

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Responsible GOVERNMENT

Fulfilling our own unique purpose

"Life is about the happiness that comes from fulfilling our own unique purpose."

Thursday night I will be sworn in as a member of the Pottstown School Board, one of nine people responsible for spending 53 million taxpayer dollars annually and educating 3,200 Pottstown youths.

Each of us will make decisions based on facts, but also based on our personal philosophies, which in turn are formed by our experiences going back to childhood.

The salient fact of my childhood was the sudden death of my father just prior to my second birthday, leaving my mother with three young children to bring up by herself.

We did not have a lot of material goods, but we never lacked for the important things — love, ideals, and encouragement.

Above all, my mother wanted my older brother and me to grow up in the company of good Christian men. By the dint of much effort on her part, we were admitted as scholarship students at a Christian boys' boarding school on the north shore of Long Island called Stony Brook. Stony Brook's student body included the sons of missionaries, clerics, and evangelicals, such as Billy Graham's son, Franklin.

Stony Brook's philosophy of education can largely be summed up by the opening sentences of Pastor Rick Warren's best-seller, "The Purpose Driven Life:"

It's not about you.

The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness.... If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose.

The biggest lesson I learned at Stony Brook is that, whatever your religious beliefs, people need purposes. Without a purpose, life is meaningless.

And I believe that people do best when they throw themselves into something larger than themselves. In my case, it is promoting traditional towns like Pottstown

that bring together people of all ages, races and incomes. In my mother's case, it was ensuring her three children had a strong moral grounding and were all able to go to college.

In my wife's case, it was uplifting the hundreds of children that were under her care as a teacher in the Pottstown School District for 35 years — and now, retired, as a day care and library volunteer.

Like me, my wife Frances grew up in a modest household. Unlike me, her parents did not want her to go to college. She had to get there on her own resolve. The most important letter she ever received was from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in August 1966, offering her a

small scholarship so she could attend Kutztown State College, where we met.

Frances remembers every day at Kutztown as a day in heaven, because she was so thrilled to be in college.

As an elementary school teacher, she ardently wished for her children the kind of opportunities we both enjoyed. Pottstown has the neediest children in the region, and it is a privilege and a serious responsibility to serve them.

Teaching low-income children is stressful, but the worst stress comes from the hyper-regulation that seems endemic to public education.

One of my goals as a school board member is to cut down on the red tape and let our teachers teach. Just like our kids, each teacher has his own strengths and own ways of doing things. We should encourage this, not try to turn teachers into automatons programmed from above.

We have special education programs for kids who are identified as gifted or having special needs. But let's not forget: *All* children are gifted and *all* have special needs.

A fundamental aim of formal education should be to immerse students in the best our civilization has produced, and to use that knowledge to help each young person discover his or her own special gift and passion — and unique purpose in life.

This column expresses the personal views of Tom Hylton and does not represent the views of any public or private organization with which he is affiliated.



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