

A Brief Charles Overby Bio – “a road less traveled by.”

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”

From Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken”

Reflecting back over three fourths of a century, Frost’s poem rings my bell.

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I began in 1926 in Cascade Montana as one of six children in the family of economically poor and formally uneducated Norwegian immigrant parents. With youthful innocence I fell in love with flying machines, and found myself in US Air Corps B-29 tail-gunnery training, destined for Japanese sky, when mushroom clouds ended World War II in a nuclear holocaust.

After WW-II, thanks to the GI-Bill, I earned a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering with high distinction (summa cum laude) from the University of Minnesota and an ROTC commission as a second lieutenant in the US Air Force in June 1950. “Second lieutenancy” became my ticket to the Korean War. I was involuntarily recalled to active duty in early 1951, volunteered for pilot training, and spent the last six months of that war as a B-29 copilot flying bombing missions from Okinawa’s Kadena Air Base to targets in North Korea.

After the Korean War and some years in industry, by this time recognizing how grossly ignorant I was about most everything in life other than engineering – I returned to graduate school at that great public university, the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where I earned a 1959 master’s degree in engineering, and a 1965 interdisciplinary Ph.D.

I am so profoundly grateful to have had these eight years at Wisconsin where my wife and I began the growing of three great Phi Beta Kappa daughters, and where my perspective expanded as I collected myself after Korea. This, my “less-traveled-path,” enabled me to grow in not just engineering, but also from swimming in some economics, political science, history, psychology and medical school physiology (for human factors engineering), philosophy and ethics, international relations, industrial relations, international socio-economic development, and some law in the Wisconsin Law School. This academic milieu in synergy with the rich intellectual and internationalist University of Wisconsin culture -- lifted and launched me on my “less-traveled-path,” and as Frost said, ...”that has made all the difference.”

I have been a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin, Madison; Ohio State University, Columbus; and Ohio University, Athens where I am presently an emeritus professor. I have been a visiting professor at Chubu University, Kasugai (Nagoya) Japan (three months); The University of Washington, Seattle (three months) (See WISE below); Shanghai Institute of Mechanical Engineering, Shanghai China (six months) and; Montana State University, Bozeman (four months).

In the late 1970s on a sabbatical leave year with the US Congress, Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), I worked on resource conservation and environmental issues. My professional engineering task at OTA was to examine some of the enormity of United States’

resource consumption, our wastefulness as a nation – and to suggest policy recommendations for improvement.

In 1980 I was the first faculty-member-in-residence (FMR) for a new and still continuing program on “Educating Engineers In Public Policy” called the “Washington Internships for Students of Engineering” (WISE). This program took place in Washington DC with fifteen top engineering students competitively selected from major universities across the USA. Students earned academic credit from the University of Washington, Seattle. In July 2005 my former students and I celebrated the quarter-century anniversary of this meaningful social invention. See my web site, www.article9society.org, for a 1981 paper describing this experience.

In 1982 I ran unsuccessfully for the US Congress as a peace candidate in the Ohio 10th District Democratic Party primary -- in opposition to the Reagan administration’s acceleration of the arms race. For this patriotic exercise of my citizenship -- my department chairman and engineering college dean significantly financially punished me.

After the 1991 Persian Gulf “Oil Resource” War ended -- with the encouragement of several persons in the Athens Ohio Unitarian Fellowship, I founded the Article 9 Society (A9S). (See page 65 and elsewhere in our book for “oil resource wars”.) A9S is an organization dedicated to the preservation of the Japanese Constitution's war-renouncing Article 9, and to the ultimate adoption of Article 9’s principles by all nations on Planet Earth. These ideas and concerns are the subject of the bilingual (English and Japanese) book -- Overby, C., Kunihiro, M., & Momoi, K, *A Call For Peace: The Implications of Japan’s War-Renouncing Constitution*, Kodansha International, Tokyo, 1997, Kodansha America, New York, May, 1998. (Paperback edition 2001) Distributed in America by Oxford University Press. In July 2005 this book was republished and up-dated with a new 48-page preface and index -- by Tachibana Publishing Inc., 2-17-8, Nishiogiminami, Suginami-ku, Tokyo, 167-0053, Japan. www.tachibana-inc.co.jp/

I have made many lecture trips to Japan, covering all five of the major islands -- and around the world, in support of Article 9’s wisdom. My two latest journeys to Japan were [1] an October-November 2003 six-week lecture tour in Japan ranging from Hokkaido to Okinawa, and [2] a July 2005 three-week trip to Hokkaido and Honshu. In May 2005 I carried my Article 9 ideas and concerns to an International Peace Museum conference in Guernica Spain. Papers on these and other trips can be found at www.article9society.org .

