

August 22, 2012

Dear Members,

Over the years, I have been repeatedly asked to tell the story of how I met and became associated with Mortimer Adler.

Here is the story in brief:

Dr. Adler was expelled from high school when he was 15 years old and I dropped out at the same age. I only mention this because like Dr. Adler, I am self-educated by life's experiences, by reading, thinking about and most importantly, discussing the great ideas found in our Western literature.

In 1959, I was living in Milwaukee employed by a company that designed and built industrial and commercial trade shows, museum exhibits and world's fair exhibits.

One day at lunch, my colleagues and I were discussing the threat of an impending invasion by the Soviet Union. One of them noted how apparently ignorant we all were of what communism was. He noted that his mother was a member of the Great Books Foundation and next week they were going to discuss the Communist Manifesto and perhaps we should attend.

We arrived at the meeting only to discover that my friend's mother had erred as they were discussing Plato's *Apology*. Because we had not read it, we were not allowed to participate, but could audit. I was so culturally illiterate at the time that I had never heard of Plato.

As I listened to the discussion of the trial of Socrates, his penetrating words had a profound effect on me that I had never experienced before. Suddenly the proverbial 'ton of bricks' fell on my head and I realized my ignorance about life, learning and literature—it was quite an epiphany.

After the discussion, I went to the discussion leader and told him of the lightning bolt that struck me and asked who started these great books discussions. He said a well-known educator and philosopher, Mortimer Adler in Chicago.

I rushed home and started researching what I could about him and the great books. I found the address of the Great Books Foundation and that Saturday, I drove to Chicago on the sheer chance that I could meet and thank him. Providence was with me as I found him and Robert Hutchins in the office. After a cordial hand shaking, I told him of my great awakening. They both seemed genuinely delighted and Mortimer gave me a box full of literature on the Great Books and a few of his books to take home.

I was so excited about my newfound interest in philosophy and liberal learning that I sold all hobby paraphernalia (guns, cameras, motorcycles, etc) so I could buy the great books and especially *The Syntopicon*, which then cost \$500. My family and friends thought I had lost my mind to spend \$500 to buy a book.

Thereafter, I was in regular contact with Dr. Adler, voraciously reading all his books and the great books. I became (he said) his best student and I wanted to become a philosopher and spend my life working with him in any way I could for my own edification, and so others could benefit from the common sense wisdom he and the great literature offered. As I was a young, married man with two young children, my dilemma was how could I possibly do this.

I worked hard and had a wonderful career in the field of architecture and building world's fairs and other well-known projects around the world. However, that was not getting me closer to my dream of working fulltime with him.

In all the intervening years, I formed and moderated Great Books/Great Ideas discussion groups in all the cities that I lived in.

In my work with trade shows and world's fairs, I recognized a need for a method to print single color images. The process used then was silkscreen printing, an old process that used very toxic chemicals and was quite labor intensive. To make a long story shorter, I used my knowledge of photochemistry and printing and after a few years of ingenuity and experimentation, I succeeded in inventing a revolutionary color imaging system. It was very successful and was used worldwide in the fields of color printing, television, advertising, etc.

Once again, providence was with me as a large British corporation saw my invention and bought the rights to it—instantly making me financially independent for the rest of my life.

I immediately retired from earning a living and went to Dr. Adler and suggested that we create the Center together; he agreed and the rest is history. We subsequently became very close personal friends; we even lived (coincidentally) across the street from each other. For the last ten years of his life in Chicago, we were together 5-6 days a week. His remains are interred in a church one block from where I am sitting, so he is always close by.

My life has never been the same since that evening in the Milwaukee library over 50 years ago to the very moment you are reading this.

Thanks for listening,

Max Weismann

P.S. If you have any interest in my earlier career, you can Google me.