

Roads Taken: A Personal Journey

By Pat Broome

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler...Robert Frost*

Every spring there occurs in the United States a rite of passage known as high school graduation. It is the end of one journey and the beginning of another. The students are happy to be finished with high school, but they are also anxious about what they will do next. What path in life will they follow? Will they go to Community College, Technical School, University? Will they go to work? Will they get married and begin a family? Will they volunteer for AmeriCorps or a church mission? Will they go into the military? Some of them may already have their plans prepared but not all.

I know what they are going through because it was 35 years ago this May that I began my own journey on this path. The path is different for everyone. Sometimes it is straight, well-marked and clear. Often it is a meandering one that wanders here and there. Sometimes the path branches off in one direction, stays straight for a while, then branches off into a completely different path altogether. I started out on one path 35 years ago with just a sketchy outline of where I was going and did not really know where I would be at this time in my life. Not many people can predict the future when they are 17.

The theme of this issue is "choice." Robert Frost's poem "*The Road Not Taken*" has always resonated with me even though I am not one for reading poetry. I started to think about chosen paths and how the path or paths that each one of us chooses is not without consequences, positive or negative. With this in mind I am sharing my story with you and some of the paths that I have traveled down to be where I am today.

I graduated from a small public high school in a rural, conservative town in South Texas. My graduating class had 48 people, 30 girls and 18 boys. There were fewer options available to us than there are today, especially for the girls. Most of my classmates were going straight to work; either on a family farm or ranch or in the city of San Antonio, which was 30 miles to the north. Some of the girls were going to get married and some of the boys were going into the military. Only about 4 were going to college.

I wanted to go to college very much, but my family could not afford it. So I decided to do something completely different. I enlisted in the Army because it still offered the GI Bill of Rights that paid for a complete college education after the end of enlistment. This was something of a shock to my friends and people in the community, because while it was acceptable for males to enlist in the military it was not so for females. Women who did such a thing had something wrong with them. However, I wanted that college education and if that was the only way to get it, then that was

what I was going to do.

Because I was only 17 when I graduated from high school, I had to wait until December when I turned 18. Those were the rules then; female enlistees had to be 18. I took several tests to find out what areas I would do well in. I was interested in photography, but I did well on the language test. I decided to study Russian because it was in demand and I would almost certainly be stationed in Germany, where I could learn German as an added bonus. I also had a more personal motive. My grandmother's family came from Germany and she grew up speaking it at home. After she married my grandfather she did not use it again and had forgotten most of it.

My journey along that road began the following January when I was sent to Ft. McClellan, Alabama for basic training. It was not easy learning to live in a large room with 39 other women of varying ages and backgrounds. The noise and lack of privacy took some adjustment. I had to learn how to do things that were totally foreign to me, like marching in formation and going out for a week on field training. No camper, I! The highlight was when we had to go through the gas chamber to make sure we knew how to get our gas masks on in case of emergency. Because you weren't allowed to have your glasses on, I think I almost ran into a tree after exiting the chamber. I felt something brush against the side of my head but I'm still not sure what it was since my eyes were burning and had tears flooding out from breathing a snoot full of teargas.



Afterwards, I was sent to one of the most beautiful places in the United States for language school. The school was located at the top of a high hill in Monterey, California and if you wanted to go anywhere off post the only way was down. I spent the next 9 months there studying Russian for 6 hours a day 5 days a week. It was very intense. On warm nights after a long day of class and homework, I would sleep with my window open and when the wind blew the right way, I would fall asleep to the sounds of the sea lions barking on the rocks off Cannery Row and Fisherman's Wharf.

I met my husband Dennis there. He was studying German and we spent our time off exploring Cannery Row and Fisherman's Wharf and Carmel.

The following spring, I got my orders for Germany where I was assigned to a base in Augsburg, which is located about 40 miles northwest of Munich. The country was beautiful and I spent as much time as I could traveling around the area and observing the people. After Dennis joined me, we found an apartment in a local neighborhood and did our best to blend in. We bought a small car and went driving some of the back roads and spending time in smaller towns

and villages. We enjoyed going down to the local market on Saturday and seeing the vendors, mainly elderly women, with their fresh flowers, fruit and vegetables. Some of them were real characters. They would be chatting with each other and I sometimes saw Dennis' face turn red. Since my knowledge of German was somewhat limited at that time, I asked him what they had said and he told me it was none of my business. I figured out that it was probably something quite naughty.

