

STUDE CLUB NEWSLETTER

A Vision That Unfolded ...

...Chair by Chair

--Janet Kinoshian

Barely awake, Don Schoendorfer stepped onto the cold cement floor of his garage at 4:00 a.m. Determined to create the world's cheapest wheelchair, the Orange County, California, mechanical engineer squeezed in three hours every day before work, tinkering at a work-table he'd set up in his overstuffed garage. First, he tried a chair with a conventional canvas-like seat, but scrapped it as too expensive. He knew he needed something cheap and durable to the point of indestructible. The chair had to traverse mountains, swamps and deserts, and endure heat and frost with minor upkeep. Many of the world's poor, Schoendorfer knew, live on less than two dollars a day and could never dream of buying a Western-type wheelchair for hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Finally, he hit on it: the ubiquitous white plastic lawn chair. Perfect. Schoendorfer scouted out sales, buying chairs by the dozen for three dollars apiece. Then he wandered the aisles of the Home Depot and Wal-Mart in search of the most inexpensive bike tires, even the most cost-effective screws. During all the aisle-wandering, he flashed back to a road in Morocco almost thirty years ago. In 1977, he and his wife, Laurie, had stopped in Tétouan and, in the suffocating afternoon heat, saw a disabled woman dragging herself across the road, almost like a snake, using her fingernails to pull herself along. Schoendorfer remembers the disdain of the street beggars: the handicapped were considered even lower on the food chain than they were. On that dusty road, Schoendorfer decided to help. Now, as he screwed two Toys "R" Us bike tires on to the chair, and welded on black metal casters and bearings, the MIT grad felt things come together. As he pirouetted the simple chair one last time, he thought, this may just be it.

"You've got a winner, Don," Schoendorfer's pastor declared when he saw the little white chair. In nine months Schoendorfer had made one hundred wheelchairs, and his garage looked like a prosthetics rehabilitation center. The pastor suggested they bring the whole lot of them on an upcoming church medical mission to India. But when Schoendorfer arrived at the first planning meeting, the missionaries in the group were less than impressed. "How much do you think shipping these chairs will cost?" one asked. Deflated and discouraged, Schoendorfer kept showing up to meetings. "I think they figured if they humored me — this odd man with the weird idea — I might just disappear," he recalled with a smile. Finally, they agreed to let him bring four chairs to India. In an overcrowded medical ward outside Chennai, Schoendorfer

saw a father carrying his disabled eleven-year-old son. Here's the moment, he thought. Schoendorfer ran outside and wheeled in the chair. From the moment the boy, Emmanuel, first sat down, Schoendorfer knew his invention had some power to heal. Emmanuel looked alternately stunned and overjoyed. His mother said in translation: "Bless you for this chariot." When Schoendorfer got back home, the company he worked for suddenly went bankrupt. He decided to stop working as an engineer and make the chairs his life's work. His family lived off years of savings, and when that started to run out, Laurie went to work for the Social Security Administration. Since that first donation, Schoendorfer's nonprofit organization, Free Wheelchair Mission, has delivered more than sixty-three thousand of the lightweight contraptions at no charge to people desperate for mobility. One hundred thousand more are on the way. Today, the chairs are made in two Chinese factories and can be delivered anywhere in the world for just \$41.17. They've been shipped to forty-five countries — Angola, Zimbabwe, Mongolia, China, India, Peru, Fiji, as well as Iraq, where U.S. Marines passed them out to hundreds of civilians in 2004. With more than one hundred million disabled poor in developing countries, Schoendorfer knows his work is far from done. "I have a small goal," he says quietly from beneath his chunky mustache, "Twenty million chairs given away free by 2010". On every trip to deliver more, the inventor sees first-hand the effect his invention has on people's lives. Indra, from Chennai, never went to school, yet is now studying to become an architect. A young Angolan mother had her legs blown off by a land mine while working in the fields; today she cares for her infant children. An Indian man from Cochin, nicknamed "Fifty-two," told volunteers how he prayed daily for fifty-two years that someone would be kind to him, and this chair was the first time anyone had done anything for him, ever. Volunteers photograph recipients as they first maneuver their newfound wheels. "It's like their wedding or graduation day," explained Schoendorfer. "Without question, it's the most important day of their lives. It's the day they get their dignity back." Don Schoendorfer will likely never be famous like Walt Disney. But like Walt, he wanted to light up people's eyes and bring them joy. He held his vision firm in his mind for more than thirty years and when the opportunity finally arose for him to pursue it, he seized the moment. Starting in his garage and eventually moving into factories in China, he quietly set out to create his affordable wheelchairs and bring them to those in need. His visionary eyes now are set on a goal of twenty million chairs delivered around the globe. I think he will make it.

