the Gypsies of TAMU, and the inside joke was: "It must be Wednesday--we're moving again".

In 1967 we made a wholesale move to the Herman Heep Bldg. Located on the first and second floors we occupied a unit vacated by the Dean of Agriculture and staff -- four offices for seven faculty, a secretary pool, and a small conference room. By 1968 we had expanded into five buildings, including the Old Biosciences.

In 1970 we obtained approval to remodel Garrigan's Barn (the former Artillery Division's horse facility). This entailed converting horse stalls to faculty and staff offices, classrooms and labs. Administrative and faculty offices, classrooms and a sizable drafting lab occupied the ground floor, while grad students and their wives cleaned and scrubbed the second floor hay storage loft for use as grad student quarters.

Our odyssey continued with our move in 1973 from the horse barn to Goodwin Hall on the east end of the Drill Field -- a previously condemned building vacated when the Oceanography Building was completed. This three-story building provided an administrative unit, first-floor faculty offices, a Cooperative Extension unit and Interpretive Unit space on the second floor third floor classrooms, and below-ground office space for all grad students. The nomadic nature of the RP Department ended in 1981 when we received approval to occupy Francis Hall where we are now located upon the departure of the four Business Management departments.

Not much of this growth history is documented in the history of Texas A&M. We did chronicle some of the major events beginning with a monthly departmental newsletter in January, 1966. Through several stages of growth, from black to color from all text to photographs and through several generations of Newsletter Editors, they provide a running timeline of growth and accomplishment.
CURRICULAR ORIENTATION

It is clear from review of these newsletters that the department remained amazingly true to an emphasis in park and recreation administration and natural resources management. This concentration was even more pronounced in Recreation and Parks as the undergraduate degree designation, while the MS and PhD degrees were awarded in Recreation and Resources Development.

As an aside, it is interesting that the students who have been attracted to this curriculum have exhibited a remarkable grouping of characteristics:

* A strong element of public good, or social service (a calling, as in the ministry)
* A desire for order, efficiency and effectiveness
* A propensity to convert vision to reality (salesmanship, or even tricksterism)

As RPTS grew, we added faculty with very different interests and terminal educational backgrounds. These included: landscape architecture, forestry, economics, physical sciences, law, wildlife, geography, sociology, physical education and public administration.

The "glue" that bound these disparate specializations together was the commitment to apply these diverse specializations to recreation and parks and the leisure field, and the inclusion of these specializations in various recreational settings.

If there was any genius in organizing this RP department it was in building a faculty in which members truly respected the worth and ability of colleagues and the willingness to work cooperatively to bring their individual disciplinary skills to bear on recreation and park applications.

The vision that established the RP department at Texas A&M was to assemble the best possible multidisciplinary team to make concerted attacks on sophisticated and complex leisure problems. Each faculty member appointed came as a partner in the dream of contributing to that concept.

Over the years, RP continued to grow. By 1975, faculty and instructors, secretaries and staff, and registered undergraduate and graduate students. Of more than 100 recreation and parks curricula listed as having legitimate curricula, (the large majority of which were recreation oriented), the RP program at TAMU was recognized as the best of the young, new departments.

By 1985, TAMU's department received the number one ranking by the prestigious national Gorman Report as the best degree-granting program in the USA. in terms of faculty, undergraduate and graduate students, scholarly publications, and world status.

A highlight in this history over the past 25 years has been the achievements of our graduates in their chosen careers. They are making notable contributions in federal, state and local recreation and park agencies, in volunteer organizations, in resource management agencies, in the travel and tourism industry, in private organizations, and on college and university faculties.

In considering the future, it is often advisable to review relevant history, and important to take a look back—to identify our roots.

In the last decades of the 19th century and the first years of the 20th century, (1900-1910) the public park and recreation movement in the USA received tremendous impetus from a variety of pioneers in recreation and parks. Yellowstone became the country's first national Park in 1872. Steve Mather built on that foundation. President Theodore Roosevelt expanded the concept and the national park system.
These developments spurred the creation of curricula in parks management at several colleges and universities. The emphasis was on conservation and protection of natural resources, as documented in the National Park Service’s Organic Act in 1916. In 1898 the New England Association of Park Superintendents was chartered, becoming the precursor for the American Institute of Park Executives. A parallel emphasis resulted in the National Recreation Association among urban recreation leaders interested in providing outdoor and sport opportunities for urban residents.

Allow me to digress a moment by referencing some historical leaders in our field of interest. The names and accomplishments of these early leaders are known to all:

Frederick Law Olmsted. Central Park New York, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco and others.
Jane Adams. Pioneer advocate of Hull House, Chicago
Joseph Lee. Boston Sand Gardens
John Muir. Scottish conservationist and naturalist, Yosemite, California
Stephan T. Mather. Father of the National Park Service
Fred Rivers. World Leisure and Recreation Council

These leaders represented a broad-based support for recreation and conservation. They were instrumental in changing the national focus from a royal/elitist to a social/popular concern.

