

Diversity and Accomplishment Visits Wylie, Texas

An Editorial – by Dr. Jerry P. Galloway

You've got to read about my evening of meeting people of incredible accomplishments right here in Wylie. My travels in Wylie last night (Thursday, May 15th) encountered an incredible range of skills and competencies, broadly developed knowledge base, a diversity of talents and interests, a multitude of accomplishments, careers and influence on today's developing youth. I also could not help but notice how many residents and city officials perhaps were unaware of this incredible presence in our midst. But first, consider who I got to meet.

I met a farmer. I am not a farmer and the infinite detail of skills, concerns and issues involved in planting, cultivating and harvesting crops is not at all something with which I am familiar. But, it was still interesting to learn how in his extreme youth (around 1940) he had to manually ride behind the harvester to manually bundle and quickly tie-off the crops before the machinery removed his fingers and hands. A tough job for any man, let alone a young boy of 5 years old. He grew to be quite the handyman learning to fix anything on the farm including all of the machinery involved. His love for what bounty the earth will yield and the processes involved was apparent and more than a little inspiring.

It was a very full evening as I also got to meet an electrician with a degree in mathematics and statistics from Syracuse University. Speaking with him, it was clear how he related to probabilities, problem solving, higher-order thinking and the things that such studies help to develop. His knowledge of technology and electronics were vital in his work and he has made enormous contributions to his field. A most impressive fellow.

But, that's not all. I spoke to a business man. Of course, there are many business men throughout Wylie, Lavon and surrounding communities. With a Masters Degree in Business Administration, he discussed numerous situations, endeavors, opportunities and more all from the perspective of product development, business models and marketing to actually help improve the lives of consumers. I took my graduate work to the South Texas College of Law in Houston, Texas, and began to feel an empathy – an ability to relate to the issues and ideas presented. This too was a motivating experience.

I also had opportunity to speak to and spend a little time with a computer programmer. This might seem commonplace among today's professions. I have a Bachelor's Degree in Logic (Univ. of Houston, 1980) and worked as an IBM-360 Mainframe computer operator in 1977. I thought my 30 years of computer experience was strong and I was ready to offer some professional exchange on the topics. But, this seasoned professional had earned his Masters Degree in Operations Analysis and Computer Programming from the University of California at Los Angeles in 1959. I was humbled yet again by this veteran's experience and background.

Well, like I said, it was an incredible range of professions I got to directly encounter right here in Wylie. I have had many injuries and illnesses and have visited many doctors for many different reasons. And, while I know my range of ailments and shortcomings well, I had no delusions about my knowledge when I had the privilege of speaking with a surgeon. This doctor of medicine (Columbia University, 1964) refreshingly explained about his work as a surgeon in the

context of “repairing” people. His extensive skills, knowledge and experience were seriously motivating attributes. But, while I already have a Doctorate in Instructional Technology, I have no plans to switch to studying medicine.

In spite of my many years of graduate education and serving as a university professor for over 20 years, I was clearly challenged in encountering these many varied personas and felt enriched by these experiences. But, it was time for me to find something in common with someone. I spoke to a pilot. I too am a pilot with over 100 hours in a Cessna Skyhawk and fly out of Collin County Regional Airport at McKinney. I understood well as the pilot spoke about approach patterns, flying the “downwind” and turning onto the “base” leg. But, I was humbled yet again to find that this man had more time – over 8000 hours – than any other human being in a T-38 Supersonic Jet. He has flown over 17,700 hours in 160 different types of civilian and military aircraft and had made over 500 parachute free falls. I had great respect for his perspective that you either do it right or you just die. Wow.

But, my experiences here in Wylie were not at an end: I had a chance to listen to a presentation from and to converse with an elderly man with a Master’s Degree of Science in Physiology and Biophysics from the University of Kentucky (1966). Again, I was at a loss and sat in awe as this man personified the marriage of technology and biology. The integration of mechanics with biosystems was integral to his discussion of the design of environmental suits. His knowledge and his understanding of what the human body needs in harsh and challenging climates was considerable.

