

We are our childrens baggage pack lightly

George Lambert

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WE ARE OUR CHILDRENS BAGGAGE PACK LIGHTLY

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Written by George Lambert.

Will insert later.

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Chapter I.



**"We are the children of children and we live as
we are shown"**

- The Great Waponi Chief

We are our children's baggage—pack lightly.
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I have to start with this: I have just turned 40 and have realized that I like myself. There are things I don't like and things that I didn't accomplish, but I have grown to like myself. At 17 years old, I didn't like myself and did not think that I ever would. At 20, I didn't think I would ever make it to 40! If my life is to have any real success, each of my children will like themselves by age 17, though there will hopefully be a few things they do that I will not like. I believe that my children will grow up with the tools to meet the challenges of the world, to make the changes they need in their lives to be happy with where they are as well as where they are going, and to be able to share that same resilience and joy with their own life partners and children.

I have been told that the first step to recovery is the recognition that you have a problem, and I would like to thank Ken and Donna Patch for bringing that to my attention. If it were not for them, I wouldn't

be where I am today—happily married with three young girls. They were the first to help me understand that "normal" is just a setting on a washing machine and that dysfunction was not a curse but a starting point for defining a brighter future. They also taught my wife and me that parents are responsible for being great role models for their children, and that friends are responsible for sharing the path to breaking the cycle of dysfunction.

Sometimes a single statement can turn into the comprehension of the essence or meaning of something. For me, that statement was heard while watching one of my favorite movies, "Joe vs. The Volcano." As the island chief of the Waponi nation said, "We are the children of children and we live as we are shown." I realized that my life experience was based on what I had been shown, and not only that, but that experience was filtering how I perceived the entire world around me.

He was right. We are all taught by example, and not one of us is born with an instruction manual. We are each taught by those who raise us, in most cases our parents, or often by at least one of them. So I further pondered what he said. These inspired words triggered the explosion of the neurons in my brain. That one thought inspired so many conclusions about who I was, where I had come from, and ultimately where I am going. I now clearly understood my new responsibilities to myself, my wife, my children, my siblings, my friends, my co-workers, and ultimately anyone who will lend an ear. I needed to tell people that "we are the children of children, and we live as we are shown."

I realized that I am the product of all of my experiences. It's more than that. The combination of those experiences in my life has given me my unique perspective on the world. Even more importantly, if my understanding of those events were to change, it might even change the very meaning of the history that I had already experienced.

Before I can continue, you need to know a few things. I can only write this because both of my parents are dead; if I had written about this while they were alive, reading it might have killed them, or at least

ensured that they might never again speak to me. It is because of that simple fact that I have chosen to write this. In my opinion, they should never have been silent.

I have realized that the baggage I have been left with by the culmination of events that shaped my life are the elements that have shaped my opinions, my worldviews, and my entire life experience. I can vividly remember so many things that I have had to identify and deal with: the threats of being disowned, the complete lack of verbal support or commitment, the secrets, the paranoia, the arguments, the fear, the anguish, and the recurring embarrassment and disappointment. With all of that, I still am who I am, and I miss them every day with all of their faults.

But I wish that I could have taught them, as they were becoming parents, what I have discovered being one:

1. I will pack the bags of my children's dysfunction;
2. My children will carry those bags and that dysfunction until they choose to discard them on their own;
3. No matter how well I do, there will be some baggage that my children need to be liberated from;
4. But if I am lucky and do my job well, my children will also have the tools to discard them quickly and carelessly;
5. And finally, my children will have the responsibility to not pass my dysfunction on to their descendants. This is how the cycle is broken.

I spent a lot of time with my father before he died; the last three months of his life were very challenging. He told me that he did not wish to have his life terminated while there was a hope of survival. I stayed with him most days until I, with my family, told the doctors they had done enough. It was a real paradox; he did not want to live in a nursing home, he was unable to take care of himself, and he would likely never make it home. But after a treatment accident at the hospital, and a

widespread infection was ravaging his internal organs, and he was unable to breathe on his own, and appeared to be suffering all of the time, I had to say that it was not his request but his desire that mattered. It had always mattered to him that he could live—live free—on his own terms; and with that, when he could no longer do that, I could no longer support his struggling on life support.

To this day, I have no regret. I truly hope that had the roles been reversed, he would have done the same. By that I mean:

1. make a hard decision;
2. make it with the best limited information possible;
3. and live with the implications of it without regret.

My father lived his entire life with fear, regret, frustration, and secrets. He has taken most of those secrets with him to the grave, but a few he passed on to his children, and he has now passed on some of this baggage.

I see many of those things in myself and my siblings. People who don't know me well find that I am loud and aggressive, passionate and compassionate, loving, respectful, and honest in every situation.

When I am around my siblings, I find that I revert into a jungle self that was required to exist in the house that I was raised in. Everything was a competition. The competitors were fierce and aggressive. If you wanted to get your way, it was incumbent on you to carve out your needs and compete for limited resources. It is not to say that one would starve; in our house, no one would ever starve.

