

## **Ralph (Dick) F. Spencer Jr.**

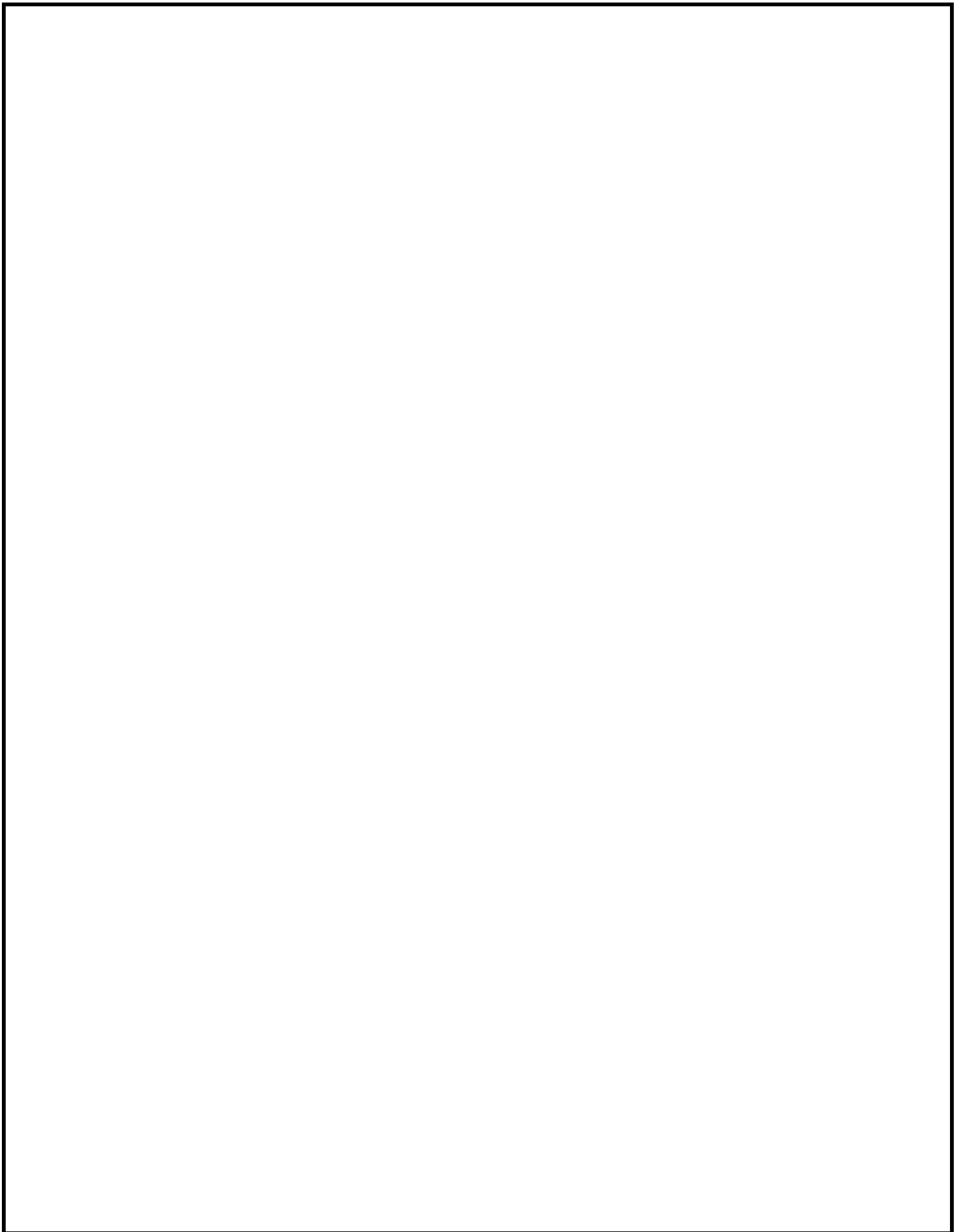
*August 20, 1939 – August 23, 2021*

Ralph Fosdick Spencer known by friends and family as "Dick" was born August 20, 1939 in Boston, MA. Son of the late Ralph and Mary E (Armstrong) Spencer. Dick grew up in the small Hudson Valley town of Claverack, NY. He and his friends enjoyed the life of growing up in a small rural fruit town, at a time when farms were the backbone of Columbia County and it was safe to leave the back door open at night. He graduated from The Taft School and entered pre-medicine at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH. He ultimately shifted his career focus to Electrical Engineering and graduated with a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania.

