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Proposal: *Pearls from Sand: How Small Encounters Lead to Powerful Lessons*

Overview

At various points in your life, you've had conversations in which someone—a friend, a relative, a teacher—spoke perhaps a single sentence that resonated with you and made you think about the world or about yourself. You've had numerous small experiences that each contained a powerful message you remembered for the rest of your life—if you were paying attention. You're recalling such experiences even as you read these words.

Each such small but momentous encounter reveals a pearl of wisdom, an insight or life lesson that can have a significant impact on you. These life lessons can shape how you think about yourself, how you interact with others, your values and priorities, and the way you view the world. Heeding the messages from such encounters can make your life happier and more rewarding.

Pearls from Sand: How Small Encounters Lead to Powerful Lessons is a nonfiction “memoir with a message.” Each of the 37 chapters begins with a succinct statement of one of those pearls of wisdom that I've been fortunate to acquire. The chapter then relates the small life-shaping experiences (the “sand” that grows into the “pearl”) that revealed that lesson to me and reinforce the message. The dozens of anecdotes in the book are drawn from my own life, both events in which I was personally engaged and those that I observed involving people around me.

Such books are perennially popular because everyone would like to improve his quality of life. Making a positive change in one's life can include taking actions that increase happiness and fulfillment, as well as minimizing and avoiding unpleasant experiences. *Pearls from Sand* addresses both of these dimensions. It's not yet another feel-good, “You can do it!” motivational book, although I do hope to motivate readers to apply the lessons I've learned. It also contains:

- Practical advice on leadership, negotiation, continuous learning, volunteering, physical fitness, health care, sharing knowledge, managing commitments, doing high-quality work, collaborating and interacting with other people, being a smart customer, and solving problems creatively;
- Inspirational stories about courage, pursuing one's dreams, dealing with adversity, surviving a life-threatening accident, and end-of-life realities;
- Cautionary tales about being a perfectionist, receiving inadequate guidance from parents, blind spots in your life, family rifts, the potential for violence that lies within us all, and dealing with gifted children; and
- Thought-provoking insights about how we view ourselves compared to how others view us, and understanding our own personalities.

I share the lessons in this book for two reasons. First, many of them are broadly applicable to a large number of potential readers. I hope that such readers can think of ways to apply each pearl that I describe to their own lives. Second, I hope to encourage readers to reflect on similar experiences they have had and to glean the messages from them. Those lessons are worth sharing with each reader's friends, colleagues, students, and children.

The chapters are grouped into six parts:

- Part 1. **Interpersonal Pearls:** Lessons that have helped guide how I interact with other people.
- Part 2. **Personal Pearls:** Lessons that taught me something important about myself or about my behavior.
- Part 3. **Motivational Pearls:** Inspirations from role models whose positive behavior helped shape my values.
- Part 4. **Practical Pearls:** Pragmatic messages that can be useful to anyone in daily life.
- Part 5. **Cautionary Pearls:** Lessons that provided warnings about certain dangers that lurk in the world and how to detect and avoid them.
- Part 6. **Professional Pearls:** Lessons I learned from my various workplaces, but which have broad applicability to almost any work environment.

Each chapter is quite short, ranging from about 500 to 1900 words, with an average of about 1300 words. There are no illustrations. The chapters are independent essays without continuity, so they may be read in any sequence.

Written in the first person, each chapter contains numerous anecdotes that illustrate the lesson. There are approximately 140 such stories, of which about 100 are my personal experiences and the rest are from others who have shared their experiences with me. All of the stories are true, to the best of my recollection. Identities have been altered for privacy reasons in a few cases. Many of the chapters end with questions or suggestions to the reader that are intended to motivate readers to contemplate how to apply the lessons to their own lives.

The book is written in a conversational and highly readable style (Flesch reading ease = 65, Flesch-Kincaid grade level = 8.1). Readers of my other books and articles have often commented on how comfortable and accessible my conversational writing style is, even with my technical writing. People often say that when they read something I've written, they feel like I'm standing next to them and explaining it. The chapters address serious topics but with gentle humor. Several chapters deal in a poignant and frank way with injury, illness, and death. They were emotional for me to write, and I believe they will engage readers emotionally as well.

