

A primary source about me seems dangerous. I'm not concerned that friends or family might misunderstand an isolated fact, since they know thousands of facts about me. The ones who concern me are historians. Historians continually rummage through archives and shoeboxes full of old letters. If history is what remains after most of the sources have been lost, what might some academician conclude when few sources about me survive?

In each of his classes that I took, Dr. Matzko asked for a primary source, an index card with my name, major, and plans for the next ten years. Those four cards, wherever they might be now, tell part of my story. When I was a freshman I was a history major and rhetoric minor looking towards law school. As a junior I studied history and Greek to prepare for the pastorate. Two cards from my senior year still had me studying history and Greek but hoping to teach history and write apologetics. The cards didn't record all the facts, however. As a sophomore I was a Bible major, but my Bible professors never required a primary source. The few bare facts that the cards did record certainly didn't explain why I studied to be a lawyer, pastor, historian, apologist. Did I change as I better understood God's will? Or did I have trouble deciding what to be when I grew up? No recorded explanation is extant.

Dr. Matzko wanted a primary source each semester to know the students he taught, but perhaps he also intended to teach me caution. The primary sources I handle are not just microfiche and yellowed paper; they are the incomplete records of people's lives. I had to learn the dangers of primary sources to understand that writing secondary sources is dangerous too.