

## Have Blueprint, Will Travel: Robert E. Whittaker

Life is a series of transitions—from infancy to childhood and adulthood, from dependency to independency and interdependency. For those contemplating the transition from full-time worker to what is commonly called “retiree”, the experiences and wisdom of those who’ve made the journey can be helpful and even encouraging.

One would be hard pressed to find a man more inspirational, vivacious and enthusiastic about life’s transitions than this issue’s *Wisdom of Ages* featured individual. An energetic and happy man who is just setting sail into his third full-time career, Robert E. Whittaker looks upon all stages in life as opportunities to build upon a plan—a life plan for personal and spiritual fulfillment. The former Master Mariner and U.S. Naval Reserve Officer turned independent motion picture film director and video photographer approaches this stage in life as he has in every other—with a plan.

“My philosophy is this,” said Whittaker. “You can build a house without blueprints—you can amass the bricks and the rocks and the stones and the lumber and everything else. But if you don’t have a blueprint, you’ll have pretty much of a hodgepodge house. I was told this a long time ago when I was quite young, that you should have a blueprint, and know exactly what you want to do in your life—even if it’s chapters in your life.”

If Whittaker’s life were a book, then the preamble was growing up in China—his father an engineer, and his mother a teacher and Associated Press correspondent. Taken prisoner by the Japanese after Pearl Harbor Day in 1941, Whittaker found the experience “very interesting. I learned how to kowtow, be respectful to people, and be so-called diplomatic. Because if I wasn’t,” he said, grinning, “I’d get a bayonet stuck in my rear, as happened to me in the camp.”

Whittaker’s first major life chapter could be called “Going to Sea,” and it began soon after his release from the Japanese in June, 1942, and repatriation to the United States. Having sailed and navi-

gated in China’s Yellow Sea, and intrigued with the adventures to be had, he applied for an appointment to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. Although he was accepted, had already taken his physical and completed all the necessary paperwork, the local draft board in Walla Walla, Washington was determined to see him join the Army instead. So Whittaker hand-penned and double-registered a plea to President Roosevelt himself, who answered by telegram four days later with instructions to immediately report to the Naval recruiting office and be sworn in as

internment camp in North China) and concluding a 17-year career that literally spanned the globe—16 times—and took him to 80 foreign countries, Whittaker made the transition into his second life chapter.

“I knew I wasn’t going to stay at sea all my life. I wanted to have a family. To be away from home for four months on an around-the-world trip and then come back for four or five days was not my life.” While still aboard ship, Whittaker began hands-on study of motion picture photography, making several films for a

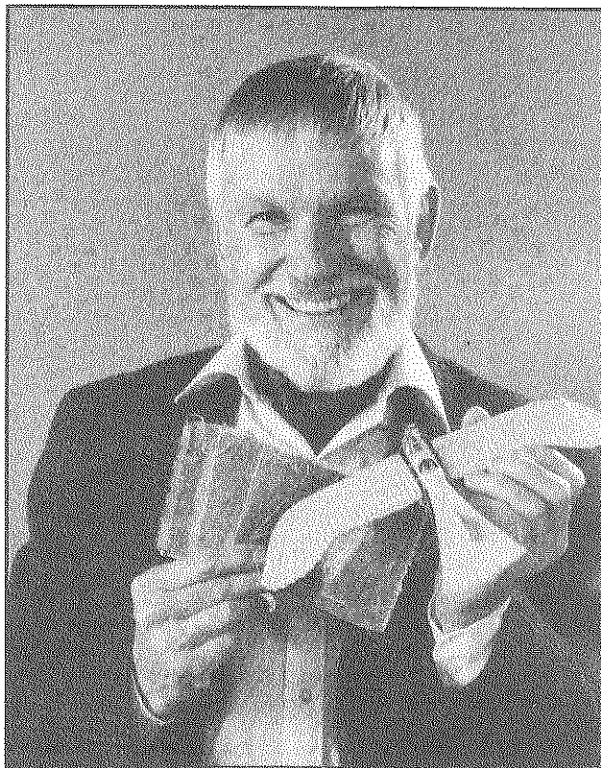
steamship company on his own time. By the time he gave up his \$25,000-a-year job as Captain of a cargo ship in 1955, he was already a professional documentary filmmaker, and easily got work in New York City. He had to take a drastic pay cut—earning only \$125 a week—but because of his blueprint he was not concerned.

“The idea was not to be greedy,” he said. “I knew the wealth was in me. I knew that if I studied and worked hard I would become the very best in motion picture photography, which I did.” As the next 40 years of shooting award-winning industrial and documentary films rolled by, Whittaker again knew this was not to be the final chapter of his life, that he would need yet another occupation. Meanwhile, freelance assignments in the late 1970s had brought him to Kohler Company for several months of each year. With his three children grown and a

new marriage started, Whittaker settled down in Cleveland, about 8 miles north of Sheboygan.

