

# My Change in Vocation, Career and Life

by Tom Peters

Born in Lincoln Park, Michigan the oldest of 10 children to a multi-talented steelworker father and hardworking stay-at-home mother (later to become a manager for H & R Block).

Upon graduating from Lincoln Park High School I was hired at Great Lakes Steel where my father worked. Tom worked as a laborer in the summer of 1967 and became an overhead crane operator in the fall. At the end of 1968 I was drafted into the Army and served as a combat infantryman in Vietnam earning two bronze stars and an army accommodation medal before being honorably discharged in the fall of 1970. I returned to the steel mill along the Detroit River to continue working as an overhead crane operator and shop steward for my unit as a member of the United Steelworkers of America.

I attended Wayne State University's Labor School and graduated in 1978 and then enrolled in a Wayne State University Baccalaureate program the following year and graduated in 1989, attending nights and weekends while working and raising three children with my wife, Patricia. The Veteran's G.I. bill paid for my undergrad degree and when I found out the steel mill had an education funded my Master of Science of Administration degree from Central Michigan University's satellite campus in Troy, Mi.

To supplement my steelworker pay from occasional lay-offs I had a photography business (Agave Images) and electrical contracting business (Alva Electric). After a failed attempt to be elected president of Local 1299 of the steelworker's union and my unfortunate divorce from Patricia in the mid-1980s, I re-married a bit too hastily and found myself divorced for a second time in 1992.

In 1997, my father passed away the same year I was eligible for an early retirement from the steel mill after 30 years of service as a crane operator, electrician and instructor/ trainer. After consulting with my mother about my lifelong desire to move west, I retired from National Steel and moved to Phoenix, taking a job as a graphic designer.

After only one year, I landed another graphic designer job in Van Nuys, CA, a destination I dreamed about since a teen listening to the Beach Boys.

My teaching career started in 1999 the same year I met my future wife JoAn and started my post graduate work at California Pacific University. The first teaching position was at the Art Institute of Los Angeles, teaching graphic design and typography followed by a position at UCLA Extension program. I always felt drawn to students with disabilities that started while he was an instructor at the steel mill and continued through his teaching career.

While teaching at Los Angeles ORT Technical Institute I transitioned into an administrative position as Technical Program Director and later as Director of Distance Ed programs at Northwest College in West Covina. In both of these positions I helped accommodate students with disabilities.

In 2004, I started teaching part time at the High Tech Training Center at Santa Monica College and married JoAn Joseph-Peters. The next year I received a Doctorate of Business Administration and the year after that Elisabeth Peters was born.

When Ellie was born it was like I was launch into a second life. Many wonderful years in Michigan with my three older children and a busy blue collar environment laced with catch when catch can approach to my educational progress. Fast forward to a west coast life in the enriching diversity of the Los Angeles area, a professional career, fantastic relationships and community, union and church engagement.

I was a tenured full-time professor in the High Tech Training Center, (retired in June 2020), Political Director for the Faculty Association, Vice President of the Santa Monica Democratic Club, Volunteer on the Santa Monacans' for Renters Right's Hotline.

I now play golf three times a week, paddle boards with Ellie, spend quality time with JoAn and I'm easing into mindfulness of near everything I do in this wonderful state we live in.