



Turning 50 in America's Best City While Working at the Best Club Anywhere!

By Monroe S. Miller

Sometimes it takes an artificial landmark to put focus on one's life and work. That happened to me this summer, on my 50th birthday. I did some thinking about turning 50, reflecting back and looking ahead.

What I quickly figured out was this: I am one lucky person. One of my youthful staff members (now that I am 50, they ALL are youthful!) asked something like "aren't you kind of depressed about turning 50?" The answer was easy. "How can one be depressed about having enjoyed a very successful career, doing something he loves in what is officially (for 1996, anyway) America's best place to live?"

Depression would be an impossibility for me. It might be an emotion for the poor guy who has hated every minute of his work, who hates the place he works and the organization he works for. Or the guy whose kids are screwed up and don't like him. Or who has had health problems. Or who has moved too often. Or who experienced a failed marriage. Or who suffered a permanent injury fighting for his country in a foreign place.

Me? I'm on the plus side of all those potential downers. The kid who asked the question was told by me "I hope you can have as full and rich and varied and rewarding life as I have had for 50 years."

Is Madison, Wisconsin 'Shangrila?' No. The politics of the place drives normal people nuts. But it is incredibly beautiful — four lakes, the isthmus, the state capitol building, promontories and wetlands, Indian effigy mounds and giant oak trees.

Where but here and at Blackhawk could one lean over a split rail fence and visit with Dr. Howard Temin and congratulate him for winning the Nobel prize for medicine, golf with a Big Ten coach or watch Vincent visit with Bart Starr on an early Monday morning?

You can hear Pink Floyd one night at Camp Randall, listen Itzak Perlman the next evening at the Civic Center, enjoy the Dave Brubeck Quartet at the Campus Stock Pavilion and dance to Smokey Robinson and the Miracles in the ancient Field House. From Sinatra to Elvis, they have all been here.

Madison is just big enough that you can go downtown and boo the president of the U.S. or cheer a hero like Bishop Desmond Tutu. Because of the presence of the great State University of Wisconsin, your neighbor might be a member of the National Academy of Science. And how lucky have I been, over the years in this town, to have frequent visits from faculty members — Love, Worf, Newman, Koval, Rossi and others. We have had plant pathologists from, literally all over the world, on bended knee with tails in the air in front of our 17th green, hands lenses out, looking at weird patches! What fun!

You can go to the Madison Club and probably seen the Governor, go to Camp Randall and watch the Badgers clobber Michigan or Penn State in football.

Madison has the Art Fair on the Square and the Farmers Market. You can catch a walleye in Lake Mendota or a northern in Lake Monona. Or go boating. Or watch the University crew teams, on cool mornings in the spring and fall, glide silently past our pump house. Or you might even have a Badger football player or a member of the women's crew team on your summer staff.

Your child can take (free) piano lessons from a Music School prof or flute lessons from the gal who is first chair in the Madison Symphony Orchestra. In the summer thousands and thousands enjoy the weekly "Concerts on the Square" with the Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra.

Visitors love to go to the Memorial

Union — the most European setting outside of Europe — or sit out on the Union Terrace on a summer night. You can take them to worship in the beautiful Congregational Church or down to State Street to see the crazies.

How about the Arboretum in any season, but especially in the spring when the lilacs and flowering crabapples are blooming? Looking for a view to enjoy, miles to see? How about one of the best in North America — the 18th hole at Blackhawk CC on Blackhawk Drive? I enjoy it everyday. Madison has fall color (no, it isn't New England, but it is pretty good) to feast the eyes on.

And golf — boy, does this community love golf. Population — under 200,000, something over that with the suburbs. But we have five private 18-hole courses — Blackhawk, Maple Bluff, Nakoma, Cherokee and Bishops Bay. We have Pleasant View (27 holes) and Tumbledown Trails (18). The city has Yahara Hills (36), Odana Hills (18), Glenway (9), and Monona (9). The University of Wisconsin-Madison has University Ridge (18 and maybe more to come before too long). Door Creek (18) is close. Many others are not far away, either.

Madison has my beloved alma mater — the UW-Madison — the Noer Facility to nuclear reactors, heart transplants to hair transplants, Babcock Hall ice cream to Big Ten sports. I could write a book about what has gone on there since 1964 when I arrived, a hick farm kid from Grant county.

It has the outrageous and absurd politics I have already noted, the meddling bureaucrats, the petty politicians of state and county and city government, and sometimes ridiculous policies. But with the right attitude and mind set, they can provide entertainment not found for sale anywhere!

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This has been a great place to live for 32 years (plus one, for the first year of my life when my dad finished his degree at the UW after WWII, and minus 15 months in Vietnam). It provides endless pleasures; if you are bored in Madison, Wisconsin, you are a BORING person, doomed to a dull life no matter where you live. It has been great for both Cheryl and me to live in the midst of all the fun and activity.

Life has to give a guy a few big breaks. One of my biggest breaks was being hired by Blackhawk CC. Since 1973, my career has been almost continuously interesting and challenging. It is a cautious and well run organization, taking balanced and measured steps of progress every year, always moving forward and getting better. It is a beautiful, old 100 acre golf course, typical of those built 75 years ago. Its history includes a place on the National Park Service List of Historical Places in America, and a touch from A.W.

Tillinghast. It often strikes me as incredible that I have been the golf course manager for what is essentially a third of its history. There were only five before me — a perfect venue for a man whose personality likes stability for himself and his family. And how lucky for a faithful UW-Madison alumnus — I can walk to the western edge of campus in 10 minutes, bike there in under five, and drive there in two! And along the way, I will see a couple of Frank Lloyd Wright buildings.

The players — members — treat me as an equal, yet expect none of the responsibilities associated with a membership. Some of them are my dearest friends. I have a sense that they respect hard work and the quality product we try to present every day of the season. Who could ask for more?

So, it is easy to see why I haven't suffered the "turning 50" maladies so many seem to suffer — you know, mid-life crisis, male menopause and all that. I am not complex enough (some say I am too simple-minded!)

to be bothered. My life as been too rich, too full, too busy, too happy, too rewarding, too fun, to think such thoughts.

Growing older isn't the end of the world. In reality, it has many advantages. Only when you can look back from the perch afforded a 50 year old person do you realize how little you knew when you were young (30, for example) and how wonderful experience is. I feel more capable, stronger and smarter about how to use the plentiful energy I still have. My ability to stay focused increases every year. The opportunity to participate in physical activity helps keep me healthy, I am sure.

A lot of the impact on aging is mental. I take the tact that my life is only half over. There is so much more to look forward to — books to read, places to go, people to meet — that I look forward to each day with a great big smile.

And when I do grow old — whenever that is — I have a plan. I am going to unwrap and become outrageous! That will really be fun! 🍷



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