Having 47 industrial documentary

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**An extinct German “dove”?** Since no pictures exist of the Rumpler Taube (Dove) monoplane in flight, author Robert Whittaker built a 7-inch scale replica, that he photographed for his non-fiction book, *Dragon Master*. Shown here with a piece of wing fabric from German aviator Gunther Plüschow’s 1914 Taube, Whittaker spent 184 hours (23 eight-hour days) building the model, and 3 years researching and writing the book—the start of his third career.

a cadet-midshipman—just 24 hours before he was to be drafted into the Army.

After living down all the publicity surrounding the presidential appointment while at the Academy, (many articles were written about him and his parents, who were still held in a Japanese civilian



# Entrepreneurs: Don't Neglect the Next Generation

by Joan Szabo

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Too frequently, small-business owners avoid the difficult task of estate and succession planning. Many entrepreneurs are reluctant to give up control of a company, or are unwilling to face the unpleasant task of confronting their own mortality. As a result, estate and succession planning is often postponed, causing hardship for the business and family members when the owner dies or becomes incapacitated.

"A typical problem with closely held business owners is that they want to hang on as long as possible," says Vincent D. Vaccaro, a tax partner in the New York office of the accounting firm of Coopers & Lybrand. Also, many entrepreneurs think all they have to do is draw up a will.

A carefully drafted estate plan is designed to carry out the wishes of a business owner and supply his or her heirs with enough liquidity to pay federal estate taxes upon the death of the entrepreneur or the surviving spouse. According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, statistics suggest that failure to plan could have severe repercussions for an increasing number of businesses. Almost half of family firms are expected to face the need to transfer ownership sometime this decade. Historically, 70% of family-owned small businesses do not survive the transition to a second generation. A major

reason, according to estate-planning experts, is a failure to plan for a company's succession.

Estate taxes are especially burdensome on family-business owners because the full value of the company can be included in the estate upon the death of the owner and the spouse. "If planning isn't done and there is a large taxable estate, the family business or other assets may have to be sold to pay the federal government," Vaccaro says.

An estate is made up of wealth and property, including businesses accumulated over a lifetime. Estates valued over \$600,000 are subject to a graduated tax of 37% to 55% on the amount exceeding \$600,000. The 55% rate applied to the portion of an estate's value above \$3 million. In states with separate estate taxes, the combined marginal rate is 58% for \$3 million and can

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## Profile of Wisdom: Robert E. Whittaker

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scripts completed and a wealth of experience to draw upon, Whittaker was ready to make the transition into his third career, writing, while gradually phasing out of the video/film business. In 1984 he published his first book, *Strawberry Wisdom*, under the pseudonym "Lao Wei." A contemplative collection of short philosophical truths and ideas from many cultures and from himself, he says the book is simply a calling card for him in his new role as a writer.

Whittaker then spent several years working on a novel set in China and spanning the era from World War I to the 1980s. Through his research he came across the story of a German aviator stationed in North China in 1914 who flew a Rumpler Taube, a primitive, bird-like monoplane. After an aviation magazine offered to pay him very little to write an article about the man and the aircraft, Whittaker decided to write a book first.

Whittaker's second book, *Dragon Master: The Kaiser's One-Man Air Force in Tsingtau, China, 1914*, was published in April, 1994, under his own imprint, Compass Books, in softcover and hardcover. The nonfiction historical account has drawn many favorable reviews from dignitaries and experts in the field, and is based on more than 3,000 newspaper clippings, letters, and other historical documents from the archives of five nations. Containing 64 archival photographs and illustrations, the book documents 11 military firsts—the first time published all together. The book also signals Whittaker's transition to a full-time writer—although he still takes occasional film jobs (a Kohler purchase order arrived in his mailbox the morning of the interview for this article.) With great enthusiasm, he has resumed his travels—this time to promote his book. And to whet people's appetite for books yet to come.

Whittaker says there are five more books he knows he will complete. There's the novel—with about 450 pages written, it's half completed. It may become a motion picture script as well. Another non-fiction title is scheduled for publication in time for Christmas—a book on Biorhythms. And, true to form in planning his life, Whittaker knows his final work will be his autobiography or an authorized biography. "It's the last thing I'll do and it will definitely be a best-seller," he stated confidently.

**"Forget about the past. The past is nice. If you want to think about it, write about it, and get paid for it. Basically, all that counts is today and the future."**  
—Robert Whittaker

As you can imagine, the word "retirement" is not a part of Whittaker's active vocabulary, nor does he plan to use it to describe himself. "Retirement to me is just stopping what you do, staying home and watching television, or puttering around the garden, and so on. It means not having a meaningful life."

