

YESTERDAY WHEN I WAS YOUNG

Memories of athletic prowess were my only comfort as I pretended to pedal while my lithe spouse, “Lolita Armstrong”, coaxed and towed my aging wheezing carcass on what she called a zippy little bike ride. After unsuccessfully demanding blood and urine samples from her, I pondered that history was in the making.

Later that day, while attending the 50th anniversary meeting of the Solano County Historical Society, another fellow cyclist was making history of their own. JB Ramirez, the talented former front man, lead singer and Conguerro for Solano County’s favorite band, “The Time Bandits”, had changed life gears, garnered an honors UC Davis history degree and penned a provocative book, “The Legend of Francisco (Chief) Solano” In engaging yet scholarly style, JB explodes the “PC” myth of Chief Solano reminding us that myth makers have agendas that may not match unpalatable historical facts.

My epiphanies tend to come grouped. Sure enough, one week later after more “zippy” cycling in the teeth of Suisun gale winds, I had the pleasure to dine adjacent to a former WW II Normandy Invasion B-17 pilot and a Vietnam marine vet with his charming Peruvian spouse. They were discussing the value of touring cradles of past civilizations to wean oneself towards a sturdier tomorrow. The stately hero and his companions knew well that history, an essential root of the tree of knowledge, is the complete story of human endeavor. When its study is neglected, the tree withers and falls.

We live in a culture frequently hell bent on addiction to analgesia and the adolescent obsession with the here and now without frame of reference to what went before and what could be. Adulthood is characterized by perspective on where we are relative to where we and others have been thus empowering us to make meaningful choices as to where to go next. Adults know that history repeats itself for those who choose to ignore it. All of these understandings are crucial to thrive in the present and succeed in the future.

Imagine a life without memory or lessons learned; disastrous, isn’t it? Without a carefully catalogued and indexed log of past solutions, failures, and the fellow time travelers in life who worked them out, we remain adolescents stuck in the immediacy and ignorance of the moment.

This is why educators, historical societies and librarians rightly encourage the study of history in school and home where your history begins. Parents, you are our first historical guides as you share family stories with children. You are surrounded by tools; photographs, birth and wedding records, newspapers and visits from grandparents. Buy a globe, read books, tell stories and explain holidays, elections, and symbols like the flag, the national anthem and people in the news. Tune in the History channel and tune out the histrionics and false idols Americans worship on the boob tube. Prepare children for the lifelong task of finding a place in history by helping them learn what shaped the world.

History crystallizes the blessed gift of critical thinking, seeing topics from different points of view while digging for evidence. History is a far better barometer of behavior than all the good intentions in the world. History teaches us what man is and thus what man can choose to do. Its study may be the tonic for an ailing adolescent mind which teaches valuable lessons of leadership, political, military and economic strategies and all the recurring themes in the human story.

Parents, visit www.themick.com/Royclarksong.html with your children. Mickey Mantle asked Roy Clark to sing his 1968 classic, "Yesterday When I Was Young" at his funeral. Explain to them who Mickey Mantle was long before Barry Bonds, why did Mickey pick that song and what does it clearly say. Yes, there is a quiz, it is given every day. It is called life.

Kevin Ryan is a retired Colonel, physician, musician and author who lives in Fairfield.