

Thank You Mr. Lester E. Cingcade

*Que sera sera
Whatever will be will be
The future's not ours to see
Que sera sera*

(Doris Day 1956)

During August 1956, I had to cut short my services as one of three Waterfront Assistants at Boy Scout Camp Maluhia on the island of Maui so that my family and I could make the move from Lahaina to Honolulu. The precipitating reasons were twofold. First, I was to start my freshman year at Mid-Pacific Institute; and secondly, my parents were on a quest to leave their jobs at the pineapple cannery and embark on some form of entrepreneurial endeavor in Honolulu. It was a period of great aspirations for us and a period of significant adjustments due to the rural-to-urban move. At the time Mid-Pacific was a private coeducational boarding high school that was in Mānoa Valley adjacent to the campus of the University of Hawai'i.

During my first year at Mid-Pac, two noticeable adjustment challenges became clear to me. The first arose when I started to notice that most of the teachers and staff people at Mid-Pac had “white faces” or were *haoles* in contrast to *kamaaina* Asians and native Hawaiians (*Kanaka Māoli*). At my previous school (Kamehameha III), I had a white Principal and a good mix of Asian, Caucasian and Kanaka teachers. My favorite third-grade teacher was a woman by the name of Emma Sharpe. She was a lady who also taught hula dancing as well as the Territory's (Hawaii was not yet a state) elementary school curriculum. When May 1st came around every year, we usually had a spectacular May Day (“May Day is Lei Day in Hawaii”) program next to the huge Banyan tree across the street from the school in the Post Office square.

The second adjustment challenge was of my own doing. It wasn't obvious to me at the time, but I had a rural boy “chip on my shoulder” entering Mid-Pacific. Being a boy from Lahaina, I was compelled to prove that I was better than any boy from Oahu. This was first manifested in the contest for

class presidency. My classmate Brian Nakashima won the election for the first semester, But I won the election for the second semester. This leadership rivalry continued for the rest of our high school years. I won the Student Body Vice Presidency election during our junior year and Brian won the presidential election during our senior year. Ironically, the rivalry did not manifest itself in other areas. We both were consistently placed on the high grades list (Honor Roll).and in Interscholastic sports, we won our M-Club sweaters by selecting different fields of competition: Brian chose Rowing, and I chose Tennis. I guess you can say that we were “frenemies.”

In order to deal with the “too many white faces” challenge, I started to seek out select Caucasian staff members that seem to have a strong rapport with Asian staff individuals. The first of these special sets consisted of Melvin Wright and Kim On Chong. Wright taught Classical Geometry and Reverend Chong taught a Bible Reading class as well as conducted the regular Sunday sermons at that time. I quickly noticed the very close bond between them and that eventually induced me to try out for the Junior Varsity Tennis team since Wright was the coach. Although I must admit that I never played tennis before. Another special set was Cecile Martin and Mr. Imoto. When I first matriculated at Mid-Pacific, I had a passion for assembling quality HI-FI equipment. I had completed the kit for the receiver and amplifier (HealthKit) but I had not completed the task of adding a wooden base to one of the best turntables in the market at the time, Also, I had to build a wooden box for my speaker system. I went down to the Craft Shop and met an Asian man by the name of Masaichi. I explained to him what I wanted to work on (but not take a semester-long woodworking course) and he eventually talked to Shop “master” Cecile Martin about what I had in mind. Martin was very amenable to the idea. (Even though I was just a freshman.) The work was done as an independent project under Masaichi Imoto’s supervision during my free time or vacation time. This endeavor was so satisfying for me that I decided to sign up for Martin’s semester-long Drafting class during my sophomore year.