Walt Disney and Bill Schoendorfer both set high expectations in pursuing their visions. But their visions were not accomplished overnight, rather they developed over time and one step at a time.

Cultivating Positive Thoughts

--Ankur Sharma, Softgin Technologies, Bangalore
(Btech IITB, 2010, EE Dept)

A group of young enthusiasts were questioned by a corporate trainer as to what are the kinds of thoughts they get during the day. Responses included a long list dominated by lot of examples of negative thoughts. For instance, thoughts of competitiveness, selfish thoughts that revolve around “I”, “Me” and “Mine”; thoughts of intolerance and injustice, low self-esteem, thoughts revolving around desires, especially ambitions yet unfulfilled and so on. Sadly, although many from the audience later admitted that they do also get positive thoughts during the day, it was noted that they completely failed to acknowledge them. After being reminded, they came up with another list mainly comprising of positive thoughts like thankfulness, repentance for a mistake and a firm resolve to not repeat; thoughts of introspection etc.

It's a fact that we are most often bombarded by the negativities around us. While an individual may very easily get sucked into it, it takes great deal of perseverance to create and maintain an environment of positivity around us.

A Swedish proverb says: “*Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow*”. It has been statistically revealed that of the number of worries that occupies our mind, 65% is about things that will **never** happen *i.e.* they are thoughts on fictitious future events. 22% of our thoughts are on those events of the past that cannot be altered or changed now. 10% of the thoughts revolve around people who can never change in their behaviour or attitude. Remaining 3% of worries are real. But we are so preoccupied with the trivial 97% of our thoughts that we do not get sufficient time to address the 3% of our reality.

So what do we do to cultivate positive thoughts? It is not enough just having positive thoughts. It is important to cultivate positive actions as well. While you can find umpteen ways of cultivating positive thoughts and subsequently positive actions, this small article will focus primarily on one method.

Keeping a Personal Journal: One cannot underestimate the importance of keeping a personal journal – a small notebook with your thoughts written down, which only you will be reading and no one else. Normally days would pass by us so fast that before we know it, our 24 hours have come to an end and a new day is staring us in the face. You may not know how to slow things down, but it is possible to take some time out to record the events of each day and to analyze them. An honest analysis of each day would help us see what went wrong and why and what needs more attention. It also teaches us to be grateful for everything that went well and for simple beautiful things in our life, which we may not notice otherwise. It is not that you have to spend a lot of time writing. Even 10-15 minutes will be sufficient. The best time to write in your journal is naturally before hitting the bed.

What and how to write in the journal? It is good to put down just about everything that happened during the day or you gave a thought to. Don't wait for an important event to take place. Every day is important because it will never come back. And what we can learn from the events that occurred that particular day may be unique and meaningful for life.

It is very important that even if you have had an awful day, you must, without fail, mention something pleasant that happened that day. It will help the mind get away from the negativity.

Be grateful for the small and simple things that happened. For example, if you are a homesick freshie and if a senior came and spent comforting time with you, be sure you express your gratitude in your diary. If you had to travel long way on an assignment, acknowledge the kind passenger who let you have his seat in the crowded train, or the adorable child who chatted your ears off in the bus. Even if you met a rude person, although it may be natural to feel only hate, be sure you force yourself to mention at least one good thing about him.

Reflect on how you acted to some situations and introspect if it was indeed the best thing to have done or whether you could have done something better. If your conscience tells you that you have acted wrongly, write down ways you could improve the injured relationship or finish an unfulfilled task given by your advisor.

Finally, if you are a theist, an important part of keeping a personal journal is to write a heartfelt prayer – for seeking strength to become better individuals and to help us help others.

Announcements

The upcoming sessions of P2P STUDe Club over this semester are scheduled as follows

1. Tuesday, 24th August, 2010
2. Tuesday, 21st September, 2010
3. Tuesday, 26th October, 2010

In addition to these series of seminars, preparations for a 3-day workshop focusing on technical skills especially meant for freshies is also underway.

For any suggestions, comments feel free to reach us at stude.club@gmail.com. For more information about this club and its activities, visit <http://p2pstude.tk>. To receive regular updates about the upcoming events at STUDe Club, join 'STUDe CLUB' on moodle.