

TAKING THE “WRONG TURN” TO MILWAUKEE BUT FINDING THE “RIGHT ROAD” FOR MY LIFE

By the end of the summer, I had been admitted to Marquette University with a partial scholarship to study for a master’s degree in Political Science. My Dad was working so it seemed like my family would be okay. I made an arrangement to share an apartment with two other Loras grads and signed the lease. Right after Labor Day, the day before I was to leave, I received a phone call from the University of Iowa, offering me a similar scholarship to study political science.

My dream had always been to go to Iowa. I might even be able to figure out how to use it to go to law school. But, I had made the commitment to my two friends and paid money toward the rent. I can still recall feeling incredibly sad standing in the dining room of our house [where our phone was located. Our number, by the way, was 2-3858] at 38 McEvoy Place and turning down that offer. If only it had come a few weeks earlier. I felt like I was trapped into taking what I thought was the wrong turn onto the wrong road to the wrong place.

But, the next day, I got into my 1955 two-tone green Mercury and drove across the Mississippi River on the steel-mesh north-end bridge from Dubuque into Wisconsin and toward Milwaukee, which was a couple of hours drive. It seemed like the “wrong turn.” I was not really clear about what it would lead to, but I felt that going to get an advanced degree would help me in some way related to government or public service. And, I was moving away from home and would, at last, have that liberating experience that most students feel at the beginning of their undergraduate study.

So I would have a year in Milwaukee and in that 12 months I would finish my course work and write my thesis. And I ended up taking the Foreign Service exam at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in the fall of 1964, which I would not likely have done in Iowa City. So, it turned out that the wrong turn actually led me to the right road—a theme that would recur throughout my life. However, a number of tragic things happened along the way.