As the noted psychologist, Victor Frankl, another concentration-camp survivor, realized, people create meaning in their lives—and those who do, find the will to live and be happy. Those who fail to create meaning in their lives—whether under brutal conditions or after "retirement"—perish quickly.

"Happiness is really the thing you want to have," Whittaker said, referring to the section in *Strawberry Wisdom* that asks readers to choose one of several options: health, wealth, happiness, or knowledge. Each is important, but without happiness, the others are not fulfilling. With happiness as a base, then the other options can be attained as well.

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## Crossword Puzzle Tips

In crossword puzzles as in life, the key to success is devising a strategy, having a plan, and attacking them with discipline. David Feldman, author of *How to Win at Just About Everything*, published by Morrow Quill, has these tips for doing a crossword puzzle.



- Start at the fill-in-the-blank clues.

These are usually the easiest.

- Next, try to fill in an across answer in the top row or a down answer on the left side. You can then proceed to answers that start with a known letter...and they are always easier to solve than answers where the known letter is in the middle.

- In a thematic puzzle, the longest blanks on the grid always relate to the theme.

- When the clue is expressed in the plural, the answer is probably plural. Most clues that are expressed in the past tense

have answers ending in —ed. Most clues that are expressed in the superlative have answers ending in —est.

- Remember that e and s are the most popular word-ending letters. Also, puzzles use a disproportionate number of common letters and very few rare letters, such as q, z, x, j, etc.

- When you are missing one or two letters in a word, scan the alphabet. Plug in all possible letters or combinations...one is bound to work.

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**2 onions (sliced)**  
**Potatoes (chunks)**  
**1 T brown sugar**  
**3 T tapioca**  
**1 C. V-8 Juice**

Mix together the raw meat and vegetables in a casserole dish. Mix sugar and tapioca in juice. Pour juice over meat and veggies. Cover very tightly with foil and bake at 250° for 4 hours. No peeking.

-Pat O'Hearn

Whittaker defines happiness as: "Being self-contained so that you can be a lone wolf. Knowing who you are. Studying constantly. Associating with nice people. You can think for yourself. You can smile and be amazed at little things, like a robin pulling a worm out of a garden—even when you are 90 years old, in the same way that you used to do when you were 5 years old. That to me is happiness."

Being of service to others and giving is also necessary to attaining happiness. "Teaching and constantly passing the baton on to other people (is important), as I have done with so many in the film business. Maybe in the future I'll be passing the writing on to other people as well."

For those facing "retirement" without a clear blueprint, Whittaker advises them to look within themselves for happiness, and not fall for the trap of looking outside. "I've seen little shacks up in the hills and mountains of Bali, where the people have to scramble around just to get cardboard boxes to make their shacks with. They don't have fantastic homes—but there, surrounded by papayas and mangoes in the backyard and the way they live—they are happy. It's all relative. They don't look at me as 'Mr. Rich American' and feel they lack something.

"It's like me looking at somebody like Donald Trump, who has millions and billions of dollars. I'm not envious of him and how he lives. I'm happy with myself and what I do here. I don't feel he owes me anything. I've got my own, and I live very happily, with very little. I don't have to have a lot to be happy."

Find something really meaningful in life—especially something involved with giving or serving others—get a plan, and then do it. "Definitely keep busy. Don't just be vegetating, sitting and feeling sorry for yourself, or just thinking about the past. Forget about the

past. The past is nice. If you want to think about it, write about it, and get paid for it. Basically, all that counts is today and the future."

Some suggestions: "If you liked painting when you were young, go ahead and paint, now, even if you want to take courses and classes to do it. Go to the YMCA and study things. Make models, like you did when you were young—give them away, or keep them for yourself. If you want to write, write your memoirs. Do a genealogy of your ancestors. There is computer software available now that helps collect this information, and before your kids or grandkids die, you'll have it for them. And get it published. Everybody's got an interesting story."

The final chapter is just beginning for Robert Whittaker. Looking back as he relaxes in the living room of his cozy Cleveland ranch home filled to the brim with books, plants, paintings, sculpture, and objects gathered from a lifetime of world travels, there is little he would change in the creation of his life plan. He harbors hopes that some day he'll have a grandchild or two, although he thinks he probably will not—his three children, two daughters and a son, are in their 30s and very career oriented. But overall, he is quite please with his lifetime's handiwork.

"I kept adding on rooms, modifying the blueprint as I went along. What I have now is a mansion—not just a house or a shack. I did each of the three facets that I wanted to do, and it worked," he said, referring to his three careers: at sea, behind a camera, and now in front of a word processor. "But the first thing is, you've got to have it in your mind—you have to have the blueprint."

If you know a wise person in the prime of life whom you would like us to interview for our "Wisdom of Ages" column, please contact the editor, Laurel Kashinn, at 377-1669.