In our house, a stranger or guest would share food and warmth without exception. When it came to anything more than the bare necessities, you would need to and be expected to argue, fight, yell, scream, and defend your position to even be heard.

My father threw me out of the house after a fight - at 2:00 in the morning - telling me that I should go stay at a shelter. It was the last time

that I ever lived under his roof. He told me that when it was my roof; I would be able to make the rules.

Years later, when he came to live at my house for a period of time, I realized that it is much easier to say "my house, my rules," but he was still convinced that he was master of the house.

Until he lost consciousness for the last time, he was convinced that he was in charge. It was in every ones best interest that it be that way! Many people who met him thought of him in one of two ways;

1. they loved him in spite of his idiosyncratic personality

or

1. they could not stand him.

There were not many people in the middle. If you needed something he was kindhearted and generous (when you were in favor.) When you were the enemy - you were either virtually excluded or you were attacked and trampled. Yet with all of that in mind - I recognize that much of the way that I think and interact with the world is derived from wanting to measure up to the expectations and approval of my father.

My family was a model of dysfunction—my parents were married twice, and for the last 12 years of their marriage, they lived in different residences; she had her house, and he had his! My parents loved each other as long as they did not spend too many hours together during a day.

They vacationed together a few times a year. They spoke almost every day on the phone. As long as they were in separate cities and had their own spaces; they got along perfectly (or they hung up the phone).

When they could not get away from each other - something would always set off an escalating problem that would spiral out of control and they would not be able to speak to each other. That would be the end of domestic tranquility.

My father did not make it to my high school graduation or either of my weddings because none of them were important to him.

He did, however, tell me the kind of woman that I needed to marry, and the kind of friends that I should associate with.

He had no idea about the struggles that I had while in junior high or high school, since he did not pay any attention or care. For reasons that escape all explanation, I made it through, while my brothers did not. Truth be told, I had no desire to take a single college class; and did not value the experience of going to college in the slightest. I only went because I was told that I had to. It was the only time after sixth grade that they expressed any interest in my education.

However if I had run into a struggle with my civil rights; or was having some protected privilege violated by the community or the school system - he was all about righting the public wrong.

On the behalf of myself and my siblings, he sued or threatened to start lawsuits against the school systems that we attended nearly a dozen times while I was growing up. (Needless to say, I got my share of special attention from staff and students alike.)

I can assure you there is nothing quite like having a notorious troublemaker for a father.

Yet for all of this - it was still his opinion that I considered most. He cut the yardstick by which I would measure my spouse; my children; my job; my friends; and my relationships.

I have realized that I can no more ask others to use my yardstick to measure their lives than I can accurately measure my life with theirs. They do not necessarily value what I value, and I do not value the world as they do either.

This continued until I realized - that it was up to me to re-cut that yardstick. It was up to me to define how I should measure personal satisfaction. It was up to me to define satisfactory relationships. It was up to me to quantify job success. It was up to me to define the parameters that make up the measure of my life.

It was when I realized that if I were to use his measurements that I would get his results - and they would not take me to where I wanted to be.

It all finally made sense to me: "We are the children of children and we live as we are shown," but I didn't want most of what I had been shown.

I wanted something so much richer. I wanted my children to know that they are unique and valuable. I wanted my wife to want to share every day with me in the same house and feel like her voice was the most important influence in my head, other than my own.

I wanted to inspire those around me and participate in protecting those near me that could not protect themselves. I wanted those that shared a mile of road in my life to feel richer for the experience.

Since the death of my father, I have taken a completely liberating worldview, and I strive to achieve the vision in my head of "something so much richer."

To start down that path, I started with a simple philosophy inspired by Dr. Seuss characters Thing-1 and Thing-2 from the Cat in the Hat: "It is always one thing or another, but things are what they are..."

"It is always one thing or another,
but things are what they are..."

The reality of the universe is that we are the product of both our environment and experiences.

I am not free from either my genetics or my environment. I will need to live with the limits imposed by both. But I have enormous influence on how they will impact my decisions in the future.

Through careful consideration I hope that I will have the tools that will enable me to empower my children and keep them from having the same challenges to overcome.

I hope that through the process of describing these truths and lessons; that I will be better prepared to raise well adjusted children.

When I am successful, my children will know that their self-image is very important. They will measure themselves not by the values and definitions of others, but by the way that they value their life experience.

My children will compete against their own goals, with their own definition of success as the yardstick, and they will always measure their self-worth against that yardstick, and their own values and abilities—not those artificially imposed by a society.



Chapter II.



"the deep end of the pool is only the beginning..."

George Lambert Jr.

— Discussions about being thrown into the deep end of the pool often describe a scenario where one has been put into a situation without sufficient instruction or preparation. For me, that expression holds a very different memory. In my case, that swimming pool was owned by my aunt, who lived in a beautiful house in Pelham, New Hampshire.

