

Speech by  
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2012 SHSAA Outstanding Alumnus  
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Thank you Salem High School Alumni Association for this honor. Thank you all for coming to this dinner.

And congratulations to all of you scholarship recipients. You are fortunate. Salem has one of most generous high school scholarship programs anywhere in the country.

I'm pleased to be joined by my wife, Marianne, and children, daughter Vanessa with her husband Salvatore, and our son Martin, and a number of relatives, friends, and 1957 classmates from Salem High.

My brother John was honored with the same award several years ago. I'm slightly younger than him, so he thinks my remarks should be shorter than his were, which means I have about 90 seconds to say something.

As is normal for a younger brother, I'll ignore his advice.

At my age a person does a little reflecting on life—while still around to do so!

Is there any connection to my life in Salem with what I have been doing?

Some time ago, I came across a speech given in 2005 by Steve Jobs at Stanford's graduation. Jobs, who was adopted, died just months ago at age 56. He was co-founder of Apple Computer. He used a concept called connect the dots to explain some early experiences in his life. You know the children's game-- a sequence of numbered dots, and when a

line is drawn connecting the dots, the outline of an object is revealed.

Jobs explained that he was worried as a teenager about the tuition cost burden on his adoptive working-class parents. He dropped out of college after 6 months, knocked around the school for a year or two, and slept on friends' sofas and apartment floors. And he sat in on a few courses that really interested him. One of the most interesting courses was in calligraphy, or the art of fancy lettering. Jobs credits that course as a major influence ten years later when he and his team were designing the first Macintosh computer's groundbreaking typography.

Had he not dropped out, had he not taken that course, personal computers might not have the wonderful typography that they do. He connected these events, these dots, as he looked back on his life ten years after the events.

As I mentioned, I have been reflecting a little on my life. And I have found it useful to think in terms of connecting the dots.

There are some linkages between the kind of work I've been doing and my early experiences.

This may suggest how you graduates might think about your own experiences to date, and what they mean for your future. In simple terms, you might be thinking about what interests you, what you are pretty good at, and what gives you special satisfaction.

In 1962, I found myself working on a top-secret project travelling around the world monitoring Soviet Union atomic bomb explosions in the upper atmosphere. I was working for EG&G Company in Boston. EG&G has been involved in

atomic and hydrogen bomb testing since the 1940's. In this project, if a Soviet test bomb exploded, we could see the unique radiation wave on our oscilloscope screens. Then the U.S. Air Force would send up planes to collect radioactive debris carried by winds as a way to confirm the explosion. I was 22 years old and thrilled to be a minor player in the project.

How did I end up in that position? Well, a little more than 10 years earlier, as an 11-year-old kid, I was busy in the pasture behind our home on Depot Road at the top of the first hill south of Salem. My brother-in-law, John Barson, standing at some distance away, was setting up his camera on a tripod. And I was adjusting a soda straw fuse I had made earlier in the day. I told him we had about 80 seconds from the moment I lit the fuse until my homemade napalm bomb would explode. I lit the fuse and ran, John waited a bit, and then opened the camera lens. There followed a thunderous explosion and a huge fireball of red and yellow flames, and then a black cloud of smoke rolled down the pasture. When the film was developed, the camera had captured the event. I was thrilled to have evidence of my efforts.

This test in the pasture was just one experiment among many with energy and explosives. The field fascinated me, and the atomic bomb was part of the fascination. So as I look back, there is a pretty clear path running from this early interest to a company such as EG&G. Connecting the dots is easy. However, I don't suggest any kid today engage in such experimentation. Back in the 1940's things were different. Today, one would end up in court, if not in jail.

In another example of connecting the dots, for 35 years I have been working with energy projects around the world. There were engineering, financial, business and human relations sides to this work.

In an experience in southern Puerto Rico, local officials and residents of small towns did not want a huge but essential natural gas fueled electric power plant in their neighborhood. Their fears centered on a million barrel stainless steel storage tank that would contain LNG, extremely cold liquefied natural gas, as the plant fuel. They were concerned that if the tank ruptured, perhaps by a terrorist attack, a gas vapor cloud could drift over their towns, ignite, and incinerate the citizens.

Gaining the communities support became more difficult when—in the middle of negotiations, in a totally unrelated event—a gas line explosion in San Juan resulted in 34 deaths. Nevertheless, engineering safety evaluations, and lots of handholding, convinced people the project would be safe. Today, 14 years later, it is one of the most successful power plants in the Caribbean region.

When I think about the engineering aspects of this project, some early experiences come clearly to mind.

While our sisters pursued music and singing competitions, brother John and I had a more robust, outdoors childhood with the advantage of living on Depot Road. We had lots of land, woods, pasture, barn, a nearby lake, and a set of cousins as lively as we were. After chores that included fixing up the old house our parents bought, weeding and planting gardens, clearing brush and woods, and helping with butchering, we pretty much entertained ourselves.

