



Q&A with David Pike: Helping others learn how to learn

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David Pike teaches Earth Science at the Mojave River Campus of the Academy for Academic Excellence/Lewis Center in Apple Valley.

He was born in the mid-1960s at a hospital down the street from Disneyland in Anaheim. Back in those days, Orange County was mostly a collection of strawberry fields and oil wells and suburban lawns and new freeways and parking lots. He went with his family to Huntington Beach, Seal Beach and got tar balls on our feet. They shopped at Sav-On, and Stater Bros. and Zody's and saved their Blue Chip Stamps.

In the early 1970s, his family moved out to the citrus-growing suburban town of Corona: Sunkist had a huge citrus processing plant operating at the edge of town back in those days.

As a kid in Corona, Pike would play in the lemon groves after school. In 1975, his family moved to Apple Valley in order to escape the increasing urban sprawl and air pollution of the Inland Empire. His dad got a job in Victorville managing the H&E Hardware Store, and the family could afford to buy a spacious home on an 1 1/2 acres in the AV Ranchos. Along with his brother and sister, Pike attended elementary, junior high and senior high school in Apple Valley.

After high school, Pike returned to Orange County for a while and attended University of California, Irvine.

“During the early 1980s, the Reagan administration decided to make quite drastic cuts to student aid outlays and other social spending programs, and of course, these cuts directly affected the education plans of many in my generation,” Pike said. “I ended up leaving UCI and returning to Apple Valley.”

Pike was able to find restaurant work in the High Desert; additionally, he spent much of the mid 1980s and early 1990s playing music in several bands. During that time, he continued his education at Victor Valley College and, eventually, was able to move on and complete his degree in geography and urban planning at California State University, San Bernardino. When Pike’s daughter, Jackie, was little, she sometimes attended college classes with him, and then later she began attending kindergarten at the elementary school all by herself, Pike said.

By the late 1990s, he began working as an academic tutor at VVC and eventually began working as a facilitator and teacher at a local charter school. He attended Chapman University and ultimately earned clear teaching credentials in geosciences and social studies.

“I have enjoyed a great time working with High Desert students over the last 15 years teaching a variety of subjects,” he said. “Recently, my wife has earned her teaching credential in biology, and I am excited to see where our teacher-family will go from here.”

Q: What is your passion?

A: I probably have too many passions in this world: sometimes I wonder, where will I find the time? I enjoy learning all the time and I enjoy helping other people learn how to learn better — the expression and excitement of new comprehension is a priceless one in my book.

I love to get outdoors as often as possible. I think if my wife would allow it, I would live in a teepee in the backyard.

I like reading books all the time. I listen to music too much: I enjoy playing the bass guitar and the upright double-bass violin.

I enjoy spending time with my family hiking and biking and swimming and kayaking and camping and traveling and exploring. I am a huge enthusiast of all kinds of creative arts, and I like to encourage my kids in their creative endeavors. I like to grow things in the garden, and I like to cook things in the kitchen. I eat new kinds of food and try out new recipes and new restaurants. I like to make different kinds of pickled vegetables and I sometimes bake fresh bread.

I like to spend time visiting with old friends. I often take way too many photographs of interesting things and then post them on Facebook. Sometimes I Yelp about the places I visit. My Yelp reviews are pretty funny stuff, if you ask me.

Q: Describe a special memory you have of Apple Valley.

A: I grew up in Apple Valley and I was fortunate to attend Ranch Verde Elementary for a few years. I met my good friend, Frank, at that school. I was fortunate to have a great teacher there: Mr. Vincent Ridge. Mr. Ridge was an Apple Valley icon to me and my classmates, his class, was the best. Ridge's class had lots of hands-on activities, lots of science and ecology, lots of good books and good times in that classroom. I had to start a Facebook page in Vince Ridge's honor, I found out there are many Vince Ridge Alumni out there who report the same thing: Vince Ridge was the greatest teacher ever. I learned all about learning from Mr. Ridge. I owe him a lot.

Q: Tell us one thing that most people don't know about you.

A: It remains a mystery.

Q: What is the ultimate issue facing the United States, and what's your take on it?

A: There are many complex and intertwined issues facing the United States right now and it's not easy to boil it all down into one simplistic yet cogent response.

If I had to pick one aspect to highlight here, it would likely revolve around the ideas of fear and fear-mongering.

It seems that so many aspects of our American political and economic and social lives revolve around powerful and irrational fears: people are afraid of losing their jobs, afraid of terrorism, afraid of crime and afraid of random violence, afraid of societal decay and afraid of doomsday. It seems like we are increasingly making far-reaching policy decisions based on collections of these irrational fears.