Several times I have been an invited lecturer on segments of a Japanese youth organized and run, around the world, cruise ship called Peaceboat. Peaceboat travels to places around the globe that are afflicted by war and violence, human rights violation, and environmental degradation etc. etc. -- educating its paying passengers on these obscenities, and asking “why?” and “what might be done.” (See www.peaceboat.org) My Peaceboat lectures deal with the importance, the beauty, the wisdom of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, and the inclinations by both Japanese and USA governments to destroy it. I also explore themes related to “Green Technology By Design” as one means to help prevent “resource wars” and ecosphere degradation. In 2000 I became a member of Peaceboat’s Global University Advisory Board.

Another of my interests is on making peace with the environment as one of the multitudes of activities in which nations might participate so as to prevent resource wars, and as non-violent means for resolving our inevitable human conflicts. My most recent publication in this domain is “Green Technology by Design: A New Paradigm for Engineering Education for Sustainable Development”, a chapter in -- Freeman, Puskas, & Olbina, *Cleaner Technologies and Cleaner Products for Sustainable Development*, Springer-Verlag, New York, 1995.

I consider myself a creative critic of my country, the USA, and its path as a world leader. I am deeply grateful for the many opportunities that have been mine as a US citizen, to fulfill some of my promise -- and yet I, along with millions of my fellow citizens, seek to improve this system that nurtured us. I love the words in some of our founding documents, "... all men are created equal... (except for women, blacks, and Native Americans)" -- and as did Martin Luther King Jr., I seek a nation that rises to these 18th Century truths. However, I am inclined to agree with Michael Sherry in his 1995 book, *In The Shadow of War: The United States Since The 1930s*, when he characterizes the US, as a culture living in a state of "militarization" which he defines as -- "... the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence."

I am a product of the culture that Sherry describes. I earned a bachelor's degree with financial help from the World War II GI-Bill, a master's degree with help from the Korean War GI Bill, and more financial help with part of my PhD expense, as a National Science Foundation Faculty Fellow, because the USSR launched Sputnik in 1957. Sputnik energized the US government into spending wildly on science and technology education at all levels for fear of being "out done" by the Russians. I must also clearly note that the Danforth Foundation also blessed me, as a Danforth Teacher Scholar, with an additional year of non-governmental financial and moral support on my "less traveled Ph.D. path." I am most grateful for all the above educational assistance. I do wonder, however, why it is so difficult for our government in economically rich America to support any student with the brains to benefit from education -- without this support having to be so largely connected in some ways with military violence of one sort or another. I thus understand Sherry's commentary. This problem still exists in the present. Many non-wealthy USA youth join the military or the National Guard in order for a chance to go to college. Soldier Jessica Lynch, of 2003 Gulf Oil Resource War infamy, demonstrates this dismal picture. As an economically poor person from a poor West Virginia family, she "joined-up" so she could go to college.

I am likewise sadly disturbed by the fact that blacks, our former slaves, who constitute about 12 percent of our US population, are 33 percent of the US Army's enlisted "grunts" -- those we ask to do wars' intimate slaughtering and destruction. Considering all different kinds of minorities, close to half of our "killing force" are economically poor minority persons. The other half is largely economically poor Caucasians. What does this suggest? Among other things, it brings me back to Sherry.

As a registered professional engineer I am much anguished by the huge link forged in America between engineering and the design and creation of things for killing and destruction. I dream that one day we might find a cure for America's addiction to war and thus enable our engineering creative contribution to be more for humanity's fulfillment rather than for empire, war, and violence. I seek an America that provides world-class leadership under "rules of law" rather than under "rules of war."

ARTICLE 9 of the Japanese Constitution

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.

In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.