

Reflections of Jack R. Hopper

As I sit down to try to put my thoughts together about my memories of my years at LSU and the intervening years since, it brings back lots of fond memories of LSU, Baton Rouge and graduate school "war stories," and the LSU graduates I've met and worked with since the year 1969.

I was probably (no probably about it) older than most of the students and had made numerous interesting "stops" before I arrived at LSU in the fall of 1967. I had six years of industrial experience (Exxon) and B.S. and M.Ch.E. degrees from other universities.

The reason I came to LSU was because of Ralph Pike. I met Ralph when I returned to the Baytown Exxon Research Laboratories in 1964 from receiving my M.Ch.E. degree (I had worked at Exxon from 1959 – 1961 after my B.S. degree). We were both married and I had two children. We became close friends with Ralph and Pat, and after about a year Ralph left Exxon and came to LSU as an Assistant Professor. During the same time period I also worked at Exxon with Jerry Plancharde and Phil Bryant who came to LSU as professors. I jokingly told Ralph when he left Exxon if he ever knew of a "good deal" to return to graduate school to let me know, not ever thinking there was

the slightest chance it was possible. To my overwhelming surprise he called me in 1966 and informed me of a program at LSU in which Exxon would pay an employee full salary to go to school full time. It was under the direction of Dr. Alex Voorhies, former Director of Esso Research Laboratories in Baton Rouge. Phil Bryant was Dr. Voorhies' first Ph.D. student, along with Dick Beecher, when he returned to LSU as a Visiting Professor.

I arrived in Baton Rouge in 1967 and began my association with LSU and Professor Voorhies. The experience in working with Dr. Voorhies in the next two years compare favorably with being in the military and these stories are still etched vividly in my mind today – 40 years later. But I won't bore you with them. I've already bored Gary April, Louis Thibodeaux, Ron Rousseau and many others over the years.

Nearing the time to complete my Ph.D. at LSU I contemplated industry but did not think I wanted to participate in the assignment options which were available, so I came to Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. The choice of an academic career was one which as a young boy I swore I would never choose. My grandfather was a

share cropper moving from farm to farm. My father was one of eleven children. He was the only one to obtain a college degree and was an elementary school principal for forty-three years. It was a good life as I look back – but extra money was something we never knew existed. However, observing the academic career of the people I knew at LSU was probably the thing that had the most influence on my decision to enter academia. Ralph Pike, Phil Bryant, Dick Farmer, Al Wehe, Gary April, Bill Hatcher (Alabama), Paul Murrill, Cecil Smith and Frank Groves all were people I admired and who served as role models for the academic profession as well as two other people with whom I had been a student prior to LSU and were professors: Mike McGuire at Oklahoma and Frazier Russell at Delaware. I had moved about every two years for the past twelve years when I arrived in Beaumont, and in my mind I felt like two years in Beaumont and I'm "out of here." Little did I realize how much I would enjoy Lamar.

The network of contacts I had made in my rambling through three degrees at three different schools made my academic life and my participation in professional activities in AIChE like "old home week." Again Ralph Pike and LSU played a very influential role in getting me involved in AIChE and I continued my contacts made at LSU at those meetings and I still enjoy those same contacts.

I have also had the great satisfaction of seeing two exceptional undergraduate students who I taught at Lamar come to LSU as professors: Danny Reible and Geoff Price. Two other M.S. students at Lamar

came to LSU and received their Ph.D.s from LSU and are currently enjoying successful professional careers: Suresh Vora and Kantilal Trividi.

As I read over the past recipients of the LSU College of Engineering Hall of Distinction I can't help but be overwhelmed that I was considered, much less selected. It is with great pride that I personally knew so many of these outstanding individuals and that I had the opportunity to be taught by some, to be taught with some, and work with some of the recipients. To think that I got to know in my arrival at LSU Jesse Coates; and to know Thibaut Brian through AIChE and Paul Merrill as Department Chair, Chancellor and GSU CEO, Alex Voorhies, Ron Rousseau, Ron Cambre and Ed McLaughlin is a personal pleasure that I will always cherish because of LSU.

In my letter from David Constant informing me of my selection it was suggested that in addition to reflections on my time at LSU was that of advice for young engineering students. As Dean I am regularly giving my advice (opinion) on this topic to entering freshmen engineering students. In my opinion James Covey's long time best seller on the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People is an excellent place to start.

In conclusion I am deeply grateful to LSU's Chemical Engineering Department and K. T. Valsaraj for this honor and to the College of Engineering Committee for my selection. I am truly deeply honored. Thank you so much.