Status of the Work

The manuscript is fully written and has undergone peer review by a variety of individuals, both male and female, ranging in age from 23 to 83. The final length is approximately 51,000 words.

Marketing Information

Because of the diversity of the lessons and the ways they are presented, I expect this book would appeal to a wide variety of readers. One class of readers includes people drawn to self-improvement books. Such books typically tell you how to change your life to achieve bliss and other wondrous outcomes. They might describe 5 steps, 6 pillars, 7 essential ingredients, 10 simple solutions, a 30-day program, 100 secrets, 101 exercises, or 365 prescriptions. Alternatively, they present a methodology or recipe for changing your life, fulfilling your career expectations, or optimizing your spiritual side. Many self-improvement books focus on helping the reader deal with specific problems: excess worry, procrastination, forgiveness, healing, or transformation.

This book takes a different approach. It does not offer a prescription for being happy or successful. Instead, it describes some of the experiences that I (and others) have had and the outcomes that resulted—both the inspiring and the painful—and it encapsulates the core message that resulted from each. Readers can judge how applicable each message is to them and look for ways to apply it to their own lives. This approach seems more pragmatic than giving the reader a simplistic set of principles, a methodological life framework, or a script of activities to pursue in their quest of happiness or enlightenment.

Many of the lessons in the book helped me look at myself differently and to better understand or shape my own values, behaviors, and interpersonal relationships. These lessons could help readers do the same. Readers respond well to anecdotes that they can relate to their own life, especially stories from ordinary people, as opposed to celebrities who live very different lives from their own. I'm not purporting to be a life coach. I'm simply passing along some things I've learned in the past 57 years that strongly influenced my life.

Another market segment consists of people interested in ethics and moral philosophy. Some of the lessons I present address aspects of virtuous behavior, such as my parents running through a fire to save their children, or an elderly wife doing her best to care for her dying husband. Other lessons describe the rewards of contributing to the betterment of one's fellow man, as through volunteering and sharing knowledge. I hope that the messages I convey will help readers think about how they can make such contributions to their communities and serve as motivating role models for their family members and other people around them. *Tuesdays with Morrie* comes to mind as an analogous book of guiding ethical principles, though without as many specific experiences described that led to articulating the principles.

Many people enjoy reading memoirs; this group comprises a third market segment. Memoirs typically fall into four major categories:

1. Autobiographies of famous people, including entertainment celebrities (or their descendants, paramours, or former spouses), sports figures, political giants, religious leaders, and people who are famous just for being famous.
2. True-life stories of people, either famous or ordinary, who confronted and overcame some significant obstacle in their own lives or the lives of family members. These obstacles often are in the form of major health challenges (e.g., Michael J. Fox and Jim Kelly), abusive families (e.g., Dave Pelzer), or substance abuse (e.g., Mackenzie Phillips, as well as many books by ordinary people).
3. Reminiscences by participants involved with specific major events, such as military operations or political campaigns.

4. Books by ordinary people who are sharing interesting experiences from their lives, along with some messages or insights that can help readers improve their own lives in some way.

Pearls from Sand is the fourth sort of memoir. I'm well known in the software world but not in the world at large, so I'm an "ordinary person". Readers will be drawn to this book initially because of the catchy title. Once they open the book, they'll find a wide variety of topics in chapters with intriguing titles. The book doesn't promise that the reader will achieve any specific outcome simply by following a particular set of steps or activities. Instead, it is thought-provoking, pertinent, and pragmatic, with practical recommendations and questions that stimulate the reader to examine certain aspects of her own life. Although drawn principally from my own experiences, of course, the lessons have broad applicability to readers with diverse backgrounds and circumstances.

Because of the appeal this book would have for these three large market segments, sales could be significant, potentially exceeding 100,000 copies.

Competitive Titles

The self-improvement category is a crowded space in the book store. However, *Pearls from Sand* differs from most of the books in that it does not offer a prescriptive path to happiness and fulfillment, it has no religious or spiritual aspect, and it does not focus on a specific problem or improvement area. Nor it is not specifically intended to be comforting, inspiring, or humorous, although it contains elements of all those attributes.

