It’s an old but unforgettable poem by the lovable American poet, Robert Frost, that I first met in our literature class when I was in my elementary grades about an unfamiliar forked road which challenges the traveler to decide which one to take to continue his journey.

Back then, our interpretation of the poem was more literal than metaphorical. We simply took it as having to decide which road to take – the one leading to the left or the one leading to the right. It was my sensitive and engaging literature teacher in senior high school who introduced the idea of an unfamiliar forked road as a symbol of the choices or decisions we face in life, choices or decisions we have to make which in turn will result in the kind of life we eventually will have to live.

This is life made up and lived with one decision made after another based on choices: to take an umbrella even if, very clearly, there is no threat of rain, to match a new blouse with a black or white pair of pants; to join the group on the Sunday picnic or work on a term paper; to quit the current job as soon as a better paying one is found; to use the savings to go on a vacation or leave it in the bank for the rainy days; to marry the girl or convince her to abort the baby.

In our travel through life, we come across many unfamiliar forked roads all the way from childhood to old age. Some forked roads are decided easily enough. But some forked roads present problems too complicated and would require many hours, days or weeks of lonely days and sleepless nights before a decision can be reached. And of course, the effect of whatever decision is made will weigh heavily and maybe last the rest of one’s life.

It is then probably the result of an earlier forked road decision when a man finds himself languishing in jail or a woman enslaved as an overseas contract worker, or a student regretting the course he had enrolled in, or a young woman who later discovers she had chosen the wrong suitor.
This is not to say that these situations cannot be corrected or overturned, except that sometimes it may prove too late because time has run out and the change may not end in the way hoped or wished for.

Definitely, it is not easy to go back and find out if taking the other road would have been better. Reversing the initial decision gives no assurance that the road not taken, if later taken, would prove to be the better way.

Again, this is not to say that there can be no happy endings to some of the unfamiliar forked road decisions made. Admittedly, life is a combination of joys and sorrows, of laughter and tears. And so, not all accused of violating the law end up in jail. There have been those ultimately found innocent and set free; as there are those who eventually learn to love the course they thought they had mistakenly enrolled in; as there are women who eventually learn to love the man who they thought in the beginning was the wrong man: as there are many overseas contract workers who successfully survive their ordeals and come home happy after having seen their children graduate or having built a house they can call their own.

But because the happy end of the road not taken can only be imagined or dreamed of, invariably that road has been more often the cause of regret for those who have not taken it.

Steve Jobs, co-founder of APPLE said: I think the things you most regret in life are the things you didn’t do.