It appears to me that many people buy into these fear-based distractions; they watch and listen to their favorite media outlets religiously. They share their ideas on social media with their friends and families. They elect representatives who promise to address these fears with legislation and other forceful and immediate actions. Unfortunately, we seem to be giving away more and more of our hard-won constitutional liberties and economic strengths and social opportunities to our fear-based efforts to achieve a greater "security" for ourselves.

We launch at-will drone attacks, we wire tap, we surveil constantly, we detain suspects indefinitely within extra-constitutional territories, we torture, and we pay corporate salaries to mercenary warriors to fight undeclared battles against a multitude of covert enemies. We start wars; we leave behind the debris. Other societies in history have likewise been driven by their fears, driven into economic depressions, driven into warfare, and driven towards totalitarian leaderships and ultimately driven to collapse. Just look into the history of the Roman Empire a bit or study the history of Soviet Russia. Or, just ask the Germans or the Japanese. They'll tell you.

Q: What person, living or from history, would you most like to have dinner with and why? What would you ask them?

A: I would most like to have dinner with my pal Frank because I truly enjoy Frank's company, conversation and humor, and also, Frank's a fantastic cook. At dinner, I'd ask my friend Frank this question: "What person, living or from history, would you most like to have dinner with and why? What would you ask them?" I'd like to hear what Frank's response to that question would be — I bet he'd have a great Frank response like this: "Well Dave, I think I'd like to have dinner with Neanderthal Man and his extended family group. I'm sure he would serve something delicious like braised elk-bone-marrow with ant-and-termite wild-berry sauce. I wonder what sorts of spices Neanderthal Man would use in his ant-and-termite wild-berry sauce reduction. What do you think, Dave? What would you use?"

Q: Where do you get your values from?

A: I grew up in California with my family: my mom grew up in a Catholic home and my dad came from a Protestant family. I went to school like everyone else with all sorts of different people from all over the place. I read books; I like to read lots of books all the time. I read the Bible. I read plenty of philosophy. I read all about theology and different religions and different beliefs. I read most of the Qur'an while in college. I read about the life of Buddha. I enjoy the contemplative life. I like to discuss ideas and values and philosophy and ethics with my friends and acquaintances. Some of the best discussions and insights can be found talking with the person next to you in the shopping line. You find your values where you find them; you weigh them and put them in your shopping bag next to the tomatoes and the onions and olive oil and carry them home.

Q: What's your favorite movie and why?

A: I am a huge fan of all kinds of cinema and movies and animation so, I don't have just one favorite movie. I have opinions and examples of all sorts of great (and not so great) movies I could share with you.

I really enjoy the 1962 film "Lawrence of Arabia" with Peter O'Toole (just like everyone else who ever watches movies). The cinematography in that film is top-notch exemplary, and the soundtrack is truly epic. I must have viewed the film 20 times already, but I can't resist, it always looks and sounds so fantastic. I'm captured and captivated every time it's on. A lot of film people seem to say that "Lawrence of Arabia" is overrated and an example of bloated cinema, but I tend to think it is an apogee of sorts for big-budget Hollywood-style productions, in many ways there hasn't been a finer high-quality film made since.

I am an enormous fan of silent movies: Fritz Lang's films, Charlie Chaplin's stuff, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy's stuff, Buster Keaton's films. Just recently, I've began watching Harry Langdon's short films, they're absolutely brilliant gems. I really enjoy Lon Chaney Sr.'s early films, especially the super-poignant 1924 MGM release, "He Who Gets Slapped." Chaney plays a scientist-inventor who suffers betrayals in his personal and professional life. He decides to give up on science and join the circus as the clown "He" whose act has all the other clowns incessantly slapping "He" for the pitiless enjoyment of the mindless circus crowds. What a great metaphor for life: incessantly slapping us down and then cruelly laughing at us.

I'm also a huge fan of movies that other people seem to hate. One example is the 1990 Tom Hanks/Meg Ryan film, "Joe Versus The Volcano". Most people I know have never heard of this flick, and if they have, they violently detest it. I think it's one of the top ten greatest movies ever. The screenwriting is exceptionally well-done, the story operates on multiple levels simultaneously. The lead character, Joe, is searching for meaning in his meaningless life. Eventually, he's hired to sacrifice himself into a volcano for a tropical island that must appease its violent volcano gods. During his travels to the island, Joe meets three different women (each of which is played by Meg Ryan), and each woman ends up teaching Joe something new about the meaning of life. I won't tell you the rest of the tale, because I hate "spoilers," but I can tell you that Joe does ultimately discover meaningfulness in his life. "Joe Versus The Volcano" truly is a great and sadly-overlooked masterpiece.

