

“Culture Shrock”

By Brian Shrock

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Intro:

Song soundbite:

“Who are you, who who... I really wanna know, who are you...”

“Who could it be now?”

Hi my name is Brian! Here I am giving my 3rd Icebreaker speech in my 3rd Toastmasters club. The Icebreaker is an opportunity to address the age old questions, of “Who am I and why am I here?”

These queries tend to bring as many questions as answers. While the questions remain consistent, the answers often change with the seasons.

Just what defines a person? Is it our physical attributes? Is it the sum of our environment and experience? Is it our thoughts and beliefs? Is it something else? I suspect the answer is *yes*.

Today then, I will share with you some of who I am, or perhaps more precisely, who I think I am, by looking at *three* different perspectives. Possibly using some literary license, I'll be bringing you some **Culture Shrock** in in the context of Heresy, Harvest, and History (or Heritage), or if you prefer, Belief, Business, and Background.

1. Heresy / Belief

Heresy has the implication of strong belief, albeit it's more about the violation of that belief. (I chose to use the word of course for alliteration because it starts with “H”.)

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Other than perhaps physical attributes, I suspect I am most defined by my thoughts and beliefs.

This is at least to some degree in line with the famous words of French philosopher Descarte who said “I think, therefore I am.” His great great great granddaughter was on a flight when an attendant asked “Would you like a drink?” She replied “I think not and promptly disappeared.

My most defining belief is that there is a *spiritual* world; that we are here by design rather than accident; and that each of us is cherished by our creator.

When I look at a chair, I do not ask, “How did that happen?”, but rather “how was it made”, or “who made it”. I cannot then ask differently for the far more complex human.

Faith is the evidence of things hoped for, the substance of things not seen. Any conclusion about our origin requires a leap of faith. I choose the smaller leap.

I define myself as a Christian and this belief in turn defines me. This gives me reason to love my neighbor and myself. It gives me relief from perfection and a path to forgiveness. It provides hope and purpose. It gives my life meaning, **and** to my great delight, distinguishes me from a cockroach.

2. Harvest / Business

Next is Harvest, or Business, meaning occupation.

When asked “Who are you?” many will respond by saying what they do. “I’m an accountant.” or “I’m a teacher”.

Are we then Human Beings or Human Doings? Again, I think the answer is *yes*. Who we are leads us to what we do and what we do shapes who we are. We spend a large percentage of our waking hours in our occupation, earning a living, or if we're fortunate, getting paid for our passion.

I am a Software Engineer by trade, with thoughts of transitioning to Database Administrator. With nearly zero experience with computers I chose a major in Computer Science, and got a Bachelor's degree from Oklahoma Christian (and 18 hours short of a 2nd major in Engineering Physics). After graduating, I went to work as a VAX Fortran programmer and briefly as a System Administrator for Vought Aircraft in Grand Prairie.

Then I came to E-Systems (which is of course now Raytheon) as a Software Test Engineer on the JSIPS program. Just after completing a Master's degree in computer science at UTD, I spent 9 months as a Y2K contractor for Southwest Airlines. Afterward I returned to Raytheon to work on the Highpoint program, then Hatchetman maintenance, and then on to IDS-D where I've been for the last 7 years.

I still wonder what I want to be when I grow up, but for now Software is still my business and my harvest.

3. History / Background

Thirdly, we reach History or Heritage, or Background. This is the stuff 5-year updates are made of.

I have a somewhat eclectic history. Born to a married, unwed widow. Before I started kindergarten I had lost a father and saw two stepfathers come and go, the second of which I watched smash out the car window with his fist and yank my mother's hair. Before 1st grade, we had moved at least 6X. By then I had a little brother and my mother was into the Hippie movement, with beads, black lights, and a VW van with Sagittarius and Peace signs painted on it.

After becoming an unintentional criminal and getting arrested at age 9, my brother and I were sent to live with our aunt and uncle, who later adopted us. This was a substantial contrast, MO to KS, city to farm, liberal to conservative, atheistic to Christian, permissive to strict, a family of 3 to a family of 6, cub scouts to 4-H, and strangely enough, un-air-conditioned school to air-conditioned school (none at home).

Through the years, I fed lots of cows and hauled lots of hay, played some basketball, ran some track, participated in academic competitions and piled up a list of yearbook credits.

I was quite shy, but creative and sometimes crafty. For example to meet girls at Oklahoma Christian, I would find out their phone numbers and call them, pretending to be on the paper taking a survey about the “Ideal Man” or claiming I was the Voice of the Unknown.

I was married the summer before Senior year. Two sons and more than two decades later – just last year (Oct 08*) – my marriage ended and I found a new depth of grief, but also new strength and many painful but good lessons.

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There is a small scratch at some of the defining moments in my history.

Conclusion:

Heresy, Harvest, and History: I have shared with you a number of things in these areas, things that tend to stay constant. Of course that is obviously an incomplete definition because I change over time. For example, I have become more interested in personal interactions than technical content. Not long ago – maybe just last year, I never would have attempted to sing a note in front of an audience, or try to give a speech without having written it word for word [filled in some of these words after giving the speech] and memorized each one! I change with the seasons. I just hope it's usually for the better.

So who am I? Good question. I have given you some ideas about that – Beliefs, Business, and Background, but in the end, when all is said and done, I want the answer to be:

someone who made the world a better place because he was in it.

Song snippet: “Who could it be, believe it or not, it's just me.”