



## Autobiography of William R. Lee

**(with a Special Remembrance of Dr. Graves)**

*To be what we are . . . and to become whatever we are capable of becoming, is the only end in life.*

- Robert Louis Stevenson

When human beings reflect on their lives they not only wonder about who they are - but also about how they became whoever they are. This autobiography is an attempt to reveal something about who I am . . . and to shed some light on my personal journey in becoming whoever I am.

I was born on April 18, 1929, in the Borough of Manhattan, New York City. My mother was a housewife and my father was a beginning plumber. The years from 1929 into the early 1940s were the great depression years and my father, a plumber, moved his family to wherever he could find work. Our family, Mom and Dad, my younger sister, Alva, and brother, Bob, and I, lived in 8 different places during the first 10 years of my life: New York, New Jersey and Connecticut and finally in 1939 we moved to Arlington County, in Northern Virginia.

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From 1944 to 1947 I attended Washington-Lee High School. After graduation I worked in the printing business for Cooper and Trent, a printing company in Arlington, Virginia, and then for Whitlock Press in Washington, D.C., between 1947-1948. In August 1948 I joined the U.S. Marine Corps. I was sent to Parris Island, N. C., for Boot Camp. Then I was stationed at the printing plant at Quantico Marine Base, at Quantico, Virginia, from December 1948 to April 1949. In April 1949 I was transferred to the printing plant at Fleet Marine Force Pacific, Camp Catlin on Oahu in the Hawaiian Islands. With the closing of Camp Catlin [and its old WWII wooden buildings] we were moved to new quarters across the quadrangle from the Marine Barracks at Pearl Harbor, Oahu. I remained there until I was discharged from the Marine Corps at San Diego, California on August 15, 1952. I had attained the rank of Staff Sgt. in four years.

Upon returning home to Arlington, Virginia in 1952 I went to work in the printing plant of the Hill Directory in Alexandria, Virginia, making printing plates for the presses and working in the photo and layout areas. In December of 1952 I flew to Rochester, N.Y., where I had been accepted for a 3-4 year course in the printing field at Rochester Institute of Technology. I was given a battery of tests and one of the tests was the Kuder Occupational Interest Survey. The test results and evaluation of the Kuder Occupational Interest Survey were:

"...interests are strongest in the social service and musical areas."

To read papers on Dr. Graves' work compiled by William R. Lee, [click here](#)

There were a number of other indicators that were telling me that I had the interests, abilities and skills to do well in the printing field. I was, therefore, faced with a problem. Back on July 8, 1948, before I went into the Marine Corps, I had taken the Kuder Occupational Interest Survey at a counseling clinic at George Washington University in Washington, D. C. The Kuder results at that time, 4 years earlier, stated that my highest interests were in social service and musical as well as literary fields. I have in my files some old papers (4-5 pages typed in Hawaii) with some thoughts about my life, past, present and future, and the fact that I was about to leave Hawaii to be discharged from the Marine Corps. The thoughts on these pages indicate that I was already thinking seriously about a change from the printing field to something else, but what that something else might be was yet to be discovered.

The Kuder survey was indicating something in me that appeared to be a constant and I did not understand it. It seemed to be saying to me that although I had strong interests, plenty of ability and years of experience in the printing field - that in terms of a career I would be "better off" if I were doing some other kind of work apparently in something called "social service." I had no idea what this meant or could mean. Both of my working parents in the late 1920s had only been able to go as far as the 10th grade in high school. My class rank in graduating from high school was 275 out of about 400. I was about a C average student. I did not have a strong, confident self-image. I was an unknown quantity. I weighed 125 lbs when I went into the Marine Corps in 1948. I was the last man in the marching line in Platoon 222 in boot camp. I was short in height and my nickname among my friends growing up in Arlington - was Peewee! I was to be, apparently, what most would call . . . a late bloomer!

With this "fork in the road" as to what I was to do with my life at age 24, I spent a few days hiking and camping out, by myself, on the Appalachian Trail near the Pass Mt. region of Thornton Gap in N. Virginia. I was in a state of meditation [Webster's dictionary states that this means: (1) to engage in thought or contemplation, (2) to plan in the mind]. I talked it over with myself and the sky full of stars . . . and I decided to stride off in a new direction in my life keeping the faith that somewhere out there in the unknown there was, perhaps, an occupation or a way of life that was better "suited" to whomever and whatever I was that was different from a career in the printing field.