When I was 10 years old, on a hot and sunny summer day, my father—wearing a blue bathing suit—decided I should learn to swim in the deep end. With words of encouragement, he threw me into the pool and told me to swim; he was sure I could do it.

I remember that day with incredible clarity because I was completely unprepared for being thrown into the water. Shockingly, while I knew how to swim as long as I could touch the bottom, once there was no bottom to touch, my ability to swim instantly disappeared. After multiple times of being thrown into the pool, consuming a large amount of chlorinated water, and feeling at risk of drowning every single time, it was quite a while before I wanted to be near my father around a pool again.

But over my life, the deep end of the pool and swimming have become places I like to be. Now, I enjoy many water events like sailing, water-skiing, snorkeling, para-sailing, deep-sea fishing, and cliff-diving, but only after I learned I could gain control over my environment by

eliminating my fear. After that process of "swimming lessons" in the deep end, overcoming the fear of swimming had its own unique challenges.

My next set of swimming lessons came during my first year at Boy Scout summer camp. Our troop had an annual tradition: a canoe trip on Wednesday night, mid-week.

The problem was that to go on that canoe trip, one had to pass a swimming test. In fact, most of the "fun classes" and events in the aquatic department were restricted to "advanced swimmers."

On the first day of camp, each attendee needed to take a swimming test from the dock on the lake. The test was simply to dive feet-first into water over your head and then swim four 25-meter laps. I remember being signed up for that mid-week canoe trip with great enthusiasm, as well as the first of the boating classes, the famous "Rowing Class" that would start second period the next morning. The only thing standing in my way was passing this simple swimming test.

I jumped into the water feet-first. I then realized the water was over my head. With flashbacks to the swimming pool incident, I panicked. I knew I was about to drown. I thrashed aimlessly in the water until I was rescued, embarrassed, and pulled into a waiting rowboat.

That water rescue ended my aspirations for the canoe trip. It also excluded me from the rowing class I had eagerly anticipated, and it left me as the laughingstock of my entire troop. My rowing class was replaced by a beginning swimming class that left me limited to water shallower than my hips. If asked to swim the required distance, I never had a problem, but every time I tried to jump in over my head, I panicked and needed assistance.

I can assure you that at our summer camp, the week revolved around a large number of water events. Watching our troop's water polo game from the dock in a life jacket was a huge embarrassment. I also missed the annual canoe trip, left in the custodial care of the camp's provisional scout troop for campers without their own troops or patrols.

I finally passed the intermediate swimming test on the last day of my first week at summer camp. I only passed because one of my swimming instructors agreed to swim beside me.

Leaving my first year of scout camp without my rowing merit badge was a large disappointment, as it was considered a "rite of passage" in our troop (a fact that my scout leader did not let slip at our awards night some months later—and a note to my former scout master, Mike: "To this day, I still remember that!" Wow, that was so much like therapy that I am leaving it in).

All of that detail probably leaves one wondering why an event at age 10 and the subsequent events a year later are so relevant. They probably would not be, if it were not for the rest of the story.

I had worked selling chocolate bars all year to earn the money for that trip. I was 11 years old and had sold more boxes of chocolate bars than anyone else in our troop's history. I had worked out a system that locked me into going to summer camp for both that year and the next. Affording camp was not on the family to-do list in 1981, but it taught me that finding a way and developing plans to get what I wanted was the only way to get through life.

I had worked very hard selling those candy bars to have the opportunity to get that rowing merit badge. While in junior high, I avoided detention on too many occasions for bringing candy to class (a real no-no). All that risk, all year long, to earn the money to go to camp, to get the prestigious rowing merit badge—and I totally blew it. I left without getting what I wanted.

I had to sell a lot of candy bars. Camp cost about \$120.00 per week. There were 48 candy bars per case, and I earned \$6.00 per case. I went through a lot of effort to be embarrassed by not being ready.

While I suspect most of my fellow troop members were happy I was there, my highlight of memory for being there was all of the failure, not the success. I was bound and determined to make up for that.

The following year, I returned to summer camp and again signed up for the second-period rowing class (a prerequisite for the third-period canoeing merit badge). I was told at swim-test time that since I had barely passed the intermediate swim test last year, I should take that test again, as I was probably not prepared for the advanced test.

I assured all interested parties that I wouldn't only successfully complete the advanced swim test, but that this year, I would be completing the Boy Scout summer camp equivalent of a gold medal event: the legendary Mile Swim.

A commitment to the Mile Swim required expert endurance and a commitment to four nights of evening activities for preparation. While many individuals started, very few ever made it to the second night. Within our group, it was unheard of for someone who had never passed an advanced swimming test to sign up for it.

I was assured that spending my limited time at camp on the Mile Swim would be a waste of time, as I was unprepared for the challenge. I was undeterred. I did sign up, and against the advice of troop leadership, I was allowed to go to the first night of the event (they were convinced I wouldn't finish).

