

Optical Engineering

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It's Never Too Late to Learn

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- It's never too late to fall in love. *Sandy Wilson*
- It's never too late to start over, never too late to be happy. *Jane Fonda*
- It's never too late to be what you might have been. *George Eliot*
- It's never too late to give up our prejudices. *Henry David Thoreau*

One thing for sure, it's never too late to learn or to get an education. It's certainly never too late to pursue a doctorate. I had an experience with this when my roommate and I were going through the engineering doctoral program. His mother was about 55 at the time, and she signed up for a doctoral program in business. I was in a rush to finish, but my roommate joined the Navy and flew jets for a few years in the middle of his program. His mother not only finished her business degree, but also obtained a tenure track-position at Ole Miss and retired as an associate professor of business a number of years later. Over the past 30 years, I have had great fun with my friend that his mom kicked his butt in school. Although, I have to admit, my friend ended up being very successful in both the Navy and as a high-level engineer with many research and development successes.

In the mid to late 1990s, I went to work for Rich Vollmerhausen, a well-known infrared physicist, to investigate the performance of infrared imagers. It was one of the greatest

5 years of my life as I learned from Rich, and we published around 100 papers, a few of them groundbreaking. Rich had done more significant research than any of the PhDs I had ever known. We both learned a great deal and enjoyed the research that included theory, field experimentation, and laboratory measurements. After a long successful career in government, Rich retired and consulted for a few years. One day, he decided he was going to go get a PhD, and in short order, he was accepted at the University of Delaware. In his 60s, he moved to Newark and completed comprehensive examinations, conducted a research dissertation, defended his research, and became Dr. Vollmerhausen. I have always been proud of Rich, but nothing makes me more proud than to see someone like Rich pursue a program with the attitude of "when" they become Dr. Vollmerhausen, not "if," as many of us younger people in a program experienced. I am now proud to call Dr. Vollmerhausen my business partner.

My girlfriend, Juliet, who currently works at the White House in the area of counter proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, has had a career of 25 years in government in both the State Department and the intelligence community. She has a master's degree in international studies from Georgetown and is very accomplished. She just recently decided to enroll in the University of Central Florida's doctoral program for international security studies, and in the fall she will be a full-time student. I can tell she is a little nervous about going back to school, but I can also tell you she is really excited about it. University of Central Florida is very fortunate to be getting someone with her experience and knowledge on the subject, and it should make the program stronger for the other students. Juliet is still young, but she is not the typical age of doctoral students who went through school continuously. It is only a matter of short time that she will be called Dr. Smith, and she will be onto her next adventure.

I strongly encourage anyone who wishes to go back to school to do so. Education not only makes your life better, but also improves the lives of the younger students around you. Having someone around with experience helps the others learn in a more robust way. Rich will tell you it is not easy, but it is rewarding.

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