So I attended night school at Washington-Lee High School in the summer of 1953 for a refresher course in Algebra and English. I chose a small college in Pulaski, Tennessee - Martin Jr. College - to begin my exploration in a new direction. These college years were to be some of the finest times in my life. At both Martin Jr. College and later at Birmingham-Southern College I sang in the college choir, I created Barbershop Quartets and we sang all over Tennessee and Alabama. I had the lead role in plays at both schools. I was a member of the tennis team. My grades were A's and B's. I was open to life, to new experiences, in a continuing discovery of (a) the knowledge and the wisdom of the human journey upon this earth and (b) the unknown dimensions of my being, as I "unfolded from within" - in my own becoming.

I do not know what personal experiences, events, life conditions or whatever variables existed - that can account for the human being that I have become. From time to time small pieces seem to fall into place . . . but I will have never enough pieces to complete the story of my becoming. We are all unknown mysteries flowing out of the past - - into the present - - towards some unknown future: DNA + LCs + Time = on our unfolding vMeme journeys. However, I do know this: I was able to go to college because of the G.I. Bill or I would not be where I am today.

Between 1953 and 1955 I went to Martin Jr. College in Pulaski, Tennessee, where I earned a Jr. College Diploma. During the summer of 1955 I went to George Washington University, Washington, D. C. for a course in Psychology. Beginning in Sept. 1955 to June

1957 I was at Birmingham-Southern College, Birmingham, Alabama, where I received a B. A. Degree - Major in Psychology and enjoyed Theta Chi Fraternity, Beta Xi chapter. While at Birmingham-Southern, I also worked, from time to time, at the City Board of Education and the Jefferson County Board of Education operating their IBM test scoring machines. A few times I worked in a local printing company in Birmingham. During the summer I worked in printing plants in Northern Virginia. I had to find ways to support myself since the G.I. Bill, which took care of a lot of things, was not enough to carry me through college, e.g., a car to maintain and transportation to and from college. During the summer of 1956 and fall of 1957 I attended American University in Washington, D.C. In college I had discovered the field of Psychology. I knew that Psychology was the career field for me and I set out to learn as much as I could about Psychology and any related areas of knowledge.

I graduated from Birmingham-Southern College in June 1957 and came home to Virginia. While I was looking around and thinking about what could I do with a B.A. in Psychology and helping around the old house on Garfield Street . . . my father was killed in an auto accident . . . so my "life conditions" changed. I spent the next year taking care of my mother and the house . . . and working at Hillcrest Children's Center in Washington D.C. as a counselor/ cottage parent/ working with emotional disturbed children, ages 6 to 13. In August of 1958 I moved to Hawthorne, New York and began working at a Jewish Board of Guardians facility, Hawthorne Cedar Knolls School. I was a cottage parent alternating between two cottages with about 30 emotionally disturbed children (15 boys per a cottage) ranging in age from 8 to 16. There were regular, permanent "substitute" parents living in each cottage and my responsibility was to take over for a couple of days or more each week so that these "substitute" parents would not be working a seven day week. I became, in a sense, a "substitute" parent also. It was quite an experience learning to relate in a meaningful way, hopefully in a helping manner, to 30 young boys each uniquely different and coming from all kinds of different life conditions. Each of them seemed to need a mentally healthy, stable home environment, which we tried to provide, and which they tested to check it out on a regular basis.

During the fall of 1958 and spring of 1959 I audited Dr. Solomon Asch in Social Psychology and Dr. Irving Rock in Perception at The Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science of the New School of Social Research, Greenwich Village, New York City. I left Hawthorne in the fall of 1959 to begin a Masters Degree Graduate program in Psychology at Michigan State University where one of my courses was Social Psychology taught by Dr. Milton Rokeach. However, the G.I. Bill and \$\$ ran out - so I was there for only one quarter and then I came back to Arlington, Va.

In the late fall of 1959 I met Jean, a wonderful woman who became my wife. (I had met Jean in the 7th grade, but our lives had gone in different directions until this time.) I "settled down" and applied for a teaching job at my old high school, Washington-Lee, in early 1960 and took over teaching world history from a man who transferred to a government job. I was now in the Arlington County Public School system. Jean and I were married in June of 1960. Jean and I have been married for 41 years. We have three children - two girls, Barbara and Donna, and one boy, Billy. Barbara, a Virginia Tech graduate, has worked for over 25 years as a Director of Food Services for a hospital. Donna, a graduate of Northern Virginia Community College, is a registered nurse, and Billy, a graduate of Virginia Tech, is partner in a building company. They have given us eight wonderful grandchildren.