My relationship with Dean Lester E. Cingcade did not start as part of this program of what I would call “strategic engagement.” Rather, I had also put into place a “tactical program” to avoid having to talk to Principal Joseph Bakken During my freshman year, Lester E. Cingcade was just another “white-faced teacher” to me, however by the start of my sophomore year;

Principal Bakken had appointed him to replace the retiring Dean of Boys and appointed him to be Assistant to the Principal. Consequently, Dean Lester E. Cingcade had an office in Wilcox Hall, at that time serving as the boy's dorm; and an added one next to Joseph Bakken's office in the main administration building. Ironically, I was placed in a very awkward position of not being able to avoid interacting with Dean Cingcade in the dorm, yet also not wanting to visit him in the administration building where Joseph Bakken had his office.

Well, *que sera, sera*. During my sophomore year, I ended up having to make two visits to the main administration office for talks with Dean Lester E. Cingcade. At the time I was not particularly fond of Cingcade, and I was naive enough to not realize that he was wearing his "administrator's hat" at those times. One of the visits dealt with serving as a Senator in Wilcox during my upcoming junior year. The second dealt with serving as a "Big Brother" to a transferring sophomore student from Roosevelt High School. The meeting involving becoming a junior Senator went quite amicably. My classmate Brian Nakashima also went through a similar process and we both ended up serving as "unconventional junior" Senators. On the other hand, my second meeting with Dean Lester E. Cingcade was "something else." What was on the table for discussion was essentially a solicitation by the Dean for me to serve as an "acculturation helper" for a Honolulu boy who was going to be my classmate. This seemed to be highly untraditional and unappealing to me and I was extremely resistant to the idea. Consequently, our conversation during this session lasted for over an hour before I agreed to do so.

In essence, that session served the purpose of being my first "real lesson" in the Art of Persuasion by a practitioner who proved to be extremely adept at its applications. So good that I started to apply what I had learned from that session during my junior year. As a Senator responsible for monitoring one wing of Wilcox Hall I became really upset by how my freshmen and sophomore dormers found it extremely difficult to adjust to the very long and stringent Study Hall period---three hours with only Senator's permission to leave the study desks. So, I took on my "mentor" Dean Lester E. Cingcade and negotiated a program of two one- and- a- quarter-hour sessions with an intervening half-hour break where dormers were free to do anything they wished, within reason. Of course, my motives

were not purely companionate and rational, I also wanted to play the HI-FI system that I still had. In order to not behave like a “peacock” as a result of that success, I tried another attempt to improve conditions at Wilcox. This time I attempted to negotiate in terms of my select group strategy with Martha Bunge and her chief kitchen worker by the name of Yoshino. I had heard stories from my classmates about how “nice” Bunge was when they did their Scudder Hall duties for their scholarships. However, I was quite skeptical since I only got to observe the Chief Dietician and Matron of Etiquette. However, Yoshino brought us our Free Weekend food and I was friendly with him. So, I asked him if he could bring us “Japanese” boys some musubi (rice balls) instead of the usual sandwiches. He responded that he was willing to do so but that permission had to come from Ms. Bunge. Well, I got to see the “other side” of Martha Bunge, and we were able to have musubi and takemono on Free Weekends. I must say, the ordeals that Lester Cingcade put me through earned me the D. Random Sherretz Award. Unfortunately, he was not able to attend our class graduation and I never got to thank him for it

Effectively, my direct experience with Lester E. Cingcade lasted for only two years, because of the Cold War which eventually led up to the Cuban Crises during the 1960s, Cingcade’s Mid-Pacific career was interrupted by a recall for military duty for two years for which he was on leave. To my knowledge, his entire career started as a teacher in 1955 and ultimately ended with his retirement from his position as the President (and CEO) of the school in 1996. This was a career spanning approximately 40 years. My direct experience covers only one-twentieth, or five percent of his entire Mid-Pacific career. While it may be presumptuous of me to “talk” about his “legacy” I will do so. The reason being that the two sessions that I had with the dean and his subsequent counseling of my Senate activities were extremely pivotal to my own development as an educator. I feel I am now sufficiently competent in my own professional educational career to present a review of Lester E. Cingcade’s “Legacy” as an Educational Leader.

