



ALUMNI OF THE MONTH

FEBRUARY 2024



Glen Sweeney

Hello boys and girls plus all you others. My name is Glen Sweeney and I was a pupil at your school between the years of 1962 and 1967. Yes, those of you good at maths would have worked out that I was released into the world at the age of 15 with no qualifications at all. I am now 71 and retired with a lifetime of learning and achievement behind me.

Let me add here that I was not an academic child and as it turns out this is because I do not have a retentive memory and I do not have the ability to learn by reading. I do however possess the ability to learn by doing, watching and listening. That is to say I am a very hands-on practical person.

This was not something that educators were looking for sadly and like many others not being good at maths and English and not having the ability to pass exams we were pushed aside and labelled failures, destined for some form of menial work. That being said I would ask that you do not use this for a reason or excuse not to apply yourself to school and working hard to gather up qualifications that will later open doors and present opportunities.

My last day at school the headmaster at the time actually told me that he predicted I would be in prison within two years. This is not forgetting that I was only 15 at the time. Contrary to this there was another man Mr. Dominic Fanning who took me aside and became the first person to say that I had hidden abilities and if I worked hard, I could achieve anything. Fortunately, it was the latter that stayed with me and was a seed to achieve later in life.

So, I was out of school and had no idea what I wanted to do. Know that at this time a job or profession was for life. At school we all went through the interviews with the youth employment officers, and I was told I filled the mould for factory work. Really? Not knowing which direction to turn I decided that college was an easy option. I applied to Southend catering college and Southend college as in academic further education for O and A levels. Surprisingly, I was accepted to both, but this is where the label 'failure' looms its head. I had no self-confidence and a belief I would fail regardless, I therefore opted for the easy option of pursuing O levels. Since that time, I have become an accomplished cook (not chef) and even self-published a book on basic cookery. Clearly, I made the wrong choice purely because of self-doubt.

Two years later having achieved no further academic accreditation I was again bounced out onto the street with no further idea about what I wanted to do. Some might say that those two years was a waste of time, but I expanded as a person and developed social skills with others, including girls of course. At the time STM was an all-boys schools and of course fraternising with the enemy was a sin.

I did not know what I wanted to do but I knew what I did not want to do and that was to

PROFILE:

NAME: Glen Sweeney

JOB: Retired
photographer and events
manager

YEAR left STM: 1967

Studied: City and Guilds
in Photography

Southend College of Arts
and Technology



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work in an office or a factory. I wanted adventure. The answer came to me finally, from where I do not know, but I suddenly decided I wanted to be a photographer.

I would say that what happens to you in life and the opportunities that present themselves has to do with five things: timing, luck, self-belief, self-promotion and who you know.

Plus taking full and decisive advantage of those opportunities that are given to you by life itself. It turns out that a local photographer named John Hawkins had that very day gone to the youth employment office looking for an assistant, the same day I turned up and declared I wanted a future in photography. And so, the story begins. I started a long and eventful life in photography which provided me with the adventure I desired but also triggered another aspect of who I am and that was creativity.

Something that slipped past the educators infatuated by academic qualifications. I must add that many of my contemporaries were not so lucky and sadly fell by the wayside despite their natural talents. I came to deplore the total waste of ability and talent so abundant in my generation.

The mould was set and I began working for John, a six foot six eccentric extrovert who rarely wore shoes and rode around on a Honda 50. He was not the greatest photographer in the world but allowed that seed planted by Mr. Fanning to flourish and the outgoing, extrovert I am today began to blossom.

I should add that at the same time I was a member of the army cadets and this was the first area in which I flourished, I was god at it, thus adding to my sense of achievement. I was convinced by my mother not to join the army because of the raging war in Northern Ireland. This is another factor in life, ***always follow your heart never listen to others. It is amazing what your heart and souls knows about you, so never doubt it.***

I worked with John for four years learning the basics and undertaking mostly weddings and local press work. This exposure to people began to give me confidence dealing with people but still I was plagued with the curse of self-doubt and continued to think less of myself than I should. This label of 'failure' continued to haunt me for most of my adult life so my advice to you now is never allow anybody to convince you that you are less than yourself. Believe in yourself, work hard and be a good person. ***As the saying goes, 'be the best you can be'. Others will try and put you down so as to rise above you.*** These people are insecure and weak so don't let this happen.