Before graduating from UPenn, Dick married Prudence Ann Whitbeck from Hudson, NY. Both of their respective fathers were practicing physicians from the local Columbia Memorial Hospital. Before completing his degree, their two sons Bradford (July 1963) and Jeffrey (May 1965) were born in Philadelphia, PA. Upon completing his PhD, the family moved to Dallas TX to start Dick's career in the emerging computer industry. The family relocated to Massachusetts several years later where Dick spent the remainder of his career with Digital Equipment Corp (DEC) which ultimately was acquired by Compaq Computer and then Hewlett Packard (HP). The family settled in the towns of both Carlisle and Acton, MA. Dick semi-retired from his career with DEC in 2003 and spent a few years after working as a consultant with Hamilton Technologies, Inc in Cambridge, MA before retiring full time.

Dick and his first wife Prudence divorced after both of their sons had graduated from college and started their own respective careers. Shortly thereafter, Dick met Nancy Meng from Newton, MA and started a partnership that lasted all the way until Nancy's passing earlier this year from a battle with Parkinson's disease. The couple had settled down in the towns of Salem and Atkinson, NH. Shortly before Nancy's passing, Dick moved to the lively new Tuscan Village community in Salem, NH which Dick was fond of including its upscale Tuscan Kitchen restaurant and vibrant businesses including local shops, cafes, and microbreweries. Dick was passionate about building his Amazon e-commerce reseller business which he had started a few years earlier.

Dick was an avid golfer playing for many years at Columbia Golf and Country Club in Claverack with his father Ralph Sr. He also enjoyed riding off-road motorcycles with his sons when they were growing up and had a life-long passion for reading, learning, and personal growth. He was always researching new trends in alternative health and applying what he learned to his own life. He remained loyal to the Dartmouth College Alumni association over the years often participating in activities, keeping in contact with former classmates, and donating to their charities. Dick will be deeply missed by his two sons, Bradford and Jeffrey. In addition to his children, he is survived by his two siblings Sandra Wiley and John Spencer and his four grandchildren, Elizabeth, Abigail, William, and Roger. In lieu of flower donations, Dick would prefer donations to the Dartmouth College Fund in memory of his name <https://www.dartmouthcollegefund.org/how-give>  
**Page down to see earlier obit crafted from Dick's 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion Essay**



## Ralph (Dick) F. Spencer Jr.

August 20, 1939 – August 23, 2021

**Major:** Engineering Science

**Dartmouth Activities:** Crew -Freshman); Fraternity (Sigma Phi Epsilon); Interfraternity Sports (touch football, ice hockey, II)

**Favorite:** Engineering Science (Solid State Electronics and Materials), Prof. Sam Werner; Thermodynamics and Thermo-statics, Prof. Myron Tribus; Miss Most: Rock bands on House-Winter Carnival, and Green Key weekends

**Military Experience:** None. Worked on classified anti-submarine warfare projects in grad school (U. of Pennsylvania) **Career:** Education: BSEE, Thayer School, 1962; MSEE, 1965,