Pearls from Sand differs from most memoirs in that they tend to be chronological depictions of the author's life, with lessons learned occasionally called out. *Pearls from Sand* is more of a collection of moments-in-time that specifically evoked a particular lesson. As an analogy, most memoirs are like movies with running commentary, whereas *Pearls from Sand* is more like an album of snapshots from my life with detailed captions that present the life lessons, the pearls of wisdom.

The closest competitive titles are likely to be other collections of anecdotal and thought-provoking life lessons, some of which are described below.

***The Last Lecture.* Randy Pausch and Jeffrey Zaslow. Hyperion, 2008. 224 pages; \$21.95, sales in 2009 approx. 610,000.** This book is a bestseller in the ethics (moral philosophy) genre. It has special poignancy because the author died at age 47 from pancreatic cancer shortly after the book was completed. The book contains 61 short essays based on the author's life experiences and lessons drawn from those experiences. In that sense it is analogous to *Pearls from Sand*. *Pearls from Sand* differs because it contains fewer essays with more depth to each one and a larger number of illustrative stories for each lesson. The lessons in *Pearls from Sand* are more explicitly called out, which will make it easier for readers to adapt those lessons to their own lives and to identify analogous lessons from their own experiences. In addition, *Pearls from Sand* includes more stories about the experiences of other people besides the author. This strengthens the impact of the lessons by broadening them beyond my personal experience. The lessons I present generally have more practical application than do those from *The Last Lecture*. I also engage the reader more actively by presenting questions for the reader to contemplate when considering how the lessons might be relevant to him.

***Start Where You Are: Life Lessons in Getting from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be.* Chris Gardner. Amistad, 2009. 320 pages, \$26.99.** Written by the author of *The Pursuit of Happiness*, in 44 chapters this book "abounds with lessons that offer hope and provides a road

map for beginning anew” (from the book jacket). The structure is thus similar to that of *Pearls from Sand*, with a few dozen lessons grouped into several parts. Many of the lessons are drawn from people who have faced a dire situation, such as job loss, and who want to change the trajectory of their life for greater success and happiness. Each lesson is stated in the chapter title, along with a single keyword. The contents are intended to be motivating, as in “You, too, can do this!” The book contains many stories and much encouragement, but little levity. In contrast, the lessons described in *Pearls from Sand* are more likely to resonate with ordinary people who don’t face extraordinary challenges: that is, most of us. The chapters and part introductions in *Pearls from Sand* are shorter and punchier than those in *Start Where You Are*, making them a quicker and easier read. Gardner’s personal life story and the success of both the book and movie versions of *The Pursuit of Happyness* give this book good initial recognition by prospective buyers.

***An Attitude of Gratitude: 21 Life Lessons.* Keith D. Harrell. Hay House, Inc., 2003, 235 pages, \$13.95.** Like *Pearls from Sand*, this book is a “memoir with a message.” The 21 chapters chronologically relate the life story of motivational speaker Keith Harrell. Each chapter ends with a lesson based on Harrell’s experiences as described in that chapter. The lessons are all in a motivational vein. Some are trite (“Say It, Believe It, and Receive It!,” “Changing Challenges to Opportunities,” “Open Up Your Eyes”), some are spiritual (“Christ Provides All Excellence”), and some are cryptic (“Confirmation to Conviction,” “Input Equals Output”). In general, the lessons are not accompanied by practical recommendations, other than the general thrust of encouraging the reader with “You can do it!” motivational language. A spiritual theme runs throughout the book. The book is similar to *Pearls from Sand* in that the lessons are drawn primarily from the author’s life experiences. However, *An Attitude of Gratitude* is more like an autobiography, whereas *Pearls from Sand* is more anecdotal and the chapters have no chronological continuity. The lessons in *Pearls from Sand* are more explicitly called out from the life experiences and include more pragmatic suggestions for the reader to consider.