Due to enrollment changes at W-L, I was transferred to Gunston Junior High School in Arlington where I taught world geography from September 1960 to June 1962. In Sept. 1962 I move to Yorktown High School in Arlington, Virginia where I began to teach Psychology (about 90% of the time). The Introductory Psychology course I taught for over

29 years (1962-1991+) was equivalent to a college level Introductory Psychology course. We used a top-level college introductory psychology textbook, Psychology and Life, (Floyd Ruch and then Philip Zimbardo). For a couple of years, in the 1970's, I also taught a class in American History and in the 1980's, due to enrollment changes, I also taught a class each year in World History. Interacting with students each day made teaching a lifetime of rewarding experiences. The "late bloomer" had grown up! As a teacher I was, in a sense, always a student . . . always learning and always growing.

Over the years I was involved in further formal education at American University (1960 and 1964), Claremont Graduate School in California (1967), and the University of Maryland (1967-1968), where I earned a Master's of Education in Human Development. In the summer of 1970 I attended the University of Virginia. I've also taken courses, through the University of California Extension, in (1978), and other courses at Trinity College, Washington, D.C. (1978), at the University of Richmond (1978 and 1979), Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (1984), and George Mason University (1988 and 1990).

### **Meeting Dr. Clare W. Graves**

In the summer of 1966 I had been teaching for 6 years and I was 37 years old. I decided to do some reading. I reached over to my shelves of books and picked up, at random, Motivation and Personality by Abraham Maslow which I had not finished reading. I was glancing through the book and I stopped on chapter 12, which is about "Self-Actualizing People: A Study of Psychological Health." As I read this chapter I suddenly felt like I was being "frozen in time" as my total attention focused on what Dr. Maslow had written. I slowly read chapters 12 and 13 . . . along with other sections of the book. For the next few days, as I moved around the house, I felt like I was "caught-up in a personal mystery" and I didn't have a clue as to what was happening or had been happening in my life that could account for this . . . and I could not talk to anyone about what I was thinking and feeling. The reason for this was that I knew, beyond a doubt - - that no one in my family - father-mother-sister-brother - and no one in my home - my wife-two daughters and a son - and no relative or friend that I have ever known . . . knew me as well as Dr. Maslow knew me . . . as revealed in what he had written - and I was confronted with the fact that I had never met Dr. Maslow. And I could not explain how all that was happening was possible. This puzzled state of mind was with me throughout the remainder of 1966 and into the spring of 1967. I looked into a number of books during this puzzling time period without finding any explanation for what I had experienced and was continuing to experience.

Then in May of 1967, at the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) in Washington, D. C., a new friend, Dick Wakefield, introduced me to Dr. Clare W. Graves who was presenting a paper, "Theory of Values." Meeting Dr. Graves and becoming aware of his research, his theoretical framework, the Levels of Existence Theory, opened up a new phase in my life. Things that I had never understood about my life began to make sense. My experiences when reading those chapters in Maslow's Motivation and Personality were now explainable. Dr. Graves became my mentor who has continued to teach me more and more about what it means - to be a human being.

From this first meeting, Dick and I formed a "Values Group" or as it soon was called by some people, the "Graves Group." We gathered together each month from the fall of 1967 until some time around 1979. The group consisted of about 15 to 25 or more men and women per a meeting from all over the Washington metropolitan area . . . NIMH, Walter Reed Hospital, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, the Census bureau, nearby colleges and organizations, governmental and private. The members of the "Values Group" were very interested in the role of values in human life and in the research of Dr. Graves. We would decide on some topic related to values research and explore that topic. Dr. Graves, and

his theory of Levels of Human Existence or Theory of Values, was the center of our concern but we openly explored the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, O.J. Harvey, John B. Calhoun, Piaget, Erickson and many other researchers and psychologists who were engaged in research involving hierarchical systems thinking or who were exploring the role of values in the lives of human beings. When possible we would have a guest speaker.