I must in passing credit a group of recreation and park professional administrators who by any measure are the stalwarts who are responsible for the professionalism of recreation and parks. Many of these dedicated leaders -- though visionaries with lifelong careers in recreation and parks are not well known names in the annals of their craft. Though the following brief listing is not all-inclusive, they are all leaders with whom I have been personally acquainted. This is a coincidence that deserves explanation.

These RP professionals were all in executive administrative positions in their individual local, state, private or national agency positions prior to the outbreak of World War II in 1939. At their mid-career ages, they were as a group collectively past the age of being drafted into the military services. They were regarded as exempt in essential services and were "frozen" in their existing positions. Consequently, they continued as directors of parks and recreation throughout the entire course of the war.

I was fortunate to be among the few students who graduated with a resource-oriented park administration degree shortly after the conclusion of WWII. Having earned an MS degree at Michigan State in the mid-fifties, I was invited to join the MSU faculty in 1957 as part of the nationwide expansion of curricula to serve the flood of returning veterans and high school graduates who were enrolling in response to the call for individuals to staff positions in rapidly-expanding RP agencies throughout the country.

The previously-mentioned top professionals had continued in their executive positions, and were now at the peak of their professional careers. Most fortuitously, my faculty appointment at MSU included responsibility for directing an in-house educational publication program. The output of this program was a series of printed publications, each one developed from synthesis of the best professional information available from the active executives in the country. Following is a listing of many of the agency directors who participated in this program.

William Stinchcomb - Cleveland Metropolitan Parks
Robert Crawford - Philadelphia, Pa
L.B. Houston - Dallas, Texas
Robert Moses - State of New York
Ellis LaBorde - New Orleans Recreation Department
Charles Dasman - Univ. of Illinois
Tommy Thompson - City of Toronto, Canada
Wm. Frederickson - San Francisco Parks and Recreation
The Recreation and Parks Department at TAMU built upon the outdoor park and recreation emphasis. That focus on park administration was our chief concern for the initial 20 years of operation. By 1990, a major shift in orientation was apparent. There was decreased domination of natural resource (outdoor) recreation, and increasing emphasis on sociological, behavioral and marketing studies. Research in the tourism industry was receiving greater attention, as was demand-side recreation (user-emphasis).

Concurrently, there was a significant change in the characteristics of enrolled students. Initially, predominantly male students hailed largely from rural areas and were interested in outdoor-related careers. The number of female students increased, as did interest in social, economic and behavioral emphases increased. In part these changes reflected basic changes in the employment market, and in the retrenchment of government jobs.

One might say that job-related skills -- such as expertise in equipment, planning interpretation, construction -- gave way to increasing importance of skills related to facilitation, management, organization, ....

These changes have been in play since the predominantly natural resource-based American Institute of Park Executives merged in 1966 with several recreation-related organizations to form the National Park and Recreation Association.

NRPA, AIPE, ARS, NRA, AAZPA conglomerate of professionals and lay factions.
AIPE segment drifting
Therapeutics -- stronger
HP&E -- weakened
Leisureology -- searching for a purpose
AAZPA -- separate identity
Travel / Tourism --Looking for an identity

FINALLY, WHERE ARE WE NOW AND WHERE ARE WE GOING IN THE FUTURE

The future is as hard to predict as it was when Teddy Roosevelt was President. What will the year 2000 be like? or 2010 or 2020? Will the first decade of the 21st century be radically different than we anticipate?

SOCIETY OF PARK AND RECREATION EDUCATORS

The branch of NRPA known as SPRE has since its inception been the forward-looking branch because of its predominant membership of educators. Several recent articles by leading SPRE professors are instructive in confronting recreation and leisure issues and concerns. A few examples:

(From the SPRE 1995 Winter Issue):

KARLA HENDERSON (Univ of No. Carolina)

Overall, the field is weakening due to the narrow focus on specialties. Some favor their own specialty more than the broad framework of leisure education; where is commitment to the core? Divisiveness of specialties. What product are universities trying to produce?

LYNN JAMESON (SPRE President)

We must define -- and keep -- what is important; positive use of leisure service to the entire leisure industry, practical application of leisure knowledge, combat negative societal view of right to leisure.

RHONDA SONIFIELD (Univ. of Illinois)

Need a core philosophy for leisure educators. (There is a) Dangerous worm of dissension re: which part of RP is more important to the whole field.