***50 Is the New Fifty: Ten Life Lessons for Women in Second Adulthood.* Suzanne Braun Levine. Viking Adult, 2009, 224 pages, \$25.95.** Each of the ten chapters in this book is titled with a concise statement of the life lesson. Some of these make good sense, such as “Every Crisis Creates a ‘New Normal’.” Others are more cryptic: “Nothing Changes if Nothing Changes.” The chapters are quite long, in contrast to the chapters in *Pearls from Sand*, which are short and can be read quickly. The 10 lessons are illuminated through anecdotes drawn both from the author’s life and the lives of others. The set of lessons provides the book’s structure, with the anecdotes supporting and illustrating them. In contrast, in *Pearls from Sand* it’s the stories that lead to the realization of the life lessons. As is obvious from the title, this book is targeted at female readers in a certain age range. However, the lessons in *Pearls from Sand* apply to both genders and to people all ages, yielding the potential of a much larger market.

***A Blessing in Disguise: 39 Life Lessons from Today’s Greatest Teachers.* Andrea Joy Cohen. Beverly Books, 2008, 303 pages, \$14.00.** This book is similar to *Pearls from Sand* in the sense that it consists of many chapters in which the author relates personal experiences and the life lessons that arose from them. One big difference is that each of these chapters is written by a different author, about half of whom have PhD or MD degrees. The lessons are grouped into six sections: Overcoming Challenges, Soul Expression, Death and Dying, Life’s Everyday Lessons, Spirituality, and Family, Love and Relationships. In general, these lessons are more philosophical and less pragmatic than those in *Pearls from Sand* and the chapters are rather longer.

Outline

Introduction

The core premise of the book is that, as we go through life, we have an assortment of small experiences and small conversations that contain powerful messages—the pearls (of wisdom)—that can affect us for the rest of our lives. The purpose of this book is to share a number of the lessons I learned from those kinds of experiences that had a strong impact on shaping my personality and values. These lessons will be relevant to many readers, who also have their own kinds of lessons to extract from their own experiences. The introduction includes a brief biographical background so readers can understand where I am coming from as I relate these experiences.

Part 1. Interpersonal Pearls

The chapters in this section describe lessons I've learned that helped me improve the nature and quality of my interactions with other people in various situations.

Chapter 1. Second Time's the Charm

My first date with my wife didn't go well; it was all my fault. Thankfully, she gave me a second chance and we've now been married for 22 years. We both learned something from this experience. Now I know that if my first encounter with some individual isn't very favorable, it's worth giving everybody more than one try. There could be many reasons why you do need a second chance to make a first impression.

Chapter 2. Promises, Promises

It's important to honor the commitments one makes to other people. I describe several examples in which I or others did and did not deliver on commitments made and how we handled those situations. The message here is that I think it's best to undercommit and overdeliver in most situations. This leads to a lot less disappointment and hard feelings.

Chapter 3. Don't Sneeze on Your Spouse

Suppose you have a sudden need to sneeze at the dinner table. You could sneeze in the direction of a stranger or an acquaintance. Or you could sneeze in the direction of your spouse or life partner. Which do you choose? Many people would pick the latter, but isn't it more considerate not to sneeze toward the person who is most important to you in the world? Of course it is. This is just one of many ways to show consideration and concern for your life partner.

Chapter 4. It's Not About You

As a young man I once made the mistake of boycotting a friend's wedding because I felt he and his wife-to-be were making a mistake getting married so young. They've been married 38 years now. From this experience I realized that their wedding day wasn't about me and I had no business boycotting it. Before you overreact to someone else's decision with which you disagree, remind yourself that, in most cases, it's not about you.

Chapter 5. Life's Too Short

A rift between myself and a family member long ago led my father to point out that life's too short to let those kinds of old wounds fester and keep people apart. He was right. That family member and I are now on perfectly fine terms. In another situation, the six adult children in a family split into two camps over perceived mistreatment of one brother by a sister when their mother was dying. I can only hope the family reconciles before it's too late, because life's too short to stay angry and bitter forever.

Chapter 6. Girls and Streetcars

All teenagers struggle with their relationships with members of the opposite sex. How are you supposed to learn how to deal with these difficult emotional issues so you can grow into a mature and well-balanced adult? Sound advice from parents is helpful, but I didn't get much relationship advice from my parents. Anytime a girl broke up with me my father always said the same thing: "Girls are just like streetcars. If you missed this one, another one will come along soon." This wasn't helpful. I wish he had taught me more about handling and sustaining relationships with other people. It could have made my life easier later on.