I also met a man who’s knowledge of computer technology, mechanics and more had placed him in the enviable position of being employed by Disney Studios. I didn’t have time to learn more about what he did for Disney but it sure sounded like an interesting and fun job.

Since I have worked as a musician and performing vocal artist for over 40 years, it was time for me to meet a fellow artist. A photographer presented his work and explained how the digital medium of today allowed so much more creativity than film. It was an encouraging reinforcement of my modern age where I teach graphics, web development and computer technology integration to university faculty. I am an amateur astronomer and director of the Jacqueline Rose Observatory (JRO) in Lavon. I too have tried to take quality digital photos through the telescope and have found it considerably difficult. This man’s work was a beautiful tribute to what he called mother earth and nature.

I spoke to a man with a considerable business in landscaping and Terri forming near Orlando, Florida. He shared some of his work and showed huge regions of developed land with plants engineered to attract butterflies and a large lake designed and built at the level of the natural water table. His compost pile, personally designed and developed from recycled materials from trees and earth from other construction development sites, is maintained at over 40 feet tall. We all laughed at his thrift and ingenuity in acquiring his huge and powerful transport vehicle through an Ebay auction. His work focuses on larger territories and is a major growth business in the central Florida area.

I also spoke with a man who could discuss poetry and writing of all sorts. He had a command of styles, authors and more empowered by his Master's of Arts Degree in Literature from the University of Houston, 1987.

I also got to hear from a man who, while traveling in Hawaii, spotted a special kind of palm tree. He was struck by the uniqueness and beauty of palm tree because it was red. While I might notice and certainly appreciate it's beauty or I might miss it entirely, I would never have been inclined to inquire about the plant and to take a real interest in it. This man asked the land owner about the plant and subsequently studied more and more about palm trees. He learned that this was very unique and that such plants were not only rare, they were not being developed or sold anywhere. He decided to acquire at a negligible cost the seeds from this palm tree to grow them and market them himself. He learned about the unique needs of this plant and has since developed the only viable business for this beautiful, unique palm tree available today. I appreciated the skill and ingenuity and smart business sense – while I can't even grow grass.

Well, finally, I spoke to a parent. I am a parent so I could relate. Of course, my kids are long since grown and have started families of their own. Still, parenting is something I can relate to. However, the parent I was speaking with has a little two-year-old baby girl. This may not seem unique except the man was 73 years old. Again, wow.

So, these various identities and accomplishments represent a considerable range of human excellence from any community, body of people or organization. Every reader should be in wonder and admiration at such a range of personalities and levels of achievement from any group. Indeed, our city leaders should turn out to meet such wonderment and to encourage our citizenry to do the same.

So, you may think that it took a long time and a lot of work to meet a farmer, a technician, a mechanic, electrician, biophysicist, mathematician, computer programmer, agriculturist, landscaper, terri former, writer, philosopher, literary scholar, horticulture expert, pilot, photographer, biologist, surgeon, business leader and elderly father – but this all happened last night at Wylie East High School.

It was even more impressive than I can express because all of these personas, these identities, were all a single individual – one man. And, most amazing of all, he would not likely be known to us by any of these many admirable accomplishments. Our amazing and incredible guest was Dr. Story Musgrave, NASA's longest working astronaut (since 1967) and a veteran of 6 shuttle missions. He shared his 17-year-long contributions in the design and repair of the Hubble Space Telescope. He explained about the training experiences and more. It was the first time I ever heard of a body of water referred to as an analog device. While I do understand this notion, I am still in awe of the mind from which it is generated.

All of his experiences were vividly tied together supporting his theme of the infinite beauty of mother earth and his message of how his background as farmer and mechanic empowered him toward everything he's accomplished. To my great honor, Dr. Musgrave befriended me and visited my new astronomical observatory (the JRO) at my home in Lavon. It was refreshing spending time laughing and talking with such an exceptional human being – a rare event for me.