But we had little in the way of purchased toys or entertainment. For example, both of us desperately wanted a model train set. Around age 5 or 6, we somehow got our hands on two catalogues of American Flyer and Lionel model trains. We never were given actual trains. But we enjoyed daydreaming about the real thing for years with the catalogues in front of us.

However, what we did have were unlimited supplies of recycled materials. This resulted from two things that affected our parents' generation: the depression of the 1930's and WWII of the 1940's. In the 30's many people had little or no money to buy anything new so they scrounged around, borrowed, and saved. In the 40's people started to have more money, but rationing was in effect for many war related materials.

Combined with the permanent depression mentality, this meant hoarding remained strong. Our barn was stocked with old rusty tools of all kinds, jars and boxes of screws, washers, bolts, metal pieces, engine parts, etc. We learned how to use these items in homemade projects, whether a fort, an army tank, tree houses, zip lines, soapbox derbies, or repairs to a small garden tractor and wagon.

While we were both building and constructing things, at some point I became fascinated with energy. A book titled The Chemistry of Power and Explosives became my bible. This interest led to building such things as bazookas, rockets, pulse jet engines, napalm bombs. One big project was trying to blow down our old barn with explosives. After several attempts failed an uncle arrived with ropes and his jeep to pull down the barn the old fashioned way.

So, looking back I can see these early dots became connected with a career in electric power generation using all kinds of

energy: petroleum, natural gas, shale, nuclear, and all the renewables.

Then there were some experiences in intelligence.

Some years ago in a Latin American country facing guerrilla activities, I needed help from Marianne. Our government was interested in recruiting a certain communist activist who had trained in Paris for subversive missions in Latin America. Marianne posed as a French-speaking journalist. After a series of telephone calls, she set up a meeting with the individual in an isolated restaurant. But it was I in disguise who met with the target. After a couple of hours, my recruitment attempt ended without success. Two days later, with Marianne and me safely on our scheduled flight out of the country, local newspapers headlined stories with the target individual's photo and statements that unidentified foreign agents were trying to enlist his cooperation.

What's the dot? For Marianne, it's sitting on a windowsill in her hometown of Malmo, Sweden, looking out on a snowy day, studying her eighth grade French lesson, and daydreaming of international travel and adventure. Years later, she was assisting in U.S. intelligence operations on the other side of the globe, using one of the several languages she had worked hard as a youngster to acquire.

In another operation, my team and I targeted a Soviet backed communist party member who was becoming more active in possible terrorist activities. I spent a year meeting the target in disguise. I would pick him up on remote country roads where he could be surveyed before contact. We spent hours talking and sizing up each other.

Finally, when he was sufficiently vetted and I had some confidence in him, I showed up for one meeting without

disguise. From then on he knew I trusted him. He began providing information on his communist cell's activities.

What made him continue to meet—actually over years—and to finally provide information that could jeopardize his life? Many motivations: desire for attention, mixed political beliefs, curiosity, fear, frustration with his comrades, need for money. I had to deal with all of these motivations.

So why did I get into this intelligence field? What early dots in my life are connected to this career? Several.

I grew up in the environment of Salem in the 1940's and in a microcosm within Salem made up of a very patriotic immigrant community.

During World War II, the Salem Romanian-American community, like Salem itself, was at a leading edge of support for the U.S. and its war effort. They were primarily working class families, building armaments, munitions, and tanks in the factories. They bought war bonds, served in the Red Cross, rationed their purchases, listened on the radio to Fireside Chats by President Roosevelt, raised their children as Americans, sent their sons and daughters to war, and hung Blue and Gold Stars in their front windows to let Salem and the world know their kids were serving, and sometimes dying for, the nation.

One uncle, Serafin Buta, was wounded in the war, captured by the German Army, left for dead, survived, and was later recruited into the OSS . This was the forerunner to the CIA.

The threats to the country from fascism, and after the war from communism, were pretty clear throughout my childhood.

Even delivering newspapers for the Salem News was full of lessons. My first paper route was on South Ellsworth with lots of shop workers, and several years later on South Lincoln, with mostly professionals. Collecting the weekly 25-cent payments gave me a chance to get comfortable in every setting and conversation, dealing with individuals in all walks of life.

Later on, this was helpful in the international diplomatic and espionage world, as well as the business world.

The point is that one can draw on all experiences, no matter how early in life, or seemingly unimportant. These can serve as signals of what interests you, what holds your attention, what kinds of things you are good at and may want to pursue.

I don't think there is ever only a single route to follow. But your path will unfold with its own challenges, excitement, and occasionally some successes, **if you do three things**: first, be brutally honest about what truly interests you; second, grab on with passion and your best effort to whatever opportunities arise, and third, when you fail, and you most certainly will, keep getting up and trying again, over and over if necessary. And if that doesn't work, then move on to a new direction. You have the incredible advantage of having been born in a free country abounding in opportunities.

And a final thought: the family environment my wife and I tried to create for our kids in Washington DC, we believe was a good one. But it was not one bit better than the one on Depot Rd outside Salem, where I grew up, with parents who only had second grade educations and a grandmother who signed her name with an "X".

Thank you, and congratulations and good luck to all of you scholarship recipients.