(April 1990 SPRE News)

RUTH RUSSELL (SPRE President)

Whatever became of collegiality? Collegiality is on the way out. Faculty self interest; jockeying for position.. Diverse interests. Not in harmony with colleagues. Focus on own activities.. Protectionism. Avoiding dilution of time and effort by NOT taking on departmental responsibilities.

Evidence on securing external funds to support personal research. Self-promotion. Tenure, salary and awards being the dominant interest.

Yes, even in some cases, refusal to support any students except the professor's own pet students.
I guess I am a strong advocate of STABILITY. Because in my view, new knowledge is built additively on existing knowledge--on past experiences. And so total knowledge becomes more and more suited to responding to the existing needs of society.

At the other extreme is INSTABILITY--in the classic sense--CHAOS. In my opinion Chaos is both good and bad. As Tevye would say (in fiddler on the Roof), "...on the other hand..." Chaos upsets the predictable order of things. Normal rules are suspended. Nothing is possible and all things are possible.

The negative aspect of instability is that existing knowledge may be irretrievably lost as a result of CHAOS.

One of my favorite preoccupations is with the Mayan civilization of Central America. But the cataclysmic collapse of that civilization and the burning of all written records that the invading Spaniards could find made that civilization an enigma to scholars for these past 400 years.

I feel certain that the relocation of native American tribes during the westward expansion of our own country caused a terrible loss of cultural knowledge--even to the use of traditional medicines as people were uprooted from localities where they were familiar with plants, seeds and animal products. Ancient history provides us with many examples of Chaos resulting in loss of knowledge--a hiatus in the records of Egyptian Pharaohs--even the Bible's Old Testament accounts of war, captivities, exiles and instability to the extent that Scripture reports, "Who was King? Who was not King?" (Some for as short a reign as ONE month).

So life in Chaos is risky because of the unknowable future. One example. We recently went to see the new movie OUTBREAK--a film about an African virus that is released in the United States and is so deadly that it kills every infected person within a few days and almost results in the annihilation of an entire city.

Also on TV just this week a medical doctor was interviewed as saying, "I fully expect the HIV virus to mutate and become an air-borne virus within 5 to 10 years". Think a moment about the implications of an air-borne deadly infectious virus disease. Suspected carriers would be avoided like the proverbial plague. Tourism as we know it today might just suddenly disappear. (Remember the empty playgrounds and swimming pools during the polio epidemics of the 1940's and 50's).

Instability brings with it the opportunity, in fact the necessity to invent a new order--a new way of dealing with conditions as they are. So new methods must be devised, new procedures developed, new arrangements and structures must be tried. And out of this comes a new world, a different world--vastly different and maybe vastly better than the old. Consider just a few examples.

The Chaos that ended the Mayan civilization with the Spanish conquest also radically changed the economic monetary system in Europe due to the massive influx of gold and silver brought to Spain from the Americas. The Chaos that was felt in England as a result of the American Revolution brought forth a new sort of representative government in this country. Most recently, the breakup of the former USSR (Soviet Union) is leading to a fundamental reorganization of that society and a government whose final form is still unclear.

And right here--tonight--we are living in the Chaos resulting from the invention of computers and PC's--the ubiquitous personal computer. The book publishing industry has been turned upside down. Books and navies are made differently with computers. The communications industry is trying hard to accommodate itself to new organizational patterns. Cadastral surveying is being done by computer and satellite. The Postal Service is ignored by those of us using FAX, modems and the internet. And universities are struggling to understand how to evaluate electronic publication of research results when assessing faculty scholarships for promotion, tenure and salary raises.
All these have direct implications for those of you in mid-career or about to embark on a career. As the novelist said, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times".

Life in a time of Chaos and upset can be wonderfully rewarding and exciting. Consider the inventors of Apple computers. Look at the fortunes made by Bill Gates of Microsoft and other young people who are now millionaires because they invented computer software programs that could not have existed a few years ago.

Opportunities abound for personal experimentation. However, the greatest need is for personal initiative, logical analysis, willingness to make decisions, and confidence in following up on those personal decisions.

I believe that recognition of the importance of the traits just mentioned is often overlooked in standard university course offerings. So perhaps it is up to each of you to accept the responsibility to refine these skills--this personalized outlook on the world--for yourself.

It is this recommendation I want to leave with each of you--student, faculty, parent or friend. Be aware that the future is coming and you MUST be prepared to accommodate yourself to it. You likely won't see the future coming. It creeps up on you unawares--and suddenly you look back and realize the world you knew and felt comfortable in is a thing of the past. It WILL happen whether you elect to work in public parks, in sport centers, youth organizations, recreation centers, or as a university teacher.

But for your sake, if not for mine, while you have your head down concentrating on the needs and demands of this hour and this day, remember--like a nervous antelope in lion country--to keep on guard for the unexpected, and turn those upsets to your own advantage. (Thank You)