While I was the last one to finish on the first night, I listened to others give up and exit, but I persisted. I was determined to at least finish the first night. All I had to do was finish the count of laps. If you did them all, you got invited back to the second night, and since I did them all, I got invited back. I was very excited that I had met the challenge, but I was exhausted. I could barely walk back to our camp, and I overslept in the morning, but I had done it. I even made it through the second night of the test and managed to swim half a mile.

On the afternoon of the third day, my dreams of demonstrating my ability to swim $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile were shattered when I was escorted from camp to a hospital with pains that resembled appendicitis. I spent the night and half of the next day there, where I was diagnosed not with appendicitis, but with dehydration. I returned to camp for dinner the

following evening, missing a full day. Having failed to complete the 3/4-mile swim, I was under the impression that I was no longer a candidate for the Mile Swim award, but I was determined to show up to try anyway.

Being told that such a test was not a necessity since I had just returned from the hospital, and no one would think less of me, I went to the dock anyway and jumped into the water. I assured my scout leaders that I didn't need to complete the mile, but I needed to see how much I could do "for me." I assured them that since everyone else was there, it was perfectly safe. Everyone knew that when I could do no more, I could safely leave the water with minimal risk. Sure enough, I did leave the water—dead last. Yes, I was there for a long time, because I kept going until I had made every single stroke. I completed the entire Mile Swim.

I completed the Mile Swim on my first attempt, the first year that I was qualified to compete. Not because I was a strong swimmer, but because I was a determined competitor, and because I was completely convinced that all those around me had underestimated my drive, determination, and ability. Most of all, because I refused to quit. I was not only struggling to get what I wanted; I was struggling to prevent what I didn't want: a feeling of failure and lack of achievement.

I was not going to be deterred by health issues or anything else. I was going to succeed because I had chosen not to be deterred by my fear, lack of experience, or my previous inability. I had simply given myself no other alternative but to succeed, or try until I could not try anymore. No one was going to be allowed to say that I quit without trying to do my best.

The next time I stood up with my scout troop to receive merit badges, I received my rowing merit badge (admittedly in my second year at camp) as well as a large collection of other merit badges earned both at camp and at home. I managed to complete all of my merit badges from summer camp despite missing a day at the hospital. I also heard my scout master warn my fellow scouts that they should be careful when prejudging my ability, dedication, or determination.

He recognized that while in my first year I could not pass the advanced swimming test and could not participate in many activities, in my second year I had become the youngest scout in our troop to complete one of the most challenging aquatic tests at summer camp: The Mile Swim. (Another note to my former scout master, Mike: "To this day, I still remember this, too! Thanks!" Wow, that was also so much like therapy that I am leaving it in.)

While writing this I found it interesting to observe that the following year I spent two weeks at summer camp.

While at scout camp in my third year; I participated in classes for canoeing, sailing, snorkeling, and water-skiing. In the weekend between my two weeks at camp I also participated as a life-guard and assistant swimming instructor for cub scouts. If I had not overcome the fear that I learned that first day at the pool, I would never have participated in some of the most amazing experiences in my life. If I had not been so determined and motivated to prove to myself what I could do, I might never have learned that I could swim a mile.

For those who are now considering a little aquatic excitement, I would highly recommend bringing the kids snorkeling in Belize with the sharks and stingrays; however, please take your time. Teach them the basics of swimming first. Sharks and stingrays can be friendly.

Remember the moral of the story: please do not traumatize the children and prevent them from having their own adventures.

Challenge your children to pick a course of action and do their very best to achieve that course of action in spite of unanticipated obstacles that may arise. When put into circumstances where they can flourish, expect them to surprise you and exceed your expectations by finding new methods of overcoming their limitations.

Like many things in life, it is essential that you and your children understand that you must gain some level of control over the fundamentals of the world around you. They must have mastered some

of the fundamentals before you can truly enjoy many of the experiences that come from great adventures.

Encourage your children to invest the time to master the prerequisites and fundamentals to really get the most out of life.

PS: While you are in Belize, if the kids have overcome a fear of heights, cliff diving nearly a hundred feet into a deep hole is quite amazing as well.



Chapter III.



"Here lies the body of William Jay / Who died maintaining his right of way / He was right, dead right, as he sped along, / But he's just as dead as if he were wrong." – An obituary reported in the Boston Transcript

I was maybe twelve, sitting at the dinner table on a Tuesday night—meatloaf, mashed potatoes, the usual. My brother had just gotten a detention for talking back to his history teacher about the causes of the Civil War. Dad set down his fork with that particular *clink* that meant we were about to have a lesson.

"What did you tell her?" Dad asked.

"I said states' rights was just code for slavery, and she said I was being disrespectful to Southern heritage."

Dad's jaw tightened. I could see the muscles working under his beard. "And what did she cite as her authority?"

"The textbook."

"The *textbook*." Dad pushed his plate away. "Did you cite the actual secession documents? South Carolina's declaration? Mississippi's? They explicitly state they're seceding to preserve slavery."