Dr. Graves would often attend our meetings or we would set up a special meeting when we knew that he was coming through Washington, D. C. Dr. Graves would explain his research and his latest theoretical position, and we all had dozens of questions to ask him. He came through Washington, D.C., to and from his home in Rexford, New York on a regular basis, for a while, because he was working with the Virginia Department of Corrections and Welfare in Richmond, Virginia. The whole "Values Group" really looked forward to these visits of Dr. Graves. Two of the members of our group were working on their Ph.D. dissertations that involved Dr. Graves' theory.

I do not know the number of meetings of the American Psychological Association, the Association of Humanistic Psychology, the World Futurist Society, the "Graves Group," the National Institutes of Mental Health, the National Institute of Health, the National Values Center and other groups or meetings where Dr. Graves gave presentations . . . that I have personally attended. I do know that at every opportunity, I collected Dr. Graves' papers and, when I could, I would tape-record his presentation and any discussion that followed. My basement study is filled with the collected papers and books of many different scholars, with at least eight full filing cabinets, over 3500 books and more video and audio tapes and related items than I seem to be able to count. Most of my "library" is devoted to the field of Psychology . . . and to the work of Dr. Graves.

Moreover, the quest to try and answer the question "what does it mean to be a human being?" involves a vast knowledge base that ranges over a large number of fields of human endeavor. The Levels of Existence Theory that Dr. Graves evolved was based primarily on his own research . . . and he readily acknowledged that the thinking of many different scholars from many different areas also influenced his thinking in the development of the theory.

I had been fortunate enough to be accepted to a National Science Foundation Summer Institute in Psychology at Claremont Graduate School in Claremont, California during the summer of 1967. The NSF grant enabled me to move my whole family to Claremont for the summer where another psychology teacher, Howard A. Peele, and I, put together a research project for our contribution in the institute. The research project originated from my classes with Dr. Milton Rokeach at Michigan State and his studies of Dogmatism. The research project was entitled, "Anxiety and The Open and Closed Mind" and included some references to the paper, Theory of Values, which Dr. Graves had presented at the National Institutes of Health in Washington, D. C. in May 1967.

From 1967 through 1991, as a Psychology teacher at Yorktown High School in Arlington, Virginia, I introduced my students each year to the latest research of Dr. Graves. Each year for about 22 years (1969 through 1991) I gave my students some of the same tests that Dr. Graves had given his students and a number of other widely known tests that were related to the theoretical work of Dr. Graves. I am still organizing and analyzing all the data that I have gathered from approximately 2658 psychology students. I introduced Dr. Graves' research and thinking throughout the teaching year in small doses when appropriate in the field of psychology. Then, in the opening weeks of the last quarter in the area of Personality, the students entered the room and on all sides of the room were charts and posters and sources of information, including the chalked front blackboard. The walls were covered with colored poster boards containing the latest information pertaining to, over the years, Levels of Existence theory - then with slight

emphasis changes - Coping Systems theory - then the Psychological Map - then Spiral Dynamics. For about two to three weeks I presented the story of Dr. Graves' research and his findings, using slides and overheads and passing out all manner of papers to the students. We went over the various tests that the students had taken during the year and related their test results, as best we could, to the Gravesian theoretical framework that encircled them on all the walls. For over 22 years at Yorktown High School approximately 2658 high school psychology students have learned about Dr. Clare W. Graves, his life, his research and his efforts to understand why human beings behave as they do.

Albert Einstein once said: "Strange is our situation here upon earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seem to divine a purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that man is here for the sake of other men - above all, for those upon whose smile and well-being our own happiness depends, and also for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of my fellowmen, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received."

This is the way I feel about how the life work of Dr. Clare W. Graves has meant to my life and why I will continue to do whatever I can to "protect, maintain and enhance" the legacy of Dr. Clare W. Graves.

At this moment there are websites that enable those who are associated with the legacy of Dr. Graves to interact, to share their own research, their experiences and questions with people all over the world. It is a very exciting time. At this point, I want to thank Don Beck and Chris Cowan, who I met in the mid-1970s, for their friendship and for all that they have done in continuing the legacy of Dr. Clare W. Graves. Knowledge of Dr. Graves' work is spreading across the planet. And, as always . . . since life is problem solving . . . there is a great deal of work yet to be done. If there was ever a "labor of love", this is it!

-- Bill Lee, August 2001