Q: What song(s) or music really gets you moving?

A: I listen to lots and lots and lots of music, and the things I listen to are always changing. I'm a huge fan of instrumental surf music: Dick Dale, The Break, The Ventures, The Blue Hawaiians, Slacktone and The Chantays. I listen to plenty of Johann Sebastian Bach as well as Haydn, Beethoven, Telemann, Schubert, Chopin, Vivaldi, Saint-Saens and Buxtehude. I enjoy lots of different kinds of jazz, but especially Miles Davis, Oscar Pettiford, Ray Brown and Sade. I still listen to plenty of punk stuff from the old days such as Agent Orange, The Minutemen, The Pixies, The Ramones, The Meat Puppets, The B-52s and Bad Religion. I'm still a huge fan of some of the early blues folks like T-Bone Walker, Lightning Hopkins and John Lee Hooker. Recently, I've been learning some Selena Gomez and Lady Gaga tunes in order to teach them to my twin daughters on piano and guitar. I have been getting the girls interested in a bit of classic rock like The Doors and The Zombies recently. My newest favorite band on the radio is a group of cats called Suun and they have a great eclectic tune, "2020," that I truly dig right now.

Q: Tell us about your favorite thing about Apple Valley.

A: My favorite things about Apple Valley are the things that no longer really even exist there anymore: the last apple orchard buried beneath Walmart's parking lot; the desert horned toads that are nearly impossible to find and seem all-but extinct; the now-derelict House on The Hill all covered in graffiti and crumbling down. I miss getting a haircut at Vic's Barbershop at the Apple Valley Inn. I sorely miss The Waffle Iron — for decades it was my absolute favorite breakfast stop. My favorite thing about Apple Valley is its past: the Ghost of Apple Valley.

Q: What is the best thing about your job?

A: The best thing about being an Earth Science teacher is being able to help students learn important and interesting knowledge that will be helpful for the decisions they will make during their lifetime on this planet. I enjoy helping students learn how "to think it through" and how to really struggle with their intellectual life. It's fun working daily with high school age people, their energy and optimism is inspiring to me. Being the Earth Science teacher at Lewis Center allows for plenty of class time outdoors exploring the on-campus Mojave Desert biomes.

Q: What is your secret to living a happy, satisfying life?

A: I think the best thing people can do is learn that happiness is an action verb — it requires doing. So many assume happiness is a noun: they act as if it's an achievement, or a destination, or a state of being. It seems too many strive to be happy someday. People need to learn how to

practice happiness and contentment and thankfulness on a moment-to-moment, day-to-day basis. The real secret to happiness lies within the word “appreciation.” I appreciate the gift of this happy life I have the opportunity to live. Also, it really helps if you have a basset hound hanging around your house that you can walk and feed and pet and clean up after. Basset hounds are the true secret to living a happy, satisfying life, for sure.

Q: What’s your favorite guilty pleasure?

A: On the weekends, I get up early and start by grinding the coffee, boiling the water and mixing up a batch of crepes. If we have fresh strawberries or raspberries from the garden they will likely end up inside the crepes. If there is no fresh fruit that day, then maple syrup or boysenberry jam or lemon butter or orange marmalade or Nutella or some sort of canned fruit will have to do. One time, I used fresh asparagus in the crepes. My kids probably think I make the weekend crepes just for them, and although I am gratified to know that they truly seem to enjoy the hand-made crepes, ultimately I must admit that I make the crepes because they go so well with fresh-brewed coffee on a bright and sunny weekend morning. Here’s the secret: I make the crepes for me.

Q: Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

A: In 10 years, I hope to be riding the bike down to the beach and taking the kayak out into the bay to visit with my friends the otters and the orcas and pelicans and harbor seals. In 10 years, it will be good to walk to school with my wife and maybe we can go on a field trip to dig fossils with the students, or maybe visit the tide pools with the kids, or figure out what ferns are growing next to the fungi and lichen and wild berries in the woods down by the river. In 10 years, I hope to finally be somewhat proficient with the bow on the double-bass; maybe I can join the local orchestra and play some Bach or Miles Davis. In 10 years, I look forward to long hikes and even longer bike rides with my grandson, Jake.

Q: Is there anything else you’d like to say, anything you’d like to get off your chest?

A: Namaste.

Q: How can readers get a hold of you?

A: You can always hit me up on Facebook, Yelp or LinkedIn, or you can send an email to reverberated@isp.com. You can find me in person teaching Earth Science at the Mojave River Campus of the AAE/Lewis Center.

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