

by Nathan Kopp

The dozen or so years spent in formal education are part of a bigger segment of time called life. When a person is born, they begin to grow and to develop ideas about what will fulfill them as a human being. A two-year-old's concept of fulfillment revolves primarily around food. At ten, satisfaction shifts from food to having fun being a kid. Ideas about life continually amend themselves into revolutionary theories about how the world should work. At eighteen, most core ideas have taken root; and by the time a person is thirty, his central values are often established. Subsequent experiences tend to develop and solidify his views, rather than alter them.

The foundation laid in the early years determines a great deal of who you will be. My formal education started with kindergarten and grade one in public school. I received the rest of my schooling at home. I distinctly remember having good feelings toward the principal particularly and the gym teachers generally. This sentiment fades as I recall my homeroom teachers. I felt misunderstood and like I was in the way whenever I pursued an interest beyond what the class was studying—like the shiny rocks in the parking lot, or the marbles on the playground, or the cool stuff we never used in the gym equipment room.

Coming home was far more liberating to learn things naturally, like making paper snowflakes or cooking and reading. I learned some math and history from unrolling coins and finding old or unusual denominations. Small-scale apprenticeships included working at the local recycle depot, delivering catalogues, training in electrics, shovelling snow, and cutting grass. These experiences exposed me to new fields of study and developed a basic skill set to build from.

When I was seventeen, I started working for a roofing contractor, which was one of the best things that ever happened to me. It enabled me to work alongside people with different worldviews, while my own worldview was becoming firmly established. Later on, trade school rounded out my experiences in more specific areas.

One of the most important things I would advise as you set out to explore, discover, and establish life foundations through education, is not to waste time. Start early if you want to be great at something, be it music, medicine, or millwork. That being said, don't rush to end the stage of life you are experiencing now. Just like a construction project, a stage of education needs to be completed well. When you're fifty it won't matter much whether you started reading at four or eight, but it will matter if you can still read and enjoy it.

Envision with me the construction of a house from the conceptual drawings through to move-in day. When your parents contemplated marrying each other, they probably discussed their future vision for their family, similar to planning a dream home. Before their children were born, they probably found baby clothes and a crib, similar to buying a lot and digging a hole for the basement. When the concrete

trucks started arriving, disrupting the tranquility in the entire subdivision, well, this is a little like a baby coming home. The children's years between four and ten compare to the framers hammering and pushing walls around: lots of energy abounds for good or bad outcomes, and it is important to stay on the straight and square floor frame.

As the children grow up, the windows of art and expression are installed, and the shingles of character are laid to keep our lives from getting waterlogged. By the time graduation comes, the house is habitable, although it still needs the trim and millwork of life experiences. During college, the final paint is applied and the exterior is finished. Beginning a profession is like buying things to furnish the house, and using the now-finished home to benefit both yourself and those around you. Now, imagine ten or twenty years from now, when you are living in the house, raising a family, running a business, or entertaining relatives.

This progression happens naturally, and to a certain extent, necessarily. When the concrete arrives, it starts curing—ready or not! When thunderheads pile up in the northwest, the shingles had better be in place or a tarp thrown over the open roof. When habitation is required, supplies for development are used in whatever state they are found.

Looking back over my whole education experience, I'm profoundly appreciative of the balance my parents employed between completing my required education and allowing my natural aptitudes to develop while I was growing up. My interests in hunting and building forts flourished into guiding hunters and house construction. My non-interest in playing piano was not ignored or disregarded; however, my non-interest in certain textbooks was overruled until a certain amount of learning had been gleaned from them. There is an intricate balance to know if someone isn't interested in a field of study, or if laziness is motivating the indifference. Compare this to a building inspector thumbing through a codebook enforcing bylaws, or giving recommendations on better building practices. Finding that balance is critical: neither anarchy nor tyranny make great learning environments, and a wise parent will spend the time to know their child sufficiently to find that balance.

Just like a new house, building a life requires time and materials. Don't squander your time or use anything less than the best of materials, or an inferior product will result.

Nathan Kopp was home educated for most of his formal education and highly advocates that style of learning. Between 2004 and 2006 he attended the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology for carpentry, and now resides in Edson, Alberta, where he builds, grows, and hunts things. If you need anything built, grown, or hunted please email him at albertabuilderboy@gmail.com.