Between the leadership of Joseph Bakken and Lester E. Cincade there was a pattern of overlocking leadership. Joseph Bakken served from 1941 to 1965. Lester Cingcade started as a teacher in 1955 and was rapidly promoted to Dean of Boys and Assistant to the Principal in 1957. He then had to take a two-year leave of absence due to military service but returned

to his duties in 1962. When Joseph Bakken retired in 1965, Lester Cingcade replaced him under the existing governance system which was the old Missionary school system. But in 1966, after earning an MA degree in Education and essentially “cementing” his leadership at Mid-Pacific, he was asked to serve as Chief Court Administrator for the Hawaii judicial system. Cingcade being Cingcade, he could not refuse doing public service but did something unusual---he set up a dual career. He kept his position as a member of the Board of Managers but had the Board hire Val Iwashita to serve as Principal. This incredible man, Lester E. Cingcade, not only did a “brilliant” job of modernizing the old territorial court system, but also started to apply his knowledge gained in that domain to envisioning how the educational domain could also be modernized by looking towards the future and starting a program of planning. When Lester E. Cingcade finally relinquished his Chief Court Administrator’s role and went back to being a full-time educator in 1985, he moved into a completely new governance system. He became President and had Principal Val Iwashita made Vice President of Academic Affairs. In addition, Sue Francis was hired as The Vice President for Institutional Advancement. Thus, was born the Trust structure of governance that still exists today. Lester E. Cingcade was also president of the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) between 1992 – 94.

While I could provide a much more thorough analysis of Cingcade’s strategic moves during his career, let it be sufficed for me to point out that there are always opportunity costs associated with innovative changes. Let the transformation be analogous to a caterpillar becoming a cocoon which will eventually hatch into a beautiful Monarch butterfly. There is a gestation period, (which for Mid-Pacific, was the period between 1965 to 1985) where the operations of the school were essentially run by the “apprentice” rather than the “master.” Of course, there are individuals who would look upon this period to be a “watershed” period for Mid-Pacific. Nevertheless, there has never been any other overlapping transformational change between leadership at Mid-Pacific. When Lester E. Cingcade retired in 1996, the Trustees selected Joe Rice as a replacement. Vice President Val Iwashita then moved on and eventually became Headmaster at Iolani High School. When Joe Rice retired in 2013, he was replaced by Paul Turnbull, who is currently serving as President of what may be considered as the most

advanced educational institution in the Hawaiian Islands entering the 21st century.

I define an “infinity question,” as a question that does not have any apparent answer but may gain some probable answers as time goes on yet is never completely answered with certainty even beyond our mortality. Sometimes it goes under the rubric of “a mystery of life,” or philosophical inquiry, or just plain a “never-ending” story.

Here is a string of infinity questions: During my second semester of my sophomore year at Mid-Pac, why did Dean Lester E. Cingcade pick, choose, or match me with my transferring classmate David Sasaki for the Big Brother/Little Brother Program? Possible answers then were innumerable. My immediate emotive response was that he just wanted to “pick on me” by matching me with a Honolulu boy. A more rational answer was that he wanted to match the “best” of the sophomore boys with the transfer. But then, there was Brian Nakashima as well as me. So why me and not Brian? It seems to me that Brian was the more appropriate choice as he was an Oahu boy. No, Dean Lester E. Cingcade adamantly selected me and gave me my first “real lesson” in the Art of Persuasion. That proved to be an extraordinarily prescient, pivotal, and productive lesson for me in terms of my post-MPI time path in both my personal life and my career in education. Also, the unfolding data points have shown that David and I have had a very amicable relationship over our lifetimes. I’m sorry to say that my friend David passed away on December 27, 2021.

Was Lester E. Cingcade more than just an educator? Did he also know the future? Oops, here I go again, compounding an infinity question with other infinity questions. It’s a “never-ending” story. Let’s just say that Lester E. Cingcade is an important part of Mid-Pacific Institute’s Heritage, and I am also proud to be a part of that heritage too.

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