My brother nodded. "She said I was disrupting class."

"You were *right*." Dad's palm hit the table—not hard, but firm enough that the silverware jumped. "Being right isn't disruption. It's obligation."

My mother sighed from the kitchen doorway. "George, he still has to serve the detention."

"Of course he does. The system doesn't care if you're right. It cares if you're *compliant*." Dad turned back to my brother, and I felt my stomach tighten the way it always did when he got like this. "But here's what you need to understand: one man in the right constitutes a majority. You might just need a judge to prove it."

I remember staring at my mashed potatoes, pushing them into little fortifications with my fork. In I was maybe twelve, sitting at the dinner table on a Tuesday night—meatloaf, mashed potatoes, the usual. My brother had just gotten a detention for talking back to his history teacher about the causes of the Civil War. Dad set down his fork with that particular *clink* that meant we were about to have a lesson.

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I remember staring at my mashed potatoes, pushing them into little fortifications with my fork. In our house, being right wasn't just important—it was *everything*. It was better to be right than to be smart,

practical, or easy to get along with. Right was right, and wrong was wrong, and the space between didn't exist.

Dad stood up, already heading to his study. "I'll write a letter to the principal. We'll cite the primary sources. If she wants to teach revisionist history, she can do it to someone else's kid."

The meatloaf sat cold on my plate. I'd lost my appetite. This was how it always went: a simple problem became a constitutional crisis, a dinner conversation became a legal brief, and somewhere in the middle, we kids learned that the world was divided into those who were right and those who were wrong—and we'd better damn well know which side we were on.

Determining what was right, however, was subject to interpretation. It is fair to say that the culmination of years of lessons on right and wrong came down to this one thought: "one man in the right constitutes a majority. But he may just need a judge to prove it."

My dad—and therefore our house—was all about "the law," specifically a simplified version of common law. The house rules were based on previous decisions, best practices, averaged punishments, and the availability of a defense based on, "I might have been wrong, but the rules could clearly be interpreted in this way." Concepts like "Double Jeopardy" and "rules of evidence" were the ultimate "get out of jail free" cards. If political affiliation were genetic, I would have been born a pure constitutionalist.

One of the most offensive statements my father ever discussed was a proclamation by a sitting federal judge who, while hearing a case my father was arguing, declared that "the protections guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States are a myth." My father started a campaign to have this judge removed from office, but he couldn't make it happen, as the judge was less than a month from retirement. Until his death, my father complained that because of his inaction, this judge managed to become a congressman.

This was one of the many times when my father took on the system and lost.

Taking on the system was never a problem for my dad, except that towards the end of his life, he became convinced that many elements of the system were out to get him. When my mother became sick from a bacterial blood infection, my father's first reaction was that she had been poisoned—potentially by those in the federal government upset about his research into the Oklahoma City Bombing and Gulf War Syndrome. It might be easy to describe these fears as paranoid delusions, except that he did, in fact, have a factual basis for concern.

My father spent years researching Gulf War Syndrome. He assisted his neighbor and friend, Sergeant Paul Perrone, in researching common symptoms they had upon returning from the Gulf War. He helped others start calling it "Gulf War Syndrome," and Paul was one of the first people to testify about his sickness before Congress. Ultimately, a 454-page report by the Congressionally-mandated Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses concluded that Gulf War illness is real, caused by toxic exposures during the war, and that there were no currently effective treatments.

From the activist behavior of insisting that something was wrong, the end result was that there really was something to this Gulf War Syndrome. According to **Congressman Dennis Kucinich** on December 17, 2009 a 454-page report by the Congressionally-mandated Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses concluded that the extensive scientific evidence now available yields three conclusions: Gulf War illness is real, was caused by toxic exposures during the war, and there are no currently effective treatments.

Paul wrote a book called *Toy Soldier: The Sergeant Paul Perrone Story*. My dad did a lot of work assisting Paul in getting his veterans' benefits and identifying the symptoms of the syndrome. Unfortunately, my father's paranoia was not an isolated incident.

The phone rang at 2:47 in the afternoon—I remember because I was on a conference call and almost didn't answer. When I picked up, there was silence, then breathing, then my father's voice, low and urgent: "I'm at the payphone on Elm Street. I need you to come get me. Don't tell anyone."

"Dad, what's—"

"Don't tell anyone." The line went dead.

When I pulled up to the corner fifteen minutes later, he was standing behind the phone booth, not in front of it, scanning the street like he was waiting for someone to round the corner with a weapon. He'd lost weight—maybe fifteen pounds since I'd seen him two months earlier. His beard was unkempt, his jacket wrinkled, and he was wearing the same Red Sox cap he'd had on at Thanksgiving, now stained with sweat around the brim.

He got in the car without a word, slumped low in the passenger seat, and didn't speak until we were three blocks away.

"They've been following me," he said. "Black sedan. Government plates."

I didn't ask who "they" were. I'd learned by then that asking only made it worse.

