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What I've Learned

JOE CROWLEY

When you're a public figure, a decision-making figure, any significant decision you make is going to make somebody unhappy.

There were a couple of times when I thought seriously about walking away. The first was after seven years. I had taken the job at a time when the University's position with the legislature was not in good shape. We didn't have accessibility, we didn't have credibility, we didn't have influence. We developed a strategy that was a very effective one, in my opinion, and gradually we chipped away at those problems, so that by 1985 we had become a much more credible institution. This was due to the effort of all kinds of people. I don't mean to say that I was the one who was responsible, but by 1985 we had influence and brought back a wonderful budget to the campus. I felt pretty proud of myself. I remember coming back from Carson City, driving home at the end of that session, and feeling like, as I got closer to campus, that what I really should have is a chariot and banners flying in a big parade. And there was nobody waiting at the other end except people complaining about not having enough money.

I used to teach beginning American government and politics, and I really enjoyed that. It would be in large lecture sections, typically 200 students, and I could do one and feel great about the results and an hour later do the same class, the same lecture, and not connect and I'd think, "How did this happen?" It's like they say about other things, you know it when you see it. You can feel it when you have connected and also when you have been a miserable flop.

The best way to get along in Nevada if you're coming from elsewhere is not to bring your elsewhere with you.

You get your genes. You get your upbringing. You have your parents as your role models. You interrelate with your brothers and sisters. That's how you learn to be whomever you turn out to be.

As young man I had the sense that if there was a really serious issue, the answer was in Washington. I don't believe that anymore. I have worked in Washington. I've watched the sausage being made.

A university is a unique institution in that it is populated by people who, as a matter of professional obligation, are critics. That makes the president's life interesting.

I went into the academic world wanting to teach and write and just really by a crazy set of circumstances became the interim president, never having given a thought to doing such a thing.

As Calvin of Calvin and Hobbes said, "It's not so much a matter of being at the right place at the right time. It's getting to the right place and just hanging around for a while."

I remember thinking when I was younger, "My God, when I get old what's going to be the point of learning more? I'll be closer to the grave." Well, I am certainly a lot closer to the grave, but I've got a lot of learning yet to do, and so it will go on. The day I shuffle off of this mortal coil I hope to be still reading and learning.

I try not to take heavy books with me to bed anymore — I mean physically heavy books — because, for certain, and in most occasions within a couple of minutes, I'll be asleep, and they will fall, and they could do damage to me.

Interim president,
president,
interim again,
NCAA president,
husband, father,
grandfather,
professor,
political scientist,
author, poet,
airman, lobbyist,
sports fan,
sports writer,
grapefruit surgeon,
dog walker,
lowan

From a conversation with John Wheeler '86, '87M.A. and Ed Cohen • Photo by Jean Dixon

At 73, in good hands with wife Joy

