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“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” I would like to share my story with you as to why that text in Micah is so profound to me.

I am a native of Norway, and my early experiences involved a lot of changing homes and schools as my father was a colporteur leader. The greatest stability for me was the summers helping on my grandparents’ farm, particularly taking the cows to pasture and helping with haying. When I was 13, our family emigrated to the United States, with the first stop in Battle Creek soon followed by Berrien Springs and then Ohio—all in a four-year period. In my senior year in academy I became even more independent, and I went to Bogenhofen, Austria, traveling extensively around Europe while I was there. It seems that for the first 18 years of my life I was constantly on the move, but all that moving helped form my way of thinking about the world.

By the time I entered Andrews University as a college freshman in 1967, all my experiences had left me fascinated with the different ways of being human. I was very excited to learn there was a discipline that was devoted to just that—cultural anthropology. Following a Cultural Anthropology course, taught by a wonderfully inspiring professor, Gottfried Oosterwaal, I directed everything I could toward the goal of being an anthropologist. My sophomore year was spent in Beirut, Lebanon, at Middle East College, and while there I traveled in Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Iran and Israel. All these different experiences cemented my emerging desire to be an academic and an anthropologist. I could name so many individuals, and particularly Andrews professors, who continued to encourage me by letting me be part of their research during my later undergraduate years. That is one reason I am so passionate still about engaging students in research, even while they are undergraduates.

A major turning point in my career was being invited to join the Heshbon archaeological expedition in 1971. I was a recent graduate and my particular focus was on animal bones, particularly domesticated animals. As circumstances turned out I became the only animal bones person on the dig, with only the experience from a class project and connection with a professor at the University of Michigan. I learned so much from the Heshbon trip, and when I returned home my suitcase was full of bones that I had not been able to identify! These I took to Norway, then to Gothenburg, Sweden, where an expert from Estonia helped me as I continued to identify the bones I had brought—the beginning of my first article about bones from Heshbon, published in Andrews University Seminary Studies.

So far, my focus had been bones but my passion expanded greatly in the next few years. I had been approved for a U.S. Selective Service Program as a conscientious objector and the first of those years I spent at Loma Linda University as a social work intern, while also continuing graduate work in anthropology. As I have mentioned, I had many experiences with different cultural situations, but I had never known the cultural world of addicts or the life struggles of parents with sick children or adults with aging parents. This engagement profoundly impacted where I would take my career and research later. I need to add that my time at Loma Linda was also very special because of my connection with an Estonian-Canadian musician and editor who later became my amazing wife—Asta!

But back to how everything came together for me: zooarchaeology (the animal bone study) and social service. It happened as I worked on my ethnographic field research in Jordan for my PhD. What that means is that I was seeking to discover what the animal bones tell us about living—the social world behind the bone discoveries. As I did this research I realized that my calling was not just about the past and bones but about how what we learn from the past can help us create strong communities in the present.

That is what has driven my contributions to Andrews University and the discipline of archaeology since I became faculty here in the fall of 1980 and while I was chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences from 1982–90. One program I introduced was the Community Service Assistantship Program (CSAP), as a means to strengthen Andrews involvement in the local community, especially in Benton Harbor, and at the same time provide students with hands-on experience working with underprivileged families and communities. The program eventually morphed into what became our campus-wide Service Learning Program. This program, in turn, led to the addition of two more focused community outreach programs. The first, the Genesis Single Parent Program, targeted single parents. The second, the Male Mentorship Program, targeted young men. The latter program was suggested to me by Harvey Burnett, who ended up leading it and is now the chair of our department.

More recently I began championing development of a graduate program in our department focused on community and international development to help build capacity in international development around the world. This has gone through several changes since its inception, and we now have both off-campus and on-campus programs that seek in different ways to respond to structural needs in changing communities for the better.

Of course, my engagement in archaeology and with others creating a more community responsive approach has also been a critical part of my career (please see [labianca.wordpress.com](http://labianca.wordpress.com)).

As I reflect back over my life, I am amazed at the way God has led me. My varied experiences, along with the support of passionate and committed mentors, have led me to a place of personal calling and conviction, where my profession, my faith and my passion for communities all meet together. To return to Micah 5:8: “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” The most important phrase to me is where it says “to walk humbly with your God.” What these words mean to me is that, despite my best efforts, there is no guarantee that any of what I have sought to accomplish throughout my career at Andrews is a guaranteed success. I have sought to bring positive change to the lives of individuals and communities. But eventually my duty is simply to walk humbly with my God and let Him take the lead in my life.



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