For the next four months, my father lived in my office. He slept on the couch, refused to answer the phone when it rang, and wouldn't let me tell my wife or siblings where he was. When clients called, I'd close the door and speak in hushed tones so he wouldn't hear their names. He was convinced the phones were tapped.

He wouldn't use his credit cards—said they were tracking devices. When I offered to take him to the bank, he refused. "They'll know," he said, as if it were obvious. I started bringing him cash for food, which he'd only accept if I promised I'd withdrawn it from an ATM "at least ten miles away."

One afternoon, I came back from lunch to find him standing at the window with the blinds cracked, peering through the slats at the parking lot below.

"What are you looking at?" I asked.

"Gray Chevy. Been there for forty minutes." He pointed with one finger, careful not to disturb the blinds. "See how the driver's just sitting there? He's watching."

I looked. It was a woman eating a sandwich.

"Dad, she's having lunch."

He turned to me with a look I'll never forget—not anger, but pity, like I was the one who didn't understand how the world worked. "That's what they want you to think."

I watched my father—this man who'd taught me about the Constitution, who'd fought for civil rights, who'd stood up to corrupt police—shrink into a shadow of himself. He stopped shaving. Stopped showering regularly. He'd wake at 3 a.m. and pace the office, muttering about surveillance and cover-ups and people who wanted to silence him.

I didn't know what to do. I was watching someone I loved disappear into a reality I couldn't reach.

After four months, he announced he was leaving. "I'll be safer in Maine," he said. "They don't know about the house."

I drove him there myself—six hours north, him silent the entire way, watching the rearview mirror. When I dropped him off, he didn't say goodbye. He just walked into that empty house and closed the door.

He lived there alone for two years until the stroke.

I've spent the years since trying to understand what I witnessed. It wasn't until I sat in his hospital room and learned about the schizophrenia diagnosis that the pieces fell into place. But by then, it was too late to help him. All I could do was make sure I didn't pass that same fear—that same disconnection from reality—to my own children.

Growing up, I learned the behavior of "being right" from my father. I don't believe there are many people more interested in being "right"

than my dad, and he did an exceptional job of passing that behavior along. It was a behavior he came by honestly—his mother had the same tendencies, and I see many of those behaviors in his sisters and their children. He never grasped the idea that two people could have different opinions and both be right and correcting injustices was likely the same time. We differed on everything from the military, and politics to religion and charity. He assisted people in navigating the red tape of my father that I am so varied in my politics and, He didn't believe the same time, tolerant of differences.

His passion for being right and correcting injustices was likely the product of his upbringing and challenges as a young man. He was medically retired from the military, and he was so proud of his participation that he had pictures of the planes he worked on hanging in his hospital room just before he died.

He participated in chat rooms and forums. He assisted people in navigating the red tape of registering for "service connected disability" claims.

We could never agree on ideas like accountability for leadership in Washington. He didn't believe the President was required to uphold the Constitution during wartime; he believed that torture and the disregard for civil liberties might be the price of safety.

During the 2004 presidential election, I gave up being a Republican. I could no longer respect the office of the President, nor could I support a regime that was treating citizens and the Constitution with such disrespect.

The inability of my father and people like him to demand accountability from government leadership led me to a fundamental question about choosing between multiple rights and wrongs: "Is blindly following the orders of a sitting President who is violating the Constitution he was sworn to uphold and defend patriotism or treason?"

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He did not believe that the President of the United States was required to uphold and defend the constitution during time of war. He believed that torture and disregard for civil liberties might actually be the price of safety.

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The inability of my father and people like him to demand accountability from government leadership led me to a fundamental question about choosing between multiple rights and wrongs: "Is blindly following the orders of a sitting President who is violating the Constitution he was sworn to uphold and defend patriotism or treason?"

At the time - I summed up the entire dilemma into one question that deserves much consideration:

"Is blindly following the orders of the sitting President of the United States who is violating the constitution he was sworn to uphold and defend; patriotism or treason?"—George Lambert Jr.

As I sat in my father's hospital room and watched the hanging of Saddam Hussein, I wondered: if the roles were reversed, would it be clear that our President had broken the law and was guilty of crimes against

humanity? It scares me that the slippery slope allows for exceptions to our core values under the guise of patriotism.

I guess what scares me the most is the slippery slope that allows for exceptions to our core values; and makes exceptions permissible under the guise of patriotism.

While my upbringing was dedicated to "the rule of law," my father abandoned it in his final days, displaying a misguided sense of nationalism. He denied the very principles upon which he built my value system.

I find that one of my greatest disappointments in my upbringing is that, at the end of his life, my fathers values were put to the test and he died displaying a misguided sense of nationalism rather than standing on his convictions for the rule and order of law. He denied the same principals upon which he had built my entire value system throughout my most formative years.

Should I take this to mean that my values are only to be honored when it is expedient; or did an overly developed sense of national identity cloud his judgement in his final days? I will have to consider that it is the latter. That I should continue to promote values in my children that honor standing up for your principals, and questioning the direction of our leadership when it is inconsistent with firmly held principals based on the rule of law.

