

The Studs Terkel Project

Richard Volker, class of 1959: A life celebrating the spirit of EC core values of Learning, Leadership, and Service

Finally, I have received a response from my invitation to EC alums to send their personal stories. I received the following from Richard Volker, class of 1959. He begins: "Obviously you enjoy creating and writing. Most of the stuff in newsletters is about recent grads, and that's the people interested in what's going on at Eureka. You mentioned in your last column that if an alum had something newsworthy in 'the spirit of Eureka' to send it to you, so I'm sending you a narrative about what I have done during my lifetime after leaving Eureka."

Thank you, Richard Volker, for the following story in your own words:

First, how I got to Eureka College: I had been a student at Illinois State Normal University for five semesters. During the summer after my sophomore year, I received in the mail a letter from "Uncle Sam" requesting me to report to my draft board for possibly being drafted into the Army as the Viet Nam war was heating up. I wasn't interested in being a "dough-boy" so I started checking our National Guard units—Army and Air Force. I enlisted in the 169th Tactical Fighter Squadron Air National Guard Unit at Bartonville. I spent a summer and early fall at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, TX in basic training. My interest in the Air Guard was to be a pilot. I passed all the tests but the vision depth perception test, which meant I was rejected from pilot training.

When I returned home in October, most colleges were already in semester sessions; however, Eureka was on the term system. I drove to Eureka and met Clarence Noe, a nice man who encouraged me to come to Eureka, which I did. It took me the equivalent of an extra semester beyond the usual four years, but I stayed at it and graduated in 1959. I think that's the class you were in also. **[Note: Loren Logsdon graduated in 1958, but time sometimes plays tricks on the memory.]** Unfortunately, I wasn't very active on campus. On weekends I usually went home to my dad's farm west of Wenona and helped him with the harvest and in the spring getting the ground ready for planting. So, my participation in activities on campus was nil. But I enjoyed the friendships I made there, especially the TKEs. Who had two members from my hometown of Wenona there: Bob Meredith and Harry Sunken. They let it be known that I was a military person and not going to be at Eureka long enough to pledge their fraternity. Even so, many of the guys would invite me for a dinner at the TKE house.

I completed my studies requirements after the second term of the 1959-59 school year. I interviewed for a job in sales management with the Coca-Cola Company and was hired and started working for them prior to the May graduation of 1959.

I was with Coke for over 40 years, starting out with a territory from Joliet to Champaign and from Bloomington and up to Rockford. The work was going on pretty well until I was called to active duty with the 169th Tactical Fighter Squadron of Bartonville. After serving 10 months and 20 days we were discharged, and Coke assigned me to the north side of Chicago. After two years on that territory, I was given the privilege of working the "Loop." In those years there were three major territories for volume on the fountain side of Coca-Cola—the Bronx in New York, the Loop in Chicago, and Hollywood in California. When you get to that level, your supervisors were confident of you, and you had arrived in "the big time." Later I called on special accounts such as the ball parks (Wrigley Field and Sox Park), drive-in theaters, amusement parks, and race tracks. After 14 years I left Coke. I took a job as Northern Illinois sales manager for FS's seed division, which meant a move from suburb Lombard to Princeton out in the country. Five years later my former manager and friend visited with Loretta and me and asked me to return to working for Coke in the North Central area of Illinois. I accepted the offer and completed more than 40 years with the company.

Through the years, starting with age 19, I was a Certified Illinois High School Association Baseball umpire and certified ISHA basketball official. I worked baseball for 37 years and basketball for 25. I had the honor and

privilege to work three IHSAS State Finals baseball tournaments. Actually, I did some Eureka College baseball and basketball games when Mac McCollum was Eureka College AD.

In addition to my Coke connection and sports officiating, in 1985-86 I was the sports editor for the Bureau County Republican newspaper. The paper's editor knew me and knew I was an official, so he asked me to cover sports for the area. As you know, small town papers don't offer much in salary, and at that time I had a son at Knox College, which at that time was the second highest tuition behind Northwestern University. I also had a daughter at the University of Iowa with out of state tuition, so I had to give up that job; but I did enjoy it, and it gave me the opportunity to use my journalism minor.

Incidentally, after our daughter Celeste graduated from Iowa, her first job was at Eureka College in the Admissions Department. Kurt Krile was also there in admissions.

While at Eureka, I studied a course on insurance offered by a great guy, Professor Alvin Thomas. It was one of my last classes, and after taking the final exam I drove to Springfield, where I took all the tests required for all areas of insurance. I passed them all and came home with an insurance license in Illinois. I maintained that license through all the years with Coke and other companies. When I became 65, I received a manual for CHS titled *Medicare and You*. I started reading through that book and thought "Gee, I think I can help people with their senior citizen health insurance," so I became affiliated with five or six companies, and I have for 12 years been selling Medicare Supplements, Medicare Advantage plans, and Prescriptive Drug plans.

I have created "A History of Coca-Cola," and for three years I have been presenting this program to retirement centers, public libraries, historical societies, park districts, and chambers of commerce. I charge a fee to speak for an hour to an hour and a half, depending on audience participation. Many people have stories to tell about their first experience in drinking a Coke or collecting memorabilia about Coca-Cola. It's fun, and I go to the Chicago suburbs, Rockford, Bloomington, Peoria, Rock Island, Davenport, and even out to Coralville, IA. Loretta enjoys coming along, and even though she's heard the stories several times, she still supports me.

In the mid-1980s, I was on the Eureka College Alumni Board and served as president in 1988-89. I enjoyed it and would serve again if asked. I have "the spirit" and the time to re-associate with the college.

During my life I've always believed that "Volunteerism is the price you pay for living in a community," so I have been a member of the Princeton Optimist International Organization for many years and was the Illinois State Governor for Optimist International for a term. I am very proud of having served as a Commissioner for the Princeton Park District for 12 years and also an Illinois Association of Park Districts Trustee. As a member of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Princeton, I was on the church council for three separate terms and president of the church council in 2018. Having a Coca-Cola background, it was natural for my wife Loretta and me to be Coke memorabilia collectors and as such to be members of the Windy City Coca-Cola Collectors Club, for which I served as president for two years.

Well, I've written you this "thesis" on my career after college.