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At the crossroads

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Most begin following a specific research road because it is where one wants to work; but unexpected opportunity tempts one to uncharted paths, which is scary because of what one would give up. My own research life took several new crossroads despite the anxiety each presents. I was very fortunate that my own development paralleled that of nucleosynthesis, which I carried onto each crossroad. They were:

(1) nuclear astrophysics instead of laboratory nuclear physics; (2) job at Rice University's new Space Physics Department, and my textbook Principles of Stellar Evolution and Nucleosynthesis; (3) return to Caltech to discover Silicon-burning Quasiequilibrium; (4) annual position for five-years in Cambridge U.K. at Fred Hoyle's new 5-yr Institute of Theoretical Astronomy; (5) personal evolution owing to a five-decade love affair with England; (6) Clayton, Colgate and Fishman (ApJ 1969) and gamma-ray-line astronomy; (7) Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory (1977-2005); (8) heresy of supernova stardust (1975-2000); (9) theory of carbon condensation in hot oxygen-rich gas in supernovae (1975-2010); (10) History of science: photo archive; autobiography; Fred Hoyle and B2FH; editing Wikipedia.

Several paths took breathtaking risks resulting successfully in new theory. Each of us face similar possibilities for change; and deciding whether to turn is hard.

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