I started this chapter suggesting that determining what is right might be subject to interpretation. Honesty and integrity should not be situational or subjective; they should be absolute from the perspective of the person making the decision. If the individual is comfortable, they made the right decision for them.

Encourage your children to value honesty and integrity. Teach them to make tough decisions based on what they value, rather than what is situational. In the end, the final measure of their decisions will be theirs alone.



Chapter IV.



**"Grace is a lot more than 'rub a dub dub, thanks
for the grub, yea God!'" – Rev. George A.
Lambert**

—**R**ev George A. Lambert
My father's primary message when dealing with others was to have as much "grace" as possible, by which he meant flexibility in understanding and compassion for the situations of others.

My father was strongly opinionated on relationships, but went through his entire marriage with my mother living in a state of caring and continuous conflict. After they separated, they couldn't coexist in the same house. He told me he would give my mother a divorce only when she became engaged to someone she could spend the rest of her life with. Until then, he wouldn't consider it. He did this out of love and concern—if he died first, she would receive his pension for the rest of her life.

They had what I would call a distant relationship. My father and mother could not live under the same roof, and yet they probably loved each other more than many couples who share a bed. If anyone threatened the other, they were a team to contend with. My dad and mom are buried together now, which is how they would have wanted it. They were my first real-life example of an "alternative lifestyle" couple. Their alternative was to not share the same space but to share two separate lives. After many conversations with my dad, it was clear that aside from the first year of marriage, the happiest time between them was

when she came to take care of him after his stroke. They had rekindled their romance, but that ended with her death from a bacterial blood infection. She died within six hours of being sick enough to go to the hospital. He caught that infection while taking him to hospitals for treatment, and I don't believe he ever forgave himself for that.

They talked on the phone nearly every day. When they were not arguing, they were both cared about each other. But were happier living apart most of the time. They were my first real life example of an alternative lifestyle couple.

Their alternative was to not share the same space, but to share two separate but distinct lives. They were bonded by their previous time spent together and 6 children. After many long conversations with my dad, it was clear to me that aside from the first year or two of marriage – the happiest time between them was in the time she came to take care of him after he had a stroke.

For the first time in over 30 years my father and mother had rekindled their romance. That relationship abruptly ended with her dying of a bacterial blood infection. She died within 6 hours of being sick enough to go to the hospital.

It is important to note that she caught that infection while taking him to hospitals for treatment, I do not believe that he ever forgave himself for that.

He always spoke of finding ways to apply "the grace of God." My father was an ordained minister who attended Bible schools that were both conservative and liberal. We spent many summers participating in tent revivals. He didn't impose a specific denomination, as long as you were willing to adopt some flavor of Christianity. He was right that every individual's walk needs to be their own, and that denominations provide opportunities for people to get support in a way that suits them.

We spent many summers in my early years participating in tent revivals in Maine and New Hampshire with traveling ministers from the Bible-Belt. My father also spent a fair amount of time giving fill-in

sermons at local churches that needed assistance. He always considered his calling to be support activities for other ministries.

My father tended to not impose a specific flavor (or denomination if you like) of Christianity; as long as you were willing to adopt some flavor of Christianity. He never told me where I should go to church and I still consider myself Advent Christian. My mother was Baptist; and being Advent Christian is close enough for me. But I am not sure that I can wear the trappings of either very well.

He was right—every individual's walk needs to be their own. That denominations of Christianity provide an opportunity for people who need different things from a support structure to get it in a way that best suits them.

However, we differed when I questioned the manipulative behaviors of organized religion. My father died convinced that every word in the Bible was literally true and not subject to manipulation by man. One of our final conversations was about "The Red Text"—the spoken words of Jesus. I posed a simple question: where could he point out in the Red Text that organized religion was a good idea, and that it didn't lead to corruption and disconnection from the true message of God or Jesus?

My father died convinced that every word in the Bible was true; and was not subject to manipulation by man. One of our final conversations was about "The Red Text".

In the King James Version of the Bible the red text are the spoken words of Jesus. I posed a simple question of where he could point out in the red text that organized religion was a good idea. That it did not lead to possible corruption; and disconnection from the true message of God the father or of Jesus himself.

I am a Christian, but I believe that the true message is intended to be interpreted through the contemplation of the law and the essential message of Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you." For reasons that escape me, my father was not willing to contemplate that control and manipulation of the public has been the operating behavior of organized

religion for nearly two millennia. There was a giant blind spot in his objectivity regarding the conflict between church interpretation and the facts of the natural universe.

For reasons that escape all understanding; my father was not willing to contemplate that control and manipulation of the public was the operating behavior of organized religion for nearly two millennia.

There was a giant blind spot in what we could call objectivity when it comes to conflicts between the interpretation of the church and the facts governing the natural order of the universe. While my father and I never actually discussed why that if the world was only 5,000 years old there are still dinosaur bones underground all over the world. I am sure that based on his interpretation that idea that "every line in the King James Version of the Bible" was to be taken literally as the divine word of god; then there was no possibility that the world was any older than (days in the current known longest calendar) + 7 days.

That all makes perfect sense to me; except for one problem. If the definition of a day is the time that it takes from sunset - to sunset then how exactly did we ever get to 'Day 4: God creates lights in the heavens. Here is the fifth divine command, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens..."

My objection is not with the word of God, but with the fallibility of human translation and limited understanding.

It was not until the 20th century almost 400 years later that the Pope John Paul II agreed to expressed regret for how the Galileo affair was handled, and officially conceded that the Earth was not stationary.

I hope to teach my children that they must remain objective—that changes in understanding can impact accepted science, and that there is a way to find a bridge between faith and science.

While speaking about the life of Jesus, and putting the gospels into context the following conclusion stuck in my head when I read it:

As Wallace Wattles wrote in *Jesus: The Man and His Works*: "The most sinful infidelity is not being unfaithful to some church, but being

unfaithful to the truth; and the vilest treason is not turning against some government, but turning against the weak and helpless."

- Wallace Wattles - Jesus: The Man and His Works



Chapter V.



"The state has almost all of the power; the only one that it lacks is the ability to control the outcome of an election..." – George Lambert Jr.

- George Lambert Jr.

My father carried a writ of habeas corpus in his jacket pocket the way other men carried business cards. He believed the current tax code was unconstitutional—the worst crime perpetrated on Americans since the Boston Tea Party—and that "No State shall make any Thing but gold and silver Coin a Tender in Payment of Debts." The only reason he wasn't a textbook tax protester was that it would cost his IRS-employed family members their jobs. So instead, he filed complaints. He ran for office. He made himself a problem the system couldn't ignore.

In 1976, he filed a complaint against the Manchester, New Hampshire Police Department with the FBI, calling them "abusive, racist thugs prone to acting under color of law." Then he bought a box of business cards, put himself on the ballot for Sheriff of Hillsborough County, and told anyone who would listen that an ordained minister was going to clean up police corruption.

Most people didn't believe him. Then came January 23, 1976.

It was a Friday afternoon, bitter cold, the kind of New Hampshire winter day where your breath freezes in your lungs. My father was walking down Elm Street when he saw them: two Manchester police

officers had a young Hispanic man pressed against a brick wall, shouting questions inches from his face.

My father stopped walking.

The man against the wall was maybe twenty, thin, terrified. One officer had his nightstick out, tapping it against his palm. The other kept barking: "Where were you? Who were you with? You got ID?"

My father stepped closer.

"Move along," one officer said without looking at him.

"I'm staying right here," my father said. "I have a constitutional right to observe."

Now both officers turned. "I said *move along*."

"And I said no."

"You want to identify yourself?"

My father folded his arms. "Fifth Amendment. I don't have to comply."

The first officer's face went red. "You think you're smart?"

"I think you're violating that man's civil rights."

What happened next took maybe ten seconds. The nightstick came up fast—a blur of wood and rage—and cracked across my father's shoulder. He staggered but didn't fall. Then came the pepper spray, a hissing cloud that hit him square in the face. He dropped to his knees, choking, eyes streaming, the world reduced to fire and pain.

They yanked his arms behind his back. Cuffs bit into his wrists. As they hauled him toward the patrol car—the "paddy wagon," as locals called it—my father did the only thing he could think of: he drove his knee up hard into the groin of the officer dragging him.

The officer went down with a howl.

My father was thrown into the back of the car, bleeding from his nose, reeking of pepper spray, handcuffed so tight his fingers went numb.

At the station, they gave him his one phone call.

He stood at the pay phone in the booking area, hands still cuffed in front of him now, an officer watching from six feet away. He dialed the number for the Chief of Police's direct line.

When the voice answered, my father didn't raise his voice. He didn't need to.

"This is George Lambert. I'm currently under arrest at your Manchester station for assault on an officer. I'm also an ordained minister running for Sheriff of Hillsborough County, and I just watched two of your officers violate a citizen's civil rights on Elm Street before they assaulted *me* for refusing to move along."

Silence on the other end.

"Now, you can keep me here," my father continued, "and I will file a federal lawsuit for false arrest, abuse of power, and violation of my constitutional rights. Or you can release me immediately, and I'll make sure the newspapers hear about what happened on Elm Street today—but not what happened to me."

The officer watching him shifted his weight, uneasy.

"Your choice, Chief."

Twenty minutes later, my father walked out of the station. No charges filed. No paperwork. Just a warning to "stay out of trouble."

He went straight to a print shop and ordered five hundred business cards.

During the 1976 primary, my father ran against the incumbent sheriff and took nearly 40% of the vote using nothing more than those business cards and his story. He never became sheriff, but he spent the next decade pursuing and winning lawsuits that leveled the playing field for ordinary citizens. He made the police department accountable. He made