I finished my enlistment in Germany and we stayed there a total of almost 6 years. I started classes with the University of Maryland and we traveled widely through Western Europe. Holland was probably our favorite place to go. I even got the chance to go to Russia when it was still the Soviet Union. Walking down some of the streets in Moscow in the cold and snow was definitely an experience. It was somewhat creepy because it felt like being under surveillance. I saw people standing in a long line outside a shoe store because they heard that a shipment of new shoes had arrived. One of my most interesting memories of Russia was when we were in Leningrad/St. Petersburg and we saw dump trucks piled high with snow passing us on the street as we were going to the Hermitage Art Museum. I was wondering where they were taking it when I got my answer a few blocks later. A truck backed up on the bank of the Neva River and proceeded to dump the entire load into the frigid waters. I had never seen snow removal like that before.

Dennis and I eventually returned to the United States and had to decide where we were going to live and what we were going to do. We chose to move to San Antonio, Texas because that was where my family lived and I thought I would go to school and get my Secondary Teacher Certification. Dennis went to work as a police officer at the University of Texas Health Science Center and joined an Army Reserve unit.

Our path then followed that of many of our contemporaries; we bought a house and had a child. I quickly realized that trying to teach history to high school students was not going to work because I found myself being more enforcer than instructor. I stayed at home with my son for a while before deciding to go to graduate school at the University of Texas in Austin and study Library Science. I had worked in a library in Germany and really liked the job.

Because of his work schedule, my husband remained behind in San Antonio while Jonathan and I moved into student housing in Austin about 90 miles away. We stayed there a little more than a year before a health problem forced me to return to San Antonio and I was unable to finish.

I wasn't finished with libraries altogether. I found a job as a Library Technician/Cataloger at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio where I stayed for 5 years. As part of my job, I also supervised a small team of college students in processing library materials to get them ready for shelving. They were a great group of young people and many of them were the first members of their families who had ever been to college.

Several were from small towns in the Rio Grande Val-

ley and along the border with Mexico. I learned a lot from them about what life was like there. The Valley is like being in a foreign country and *La Frontera*, as it is called, was fairly open then.

After a few years I decided to return to graduate school, this time at the University of Texas at San Antonio – a distance of approximately 10 miles from my house. What was I going to study? I chose to follow my first love; which was History. A few months later I also accepted another position as a Library Assistant/Government Documents Specialist at Palo Alto College, a local community college.

The next few years I was working full time and attending Graduate School in the evenings. It wasn't easy, but I was happy doing it. I enjoyed the intellectual stimulus of both my job and my classes. Finally, I finished the program and received my Masters degree.

Dennis and I had decided some time before to move out West. My family in Texas had all gone and his parents lived in Northern California, but they were getting older and his mother's health was not good. We chose to move to Oregon because it was close enough to them where we could visit more often. We had visited Oregon on an earlier trip to visit his family and liked the area. We chose this particular area because it reminded us a lot of Germany, a place we had enjoyed very much.

Little did we realize at the time, that this road was definitely going to have a few bumps in it! Just after we moved up here, the bottom fell out of the economy and it was extremely difficult for me to find a job. I decided to volunteer at the Fern Ridge Library because I have always felt at home in libraries and it would probably help when I applied for library positions. Eventually I found a job working with books (of course). I still volunteer at the library, mainly at the Quarterly Book Sale now and more recently as a member of the Library Board.

I also do some writing for *Groundwaters* and belong to a Writers' Group called the *Misfits and Mavericks Literary Circle*. The name of the group is a good description of me. I have always been something of a misfit and most definitely a maverick. After all, there is a prominent family from San Antonio named Maverick, who live up to their name, and while not related by blood, I feel related in spirit.

The journey that I began 35 years ago in a small town in South Texas has taken me down many paths to many places. I have met many different types of people and lived in different parts of our country and the world. There are some common themes in the various roads that I have traveled on my journey. My love of history, travel, and curiosity about other times and places, and my love of reading and writing are just a few. I don't know where the road I am on now will take me. I guess I'll find out when I get there. That's just part of the adventure.

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference*