

Perspectives

By Paul Hosford

Scaling the face of tomorrow

How often in life do we find ourselves in trouble of our own making?

On a trip to Minnesota this past weekend we stopped in a little park called the Palisades. It's a beautiful gorge cut deep into the ruddy quartzite bedrock, revealing a geologic wonderland one would never suspect lies just beneath corn and soybean fields.

Tom Dickey had told us about it once, mentioning that two large escarpments known as the "King and Queen" could be climbed without ropes. So I decided to do so.

Just because such towers of rock can be climbed without ropes doesn't mean an inexperienced middle-aged guy with a bum knee should. But the slightly lower of the two didn't prove too challenging. And that gave me confidence to try the other.

Lori kept trying to stop me, reminding me of my age. But I couldn't just walk away -- I had to try.

Getting started was the hardest part.

There was no easy way evident so I had to take time to get to know the rock. But once I'd made it up to the first little ledge there was no turning back -- I scrambled and bit and clawed my way to the top -- and loved every moment of it.

For the first time in a long time I was a boy again, taking on a perfectly pointless adventure. And while it was a sad reminder of how far behind me my childhood lies,

I'll savor the joy it gave me for a long time to come.

The view was great, too...

Hopefully as we get older we don't get ourselves into as much trouble. Past experience teaches us to be cautious, instills in us a healthy respect for unexpected difficulties. We learn that even though something looks appealing there's usually a hidden downside. And we grow to fear that the expected downside outweighs the potential benefits of trying something new and different.

But while this may keep us safer and less sorry, it can also close us off to change. Change can be frightening -- it too carries unseen risks. But when we let those risks -- real or imagined -- stop us from moving forward, from confronting new challenges, we've lost something important. We've lost the optimism and enthusiasm, and most of all, a faith in the future that fuels our youth.

Where once we saw only the potential gains challenges offer, as we grow older, we see only their risks. And then we stop growing. Then it's all downhill...

Next week a group of fifth year students from the UNL College of Architecture will be coming to join our community, to become a part of it for a semester. They will get to know us as I got to know that imposing rock. And by getting to know us they will be better able to identify challenges to our growth and help us find solutions.

They will naturally see things differently than we do. Where we see massive stone ramparts blocking our advance -- the myriad problems rural areas face -- they will see opportunities to excel. And just as an echo of my youth led me to overcome both the imposing Queen and King of the Palisades, the youthful energy and enthusiasm of the UNL students will, in the words of their professor Martin Despang, "lead them to accomplish the impossible."

At this point, we can only imagine the view they'll help us to see -- a view of a sustainable, innovative future where our buildings, like those constructed by the pioneers, express not only who we are but who we can become.

For while we seldom think about it, our architecture -- especially buildings which draw us together -- express in tangible form who we are and what we believe in. Buildings aren't easy to create; we have to be committed to undertake their construction. They are meant to endure, meant for both the present and the future.

Each new construction, like each new child, is an expression of faith in tomorrow.

As we "re-pioneer" our area to reap the bounty of the 21st Century, we know there will be challenges. But instead of fearing these challenges, we need to confront them -- only then can we overcome them. By joining forces with the university, by welcoming their students and professors into our area so they can better understand us and our needs, we can scale the face of tomorrow with -- unlike my solo weekend efforts -- guidance, skill and support.