

life story of Mark Craven

I retired from 9-5 work, but I haven't stopped working. I just remain unemployed, which is the way I prefer it. I could never do nothing. An active mind cannot get bored, because there is always something to do or learn or read. There are places to go, people to meet, goals to set and meet. There are not enough hours in the day to do all I want and need to do. I wonder now how I ever got done what I did when I was employed.

Mark Craven, now age 60, resigned from his last job in 1998, at age 52. He saw it as a retirement of sorts, although he was still years away from being able to collect on any pensions he had. Leaving behind the 9 – 5 working hours, he decided to dedicate more time to what had previously been “diversions” in his life. Bringing these into the centre of his life, he redefined his identity and stepped into a new future.

Making significant change happen in his life is not new for Mark. Over his lifetime he has undergone transitions to new career fields no less than three times. His careers fall into three main areas – chemistry, computers, and real estate, although within each of these fields he did more than one kind of work.

Born in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1946, Mark was the son of a Naval Lt. Commander, but he had retired by the time Mark was in 5th grade, “so the Navy life,” he says, “was largely unknown for us as kids.” He remembers Boston and New Orleans, and then the Mississippi coast where they completed their schooling, recalling, “We had no fear of travelling or relocating, since we had done it before and it didn't seem to be traumatic.” After high school he attended college, first Tulane University, then transferring to Mississippi State University, from which he graduated in 1969 with a BS in Chemistry (BSCh).

Not long after graduating he had married, though this first marriage was shortlived and they divorced in 1975. He began a new relationship with a friend of his sister's, but it ended when she died unexpectedly, not long after his father died. These three losses all occurring in such a short time frame were distressing, and he sought psychiatric assistance to help him through this time.

The process was enlightening and I saw many of my own traits that needed to be changed. I needed to be more caring, to share more of my emotions, to become vulnerable in my relationships and to learn to express love and affection. . . . Maturity and time solved much of that, but my time was compressed, I believe, by the year I spent talking to the shrink.

His first job had been a “safe lab analysis job,” but after going through these losses and seeing a new opportunity open up, he decided to take a job running an experimental lab on a mountaintop in Arizona. In 1978, through mutual friends he met Katie, marrying her on their move to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he took a job as a commercial analytical chemist.

Mark continued to work in chemistry in Salt Lake City until 1986 – though in a different job after the first ended, but after Katie had finished taking her Pharmacy degree and completed a year's work they moved to Las Vegas. He had had enough, and decided to turn his hobby into a job, working at a series of computer-related jobs in Las Vegas, as tech writer, analyst, and instructor.

Just over a decade later he thought once more about making another career change, one which focused on his current interests at the time – and so in 1998 began his real estate/investment phase although, he explains, “there was some overlap in times and phases as one might guess with all the career changes, but after each change was made, there was no looking back.”

The reasons Mark gave for making such changes in his life, from one major career area to another, were boredom, not liking the people he encountered while on the job, and just the fact of finding something else he’d rather be doing, all of which he refers to simply as wanderlust. In part, it was the support of his wife Katie, who worked while he made his final career change from employment in computers to the field of property – at the same time beginning to be self-employed, that enabled it all to come about.

Working from home and choosing his own hours of work suited him, he decided. He could use a spare room as an office and computer centre and work well into the night, freeing up the daytime hours for more golf. Maintaining several web pages which involve him in a network of related sites is a further responsibility. While still working in property in the years that followed, the focus of his interests changed over time, from management to investment, with additional interests on the side, such as consulting and a margarita machine rental/sales business. He enjoyed the ambiguity of his new identity and the responses it raised from friends and associates. He appeared to be a man of leisure, who had taken early retirement while enjoying financial security and freedom to travel at will, but he was actually putting in more hours than he ever did working a day job for an employer, managing several buildings at one point before the focus of his interests shifted. The investment side of it could still be time consuming, but the flexibility of it, including both small and larger projects, sustains his interest.



Mark Craven & margarita machine

Mark’s own personal choice in life was that marriage, for him, would be childfree, and he always made that clear, early in any relationship. He was convinced that he would not have been as good a parent as one should be, admitting also that selfishness played a part in it. He says

It’s empowering to be childfree . . . I enjoy coming and going at will. There is always the ‘what if’ aspect of children. Those with, contemplate life without them, and those without, contemplate life with them. I certainly have no regrets. . . We have both enjoyed the offspring of our siblings and in some cases, neighbors, but also enjoy the quiet and less hectic (sometimes) nature of our lives.

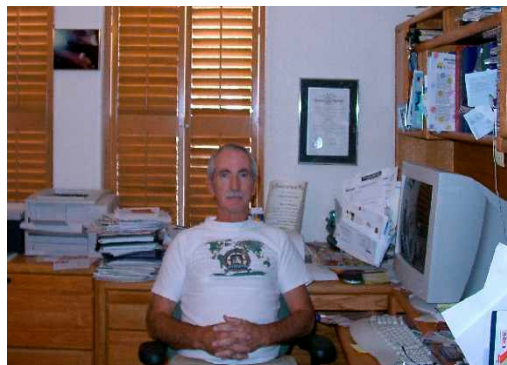
I asked Mark what would have happened if Katie had become pregnant. He said he didn’t know, but thought they would have adapted and done the best they could in making any decisions. “But early in our marriage, shortly after we moved to Las Vegas, I had a vasectomy to eliminate any possibility of such a pregnancy occurring. Problem solved.”

Mark still works, and works hard, he says, but now he works at things he chooses to work at. He has discovered that, as time goes on, his time becomes squeezed again due to more and more projects coming his way. Nevertheless, the difficulties of being self-employed are outweighed by the benefits. He says “ I’m looking forward to ‘retiring’ from some of these obligations in order

to bring more free time into my life and to reduce the stresses and anxieties that invariably accompany those efforts.” He is an avid fan of 60’s music with his own collection, which he distributes online. He would like to play more golf, get together with friends, and enjoy the free time to read and maybe do some writing – a humour column sounds good at this point. As one might expect, Mark writes in diverse styles, for different purposes, having begun early on with a short story for his high school publication, later writing creative science fiction, articles for computer magazines, users manuals for casino software, gags for a well-known comic strip, and the Christmas newsletter he and his wife send out annually.

Looking back on his life, Mark has no “really strong regrets,” adding, “Relationships might have been better had I not been so much like my father . . .but all has turned out OK and I doubt I could have made a better choice than I did . . .In retrospect, I might not have chosen a science field to pursue as a career.” He continues:

When we reflect on what we have and where we are in this life and the world, we certainly have little to complain about. A nice house, secure future, good health and a choice of leisure activities and employment opportunities. Most would be happy with much less than we have. It’s more than I ever really expected in my life, so I am very satisfied with how it’s all turned out.



Mark Craven 2006

When I went out into the world, I knew little about anything. I just knew that if I had a decent job, I could take care of myself just fine. So my goal was to be financially independent and never to be at the mercy of any employer. I could quit or be fired at any time and not suffer any financial setbacks. That philosophy has worked pretty well for me. That, and marrying well. As a kid, I think that my perception was that so long as you were one of the smart ones, the life ahead would be just fine. Little did I know about the inequities, the unfairness of much of it, and the frustrations that lay ahead. But I can’t say that there was any serious misconceptions about what was ahead and nothing that couldn’t be adjusted to.

Life story of Mark Craven written by Sue McPherson following email interview in 2006.

Diversity in Retirement website: <http://www.DiversityinRetirement.net> 2004- .
Alternative Work-Lives: Retirement Possibilities. Sue McPherson writer and editor