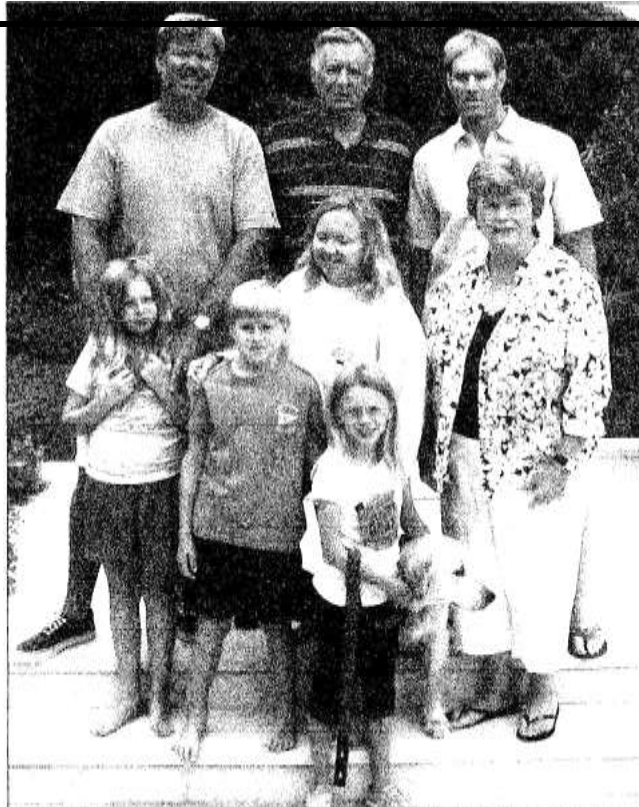
PhD, 1967, both at Moore School of Electrical Engineer- University of Pennsylvania.

Started out with Texas Instruments in Dallas, working in MOS Integrated Circuit (IC) (aka chips) develop-received a patent for a Sequential Programmable Logic worked as a manager of MOS IC development for a startup company, Viatron, in Bedford, Mass., which was heralded as the next Xerox but unfortunately fizzled after going through startup capital lickety-split; continued work MOS IC development at Sperry Rand Research Center received a patent for a block-oriented Random Access

Memory (RAM) and at Raytheon; joined Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), the world's foremost minicomputer developer; in 1973 and worked there until bought out by Compaq Computer in 1998; started out with DEC developing MOS-integrated circuit chips; in late 1980s changed my career and switched to systems engineering, concentrating on the performance evaluation and design of custom computer systems for DEC's customers such as the World Bank and Bell Atlantic NYNEX Telephone Company. Retired from DEC/Compaq in 2001 and started up a small software development company called Virtually Perfect Software emphasizing the use of Hamilton Technologies' OO1 software development system, which produces virtually perfect software using formal methods and an object-oriented system approach. After two years my capital ran out, so I retired and put all my retirement funds into one pot, which I have been managing as an individual investor ever since.

**Extra-Career Activities:** Golf; listening to jazz, classical rock, and classical music; reading; economics; investing; gardening using the Topsy-Turvy method (no weeding required!) **Domestic Partner:** Nancy Chester Meng. Nancy has three children, John Meng, living in Rehoboth Beach, Del.; Ann

Meng Hadwen, living in Sandown, N.H., has twin boys, Tucker L. Hadwen and Boden J. Hadwen; and Catherine



Dick Spencer and Nancy Meng with Brad and Jeff, daughter-in-law Victoria Spencer, and Abby, Willy, Beth, and golden retriever Chance

Meng, living in Oakland, a poet who also works for Oliveto's Restaurant & Cafe in Oakland; she is engaged to Elliott Fredericksen.

Nancy has a Master's degree in Fine Arts from Boston University and has taught art education in primary school as well as working at the Girl Scouts.

**Children:** Bradford A. Spencer, July 27, 1963, commercial real estate broker working for Grubb & Ellis in Boston; residing in Weston, Mass.; married to Victoria Davis Spencer; three children, Abigail W. Spencer (10), Elisabeth D. Spencer (10) (Abby and Beth are twins), and William A. Spencer (8). Jeffrey W Spencer, May 28, 1965, software development engineer, has worked for hedge funds and software development companies; resides in Cambridge, Mass., lots of girlfriends over the years but no wedding yet; currently working for Recombinant Data Systems in Newton, Mass.

Here are some of my musings and reflections for our 50th Reunion.