Part 2. Personal Pearls

These chapters focus on small experiences that showed me something about myself that made me think about who I am, how I came to be this way, and what I'm going to do about it. Each such insight strongly influenced my self-understanding and my behaviors.

Chapter 7. Introverted Is Something You Are

One aspect of knowing yourself is to understand how you feel most comfortable interacting with other people. Are you more of an introvert, preferring to do things on your own and having perhaps a small social circle? Or are you an extravert, drawing energy from your interactions with others? I'm an introvert at heart, and yet I'm perfectly comfortable with public speaking, something that terrifies most people. Understanding these interaction preferences can help you better fit into the world and better appreciate the behaviors of people who are close to you.

Chapter 8. On the Treadmill for Life

"Do you get any exercise at all?" A single question asked by an allergist 30 years ago launched me on a lifetime of regular exercise and a focus on health and fitness, despite growing up with an aversion to athletics and developing a sedentary lifestyle as a young adult. Now you can't keep me out of the exercise room. I offer some suggestions for readers to begin an exercise program of their own. They'll be glad they did.

Chapter 9. Look! Up In the Sky! It's Perfectman!

Being a perfectionist is tough, both on yourself and on the people around you. It's important to learn that not everything needs to be perfect. My philosophy is: "Strive for perfection, settle for excellence." Try to learn which of the things you do really demand perfection and the ones for which a lower standard of quality will be acceptable. This will make your life easier and it will make you easier to live with.

Chapter 10. It's Your Body, It's Your Life

I learned long ago the value of forging collaborative partnerships with your doctors when it comes to managing your health. When you go see a doctor, take along a list of information and questions to make sure you cover all of your concerns and to help the doctor take care of you as well as he can. If you have unsatisfactory experiences with medical professionals, tell them. You're the customer.

Chapter 11. Outside Looking In

When a friend told me "You're the most aggressive person I know," you could have knocked me over with a feather. It's rare that we get an opportunity to learn exactly how someone else views us. When that observation conflicts with how we view ourselves, that's a great learning opportunity. Is that how you want to be viewed? Or do you want to change some aspect of your personality and alter the way others perceive you?

Chapter 12. Just a Container

When I saw my father-in-law's body lying in his casket at his wake, this thought flashed through my mind: "That's not Zeke. That's just the container he came in. Zeke is still around here somewhere." Although I am not a spiritual person, I found this thought comforting. The essence of Zeke was the impact he had on his family and friends and community and the memories he left behind. That essence remains long after the container you walk around in is no longer needed.

Chapter 13. Now You're Scaring Me

I once had a relationship with a woman whose pleasant exterior concealed a violent core. During one of our numerous arguments, I stomped my foot right on my briefcase in frustration. It shocked me to realize that it was possible to enrage me to the point of lashing out physically. I had no idea I could get that angry. It's good to know your own limits and triggers. We eventually broke up. It was a happy day.

Chapter 14. Beware of Gifted Geeks

Everyone in my family was academically gifted. My parents, concerned about keeping my ego in check as a child, stressed to me that I was "average" in all respects. As a consequence, I developed a long-lasting inferiority complex and a need for external validation of my achievements. Fortunately, I've overcome that need by now. I present some examples of how this affected me and I point out that it's important for everyone to set realistic expectations for themselves, regardless of what the rest of the world demands.

Part 3. Motivational Pearls

The stories in this section describe powerful positive lessons I learned from several excellent role models. These examples motivated me to incorporate some of these same values and behaviors into my own life.

Chapter 15. Because No One Should Be Hungry

When I was a child, my father told me that he would never send one of his children to bed without dinner for punishment. He said, "I know what it's like to be three days hungry." That statement stuck with me for life. There is no reason why anybody in the United States

should go involuntarily without food. I've become a big supporter of the Oregon Food Bank and other hunger causes, and I describe my experiences as a Meals on Wheels delivery driver.

Chapter 16. For Whom the School Bell Tolls

I've always had great respect for adults who go back to school to further their education when there are many things they'd rather be doing. I point out several inspiring people—my wife, other relatives, friends, and professional colleagues—who pursued higher education to better themselves or just for fun. There are also many learning opportunities in daily life, as when my sister undertook some major home remodeling. I hope to motivate readers to pursue their own interests and quests for knowledge.