During my time with John he made me attend Southend College of Arts and technology to take what was then called a City and Guilds course in photography. This is where I met yet another Maverick personality called Peter Frederick who was the then head of photography. Peter and I were kindred spirits and this began a long friendship and also resulted in me becoming a part time lecturer in photography at that same college.

My next adventure was a move to another studio where I continued to expand my knowledge and expertise. Continuing with weddings and local press work but now including studio portraiture, still life, industrial, architectural, aerial and sailing. This was another four years of fresh adventures.

Finally, I landed up working with another photographer name Mike Hughes. Now you will



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find that name in the history books of STM, he was a former head boy at the school and followed in his father's footsteps as a photographer. I continued to work with and for Mike over the next few decades. Mike was a fully-fledged commercial photographer and I learnt much of what I know now through working with him. We shared a lot of fun and adventures and remain friends to this day. During this time I developed my own client base which seems to have been concentrated in the aviation industry. The financial crash in the nineties caused a lot of my clients to fall by the wayside so I began to struggle. Lesson learnt, don't put all of your eggs in one basket.

In the nineties also came the birth of digital photography and subsequently everybody became a photographer and thus knocking the bottom out of photography as a business and a profession. This coincided with me becoming bored with what I was doing, it was no longer a challenge, the adventure had gone. Over the previous decades another aspect of myself had come to light and had evolved slowly but steadily. I realised I was a very effective communicator and organiser of events and activities. For some time, I ran a luncheon club and annually I organised a summer ball attended each year by about two hundred people. I must add that I was the first social secretary of the STM Old Boys Association.

I digress, this sleeping talent led me to start a company called Eventful. It became successful in organising various forms of events, presentations and launches for local companies and survived for five years until my partner and so-called friend, ran off to Spain leaving me with considerable debts, this caused the sad demise of the company. Another lesson learnt, trust nobody.

In 2001 with Eventful folding, I had the good fortune of knowing somebody who worked for a major international company within their events department. So, I joined this team and continued to work there for the next five years gaining global experience in event management.

Major lesson here guys, ***always be ready to adapt, follow your heart and be willing to jump at opportunities that present themselves.***

In 2006 I married and moved to Vienna. That is all another story, not to be told here. In Vienna despite my best efforts I found no opening in event management so after three years and with dwindling savings I took the job of teaching English in the Vienna school system as a Native Speaker Teacher. I then spent the next nine years teaching English to ten year olds which became a very challenging and demanding experience. It was a lifeline however and got me through the next period of my life before my retirement in 2016.

Since I retired I have developed my own collection of photographic fine art and still promote myself on line and assemble an annual exhibition in a gallery here in Vienna. I do have a website but my work is best seen via this link. www.saatchiart.com/glensweeney

I have also self-published books that can be found on: www.blurb.com (search Glen Sweeney) During the lean times I have turned my hand to painting and decorating, labouring, delivery driving, driving American tourists around the UK, cooking and I few things I can't remember. I have written articles for travel and conference magazines. Self-published books on poetry, photography, cooking and baking bread. And I continue to seek out fresh challenges.

So, what are you to take from this somewhat abridged version of my working life:

- Always believe in yourself



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- Never give up on yourself, it's never over until it's over
- Dispel self doubt
- Ultimately it is down to you, never become a victim or blame others
- You are where you are because of you, it's nobody else's fault
- Don't be angry with others or yourself because of the cards you are given, just deal with it
- There is no black, there is no white, just a lot of graduated grey
- Never let anybody convince you that you are less than yourself
- Academic qualifications are not everything, but they help
- It is not a question of success or failure more a question of achievement at your own level
- We can't all be geniuses so find your own level and work hard at that
- Never resent others it only eats at you, and they don't care
- Better to try and fail than fail to try
- Be honest
- Be kind to yourself and others
- If you want friends be a friend
- Never think you are better than others
- If you have beauty and or talent you are not better than others, you are just lucky
- Show empathy, kindness, understanding, tolerance and patience and receive it in return
- Never be greedy, selfish or self obsessed
- There is no single path in life. Adapt!

To finish off I would like to add that I have never had a lot of money by my true wealth is the memory of the things I have done, the places I have been and the people I shared it with. I have travelled to five of the seven continents. I have sailed, climbed, caved, skied, trekked, abseiled, partaken in survival training, camped, became a black belt in kick boxing, etc. etc. I have friends around the world and I remain in touch through FaceBook. After all of that the people I have most respect for are those that give to others. They are the true heroes.

Success is the fulfilment of self. Good luck and be happy.