### **Reflections on My Philosophy of Life:**

As long as I can remember, I've adhered to the Greek ideal best summarized by John Locke's quotation "A sound mind in a sound body is a short but full description of a happy state in this world." A sound mind in my view would be one that not only reasons well (rationality) but also seeks to feel at home in the universe (spirituality)—to feel benevolently connected to all that exists and to the ultimate source, whatever that might be, of all that exists.

By "spiritual" I mean pertaining to consciousness; and further, pertaining to the needs and development of consciousness. In my view spirituality is not necessarily religious or mystical. In my *search to lead a spiritual life I find myself as a deist on one day (Thanks to Duane Cox for helping me to understand deism) and as an atheist on another day.* I constantly find myself swinging back and forth between these two poles. I've started to read a very interesting book "At Home in the Universe, the Search for the Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity," written by our classmate, Stuart Kauffman. His book explains how life can arise through a process of spontaneous order. This view expects life to arise but not as an accident. In other words, life is built into the *Universe.* I like to call this "The Life Force." May the Force be with you!

Reflections on the Idea of America  
*I've been thinking about the idea of America. (The Idea of America, by William Bonner and Pierre Lemieux; Les Belles Lettres, 2003.) What is America? What does it mean to be an American? The answers to these questions seem to come from many different dimensions.*

One dimension is the Founding Documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. These documents proclaim the supremacy of

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Individual Rights over Collective Rights, the rights of a minority of one. In other words, "... That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed ... ."

A second dimension is American Revolutionary history. Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" encapsulates the emotional force that drove America from its Colonial chains toward the founding of the American Republic. Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" gave American colonialists the intellectual ammunition to break the chains of the English Monarchy. America's revolutionary past forged an independent spirit for Americans. Unfortunately, it wasn't strong enough to eliminate slavery and grant women's suffrage at the beginning of the USA.

Another dimension is the notion of limited government. The political system put in place after the Revolution was meant to reflect self-, decentralized, and limited government. James Madison's Federalist No. 41 best explains this idea. One of the fears

many Americans had, as the Constitution was being designed, is that the Federal Government would be too powerful. Madison in Federalist No. 41 *took great pains to ensure Americans that "... the ultimate authority, wherever the derivative may be found, resides in the people alone ."*

There are other dimensions that could be discussed but space doesn't permit. The idea of America was in large part the idea of individual liberty. I wonder if the idea of America is alive and well today. There is much evidence today to say it is not. I fear the Liberty has been hollowed out in modern America but it is still worshipped as though it were a religious relic.

### **Reflections on Health**

I've been exercising regularly since I turned 40. Recently, I've started working with a personal trainer, *which I have found very useful as I found myself wimping out before.* My take on my exercise commitment is I hope to be able to still take out the garbage and the trash (Coasters: *Yakety yak! (Dort': talk back)*) until I'm 90, assuming I'll be fortunate to live that long.

### **Reflections on My Significant Other**

Nancy and I have been a couple for over 20 years. We've been living together for over ten years in Salem, N.H. One of Nancy's thoughts is that we should start sharing the cooking duties. As it turns out, this has been good for me as I've found out that I enjoy putting on a decent dinner, especially if she finds it tasty. What I find attractive about Nancy is she makes other people feel special and makes them feel that she really gets them, me especially. She's my soul mate and my friend. Our relationship has been enriched by our grandchildren and our virtual grandchildren; we've enjoyed watching them grow up. As I am writing this, Nancy's grandkids, Tucker and Boden, are sleeping upstairs in our guest room after having been entertained with toy car roller coasters and watching a *Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer* DVD. I'm looking forward to growing old with Nancy and hope to live long enough to experience the full development of grandchildren.