Chapter 17. Lending a Hand

My parents set an excellent example for their descendants through the extensive volunteer work they performed. My siblings and I have carried on the tradition of volunteerism and trying to find ways to help other people in need. I describe some of the many ways we've been able to contribute to the health and well-being of others and suggest ways that readers can do the same.

Chapter 18. Racing for Your Dreams

My father had always wanted to drive race cars. In his late 30s, he finally did. Eventually he held nearly every position at the local racetrack, including flagman. Then one night he was hit by a car while he was flagging a race and badly injured. But he had chased his dream. I wonder if the readers are chasing theirs.

Chapter 19. The Bravest Thing I Ever Saw

When I was 10 years old, the mobile home in which my family was temporarily living caught fire in the middle of the night. My mother woke up and spotted the flames. She and my father ran directly through the fire into the back of the trailer to rescue the three of us children. No one was hurt, although we lost some valued possessions. Knowing that my parents ran into a solid wall of flame to rescue their children was the bravest act I've ever seen. I can only hope that I would demonstrate as much courage should I ever be in such a terrifying situation.

Chapter 20. Do All You Can, Then Get Help

After my father was diagnosed with brain cancer, my mother went to heroic lengths to take care of him at home as both his mental and physical health quickly deteriorated. Eventually, though, she couldn't do it any longer and she had to place Dad in hospice care. She felt guilty about what she perceived as abdicating her spousal responsibilities. But everyone else in the family thought she did an admirable job. You do the best you can to deal with a difficult situation in view of your own abilities and limitations, and then you just have to get outside help from professionals. There's no shame in that.

Part 4. Practical Pearls

As a pragmatist, I'm always interested in techniques for getting my work done faster and more accurately, and I look for practical ways to meander through life more securely. This section presents several practical insights that can be useful to any reader.

Chapter 21. Think First, Buy Later

Have you ever bought a product only to be disappointed because it didn't really meet your requirements? Perhaps you didn't think carefully about your requirements for it before handing over your credit card. It's well worth the time to consider the features and characteristics you really want in the products you buy, whether it's a blow dryer for your bathroom or a house to live in.

Chapter 22. Trust Facts, Not Opinions

Three scientists once decided to actually measure the effect of cream on the acidity of coffee, rather than just debating what ought to happen. The message from this was that you're always better off getting facts instead of simply propagating opinions. People are too quick to pass along inflammatory e-mails and rumors without checking to see if they are actually true. Try to find the facts before you spread your opinions.

Chapter 23. An Ounce of Preparation

In this chapter I describe how doing a little organized planning using simple checklists has helped both business trips and vacations run more smoothly for me. An ounce of preparation can save tons of aggravation and maybe even your life. A case study describes how being well-prepared for emergencies saved my brother's life when he suffered a severe injury while exploring a canyon in the Idaho desert.

Chapter 24. Everything Is Negotiable

One of the key phrases that I learned as a young adult was, "Can I do any better on the price?" It turns out that you can negotiate a better deal on a surprising range of purchases and transactions; I offer numerous examples of where that has—and has not—worked for me. Negotiation is important in other interactions that don't involve merchants, too, as when negotiating toward a win-win outcome helped me solve a problem with a neighbor who owned the world's largest—and loudest—collection of wind chimes.

Chapter 25. Is It Quality or Is It Crap?

In many situations it takes very little additional time, effort, or money to do high-quality job instead of a crappy job. This chapter presents numerous cases of puzzling quality problems that didn't have to happen, including some I was guilty of myself. People make mistakes, but processes can be improved, people can take a little more care, and we can all receive—and deliver—better quality and services than we often do.

Part 5. Cautionary Pearls

These stories provide warnings about certain risky, dangerous, or disappointing situations one can encounter. In each case, specific small encounters revealed the danger to me. Each chapter also offers suggestions about how readers can detect and avoid such situations in their own lives.

Chapter 26. Can You See Me Now?

My experiences learning to ride a motorcycle properly taught me about the importance of being aware of blind spots on the road. People also have blind spots in their lives, such as the impacts their own negative behaviors have on people around them, medical issues they sweep

under the rug, and potential serious concerns with people close to us. Try to become aware of the blind spots in your life so you can deal with a concern before it becomes a crisis.