### **Reflections on My Children**

My two sons, Brad and Jeff, are not two peas in a pod—they're quite different. Jeff, the younger, is more like me—the engineer-technically oriented type; Brad is more like his mother—entrepreneurial and business-like. Today Brad continues his success in the commercial real estate brokerage business, also has a portfolio of income producing real estate. Shortly after writing my 40th reunion reflections, Brad's wife, Vicki, gave birth to twin daughters, Abigail and Elisabeth. Fifteen months later Vicki gave birth to her first and only son, William. Having three little ones in such a short time understand changed the Spencer household environment dramatically. Fortunately, between nanny and family help Vicki was able to bring some order to chaos. For several years Nancy would

routinely help Vicki manage things with weekly visits. Brad did his part too after arriving home from work to find out his help was needed to keep Vicki on an even keel. I've enjoyed watching Brad and Vicki raise their kids so far—Abby and Beth will be 10 next March, and Willie will be 9 in June during our reunion.

Jeff continues to be a professional software engineer and is now learning how to be an uncle to my grandkids. Several years ago, he got an opportunity to work for a start-up hedge fund, so he left his job at ChannelWave. Although he stayed at the hedge fund for only three years, he learned a lot about how investments are managed in the rarified hedge fund business. He is now developing custom software for Recombinant Data Corp. in Newton, Mass. Recombinant builds reliable data warehouses and reporting systems that integrate complex clinical = concepts of evidence-based medicine to transform healthcare data into meaningful, actionable views. Jeff has developed software for Johnson and Johnson as well as other leading healthcare companies. He continues his passion for sports with regular workouts

at the gym as well as skiing and mountain biking. Jeffs between girlfriends right now, and I await the prospect of his next relationship with keen interest.

### **Reflections on My Grandchildren**

Being a grandfather has been an interesting experience, since I've gotten to enjoy my grandkids without the primary responsibility for their upbringing.

I'd like to thank Ron Wybranowski's help in mentoring me for grandfatherhood. He advised me to visit them as much as possible before they start regular schooling. He said it was a great opportunity to "pass it on" while we're growing older. For about five years Nancy and I would visit them pretty regularly on a weekly basis. Now that all three are in elementary school they all have very busy calendars —too busy for my taste as I remember I had more free time when I was growing up. My twin granddaughters are busy with ballet (both of them are in the Nutcracker ballet this fall/winter) and learning to play the cello as well as playing lacrosse and field hockey. Willie is learning how to play the piano as well as playing baseball and basketball.

Nancy's twin grandsons, Bodie and Tucker, will be six in May. Having twin grandkids on her side and my side has been an adventurous experience. Nancy has repeated the same support she gave Vicki with my grandkids. I know her daughter, Ann, and her husband, Brian Hadwen, have appreciated Nancy's help in raising their kids when they were little. Now that both are going to kindergarten not as much help is needed, although Nancy provides babysitting help on a demand basis.

### **Reflections on Who Am I?**

I've decided after much thought that I'm a seeker. It took me a long time to come to this conclusion as I was stymied by the question of "Who am I"? I'm a seeker—a seeker of knowledge and truth. I discovered this when I started to read (I never finished it, which is typical) Daniel J. Boorstin's book *The Seekers: The Story of Man's Continuing Quest to Understand His World*." According to Boorstin, Seekers seek to find meaning and purpose in our existence. We all want to know *why*.

Another aspect to this question is that I like to find things out. I learned about this from the famous physicist, Richard Feynman, when I discovered his book *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out*. Feynman's view is that "I can live with doubt, and uncertainty, and not knowing. I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong. I have approximate answers, and possible beliefs, and different degrees of certainty about different things, but I'm not absolutely sure of anything, and in many things, I don't know anything about, such as whether it means anything to ask why we're here, and what the question might mean. I might think about [it] a little, but if I can't figure it out, then I go to something else. But I don't have to know an answer. I don't feel frightened by not knowing things, by being lost in a mysterious universe without having any purpose, which is the way it really is, as far as I can tell, possibly. It doesn't frighten me."

In my life I haven't followed an architected life plan. I seem to go where my passions and interests lead me. I guess this is sort of a zigzag path to life where at each decision point I tend to take the path less traveled—sort of a contrarian view.