Chapter 27. Dodged a Bullet

We've all had close calls, maybe while driving a car, maybe in our health, maybe at work. If you're paying attention, that scary almost-but-didn't-quite-hurt-you experience contains a powerful message that can help you change your behavior. It's actually a good thing if you can experience some of these scary moments that don't do any real damage but get your attention. The changes you make in response just might save your life.

Chapter 28. Keep Getting Up

In this chapter I describe the role model of a beloved uncle, who demonstrated admirable resilience to the difficulties life threw in his way. I wish I had been able to learn more from him at an earlier age. Instead, I remember several situations in which my parents missed an opportunity to help instill the values of persistence and tenacity in me. I would have been more successful in several aspects of my life had I had some key conversations with my parents when the teachable moments arose.

Chapter 29. Be Careful Who You Listen To

When I was a teenager I consulted with an aunt in show business when I was having a conflict with another member of the rock band I'd started in ninth grade. She advised me to quit the band. I did, and I regretted it for years. It turns out that adults don't have all the answers and sometimes don't give young people good advice, so be careful who you use as a role model.

Chapter 30. Driving As a Metaphor for Life

My father taught me much about driving a car beyond the mechanics of operating the pedals, the gear shift, and the steering wheel. I describe some of these lessons and how they can apply to one's daily life as well, including avoiding the "deer in headlights" look (not being paralyzed into inaction by impending problems) and keeping your eyes moving while you're driving (situational awareness and anticipating what lies ahead for you).

Part 6. Professional Pearls

Here are numerous lessons I learned from the workplace, but which have broad applicability to almost any work environment.

Chapter 31. The Customer Is Not Always Right

It's popular to say that the customer is always right, but it's just not true. The customer could be unreasonable, uninformed, mistaken, or in a bad mood. I describe several situations in which the customer was not right and I encourage people to build realistic customer-supplier relationships.

Chapter 32. There's Plenty of Credit to Go Around

Some people like to hog the credit for a job well done. In reality, it's much better to share the credit with all who contributed to the effort. I learned this when my graduate thesis advisor made sure my name went first on the papers we co-authored that described my research. As a counterexample, I have a friend who wrote the seminal book in a particular field, but two people

who have built on his groundwork want to push him out of the way and have the limelight shine on them. Credit is something you give, not something you take.

Chapter 33. The Leaders of the Band

When I played trumpet in a high school marching band, I had an opportunity to compare the leadership and teaching styles of two band directors. One was a dream, coaxing the best performance from each student and inspiring the band members with interesting music and challenging, creative marching routines. His successor was a foul-tempered tyrant who destroyed the morale and excellence of a once-proud marching band. I liked the first teacher better.

Chapter 34. Trust Your Own Work

It took an observation from my PhD thesis advisor to make me feel confident enough in my own laboratory work to trust the results I was obtaining. It's important to acquire the confidence that you know what you're doing in certain areas. It's also important to know what your limitations are so you can get expert assistance by collaborating with others when necessary.

Chapter 35. Knowledge Is Not Zero-Sum

Some people are very protective of their knowledge. They act as though there is only so much knowledge to go around and if they share some of theirs with you, then they will know less. Not true: Knowledge is not a zero-sum situation. This chapter uses several examples to illustrate the value of sharing your knowledge with other people. We all come out ahead when we pool what we know.

Chapter 36. We're All On the Same Side Here

I haven't found team-building exercises to be worth the time they consume. I was startled once, though, when a participant in a team-building exercise suddenly came to the realization that "We really are on the same side, and we have to work together to accomplish our goals." It was scary that it took a contrived team-building activity for him to figure that out. I present several examples of teams that were effective and teams that weren't, and I offer some suggestions for how to align the people on your teams toward a common purpose.

Chapter 37. Outside the Box

People tend to get stuck in ruts, trying the same things over and over even when they don't work that well anymore. Sometimes we need to consider new ways of solving problems, both at work and at home. This chapter presents several examples of paradigm shifts I experienced that had a significant impact on my thinking. Incremental approaches to doing things better work in many situations, but sometimes you really need to break the mold and try something different.

Acknowledgments

Author Information

Biography

The eldest son of a career Air Force officer, Karl Wiegers was born in Japan in 1953 and lived in California, Texas, Maine, Iowa, Italy, France, and Idaho before starting eighth grade in Boise, Idaho, when his father retired from the Air Force. Karl graduated from Boise High School in 1970. He received a B.S. degree in chemistry from Boise State College (1973), and M.S. (1975) and Ph.D. (1977) degrees in organic chemistry from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Karl then spent one year as Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois and did one year of postdoctoral research there.

Karl spent 18 years at Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, New York, as a photographic research scientist, software developer, software manager, and software process and quality improvement leader. Since 1998, he has been self-employed as Principal Consultant with Process Impact (www.processimpact.com), a software consulting and training company in Happy Valley, Oregon, where everyone is happy. He is now largely retired from this position. His professional interests include software requirements engineering, project management, peer reviews, process improvement, risk management, and metrics.

As an independent consultant, Karl has delivered hundreds of presentations in numerous countries. These presentations include: training courses delivered at corporations and government agencies at all levels; conference keynotes, track presentations, and tutorials; webinars; and speeches at professional society meetings. He has provided consulting and training services to more than 100 companies in many different industry sectors and government agencies since 1994. His popular training courses and seminars also are available in eLearning format.

Karl is the author of six highly-regarded books on software development and management topics, two of which won Productivity Awards from *Software Development* magazine, and he has contributed chapters to numerous other books. He has also written 175 articles on many aspects of software development, management, chemistry, and military history. Karl served on the Editorial Board for *IEEE Software* magazine and as a contributing editor for *Software Development* magazine. He is a member of the Association for Computing Machinery.

Karl's leisure activities include reading (particularly military history and science), watching movies, playing guitar, composing and recording music, motorcycling, and wine tasting. He volunteers at the local public library, as a Meals on Wheels delivery driver, and for periodic events for the Oregon Food Bank and similar hunger-related causes.

Previous Books

(Sales figures do not include translations; my books have been translated into Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Thai, Czech, and/or German)

- *Practical Project Initiation: A Handbook with Tools*, Microsoft Press, 2007. XX copies sold.
- *More About Software Requirements: Thorny Issues and Practical Advice*, Microsoft Press, 2006. XX copies sold.
- *Software Requirements* (first edition, Microsoft Press 1999; 2nd Edition, Microsoft Press, 2003). XX copies sold in both editions combined. First edition won a Productivity Award from *Software Development* magazine.)
- *Peer Reviews in Software: A Practical Guide*, Addison-Wesley, 2002. XX copies sold.

- *Creating a Software Engineering Culture*, Dorset House Publishing, 1996. XX copies sold. (Won a Productivity Award from *Software Development* magazine.)

Why Me?

I did not write this book because my life has been particularly fascinating and my experiences extraordinary, although I have lived quite a few places and done a variety of things. I believe I'm well qualified to write this book because I'm a good observer and am skilled at extracting lessons, insights, and messages from a variety of daily experiences. I have a lot of experience in my technical writing of collecting stories and experiences both from my own career and from my consulting clients, then extracting the lessons and packaging the wisdom into condensed nuggets. My most popular book, *Software Requirements, 2nd Edition*, contains dozens of such anecdotes, all true, to which readers relate well.

I'm also a good communicator, both verbally and in writing. People enjoy my presentations and I've received many compliments on how direct and pragmatic my writing is. The combination of meaningful and broadly applicable life lessons, the relating of numerous and diverse real-life experiences, and a clear and engaging writing style will give this book broad appeal.

Marketing Support

Although I have a great deal of speaking and writing experience, and good visibility, in the software development and management arena, where my previous books have been very popular, I do not presently have exposure in the self-improvement domain. I would contribute to marketing *Pearls from Sand* through visibility on my current web site, www.processimpact.com, which is visited more than 65,000 times per month. I also plan to create companion web sites for the book and for myself, such as www.pearlsfromsand.com and www.karlwiegers.com. I currently promote my technical books through at www.processimpact.com/pubs.shtml, where visitors can view the table of contents and sample chapters and order copies from Amazon.com. In addition, I could promote the book through my LinkedIn networking account and I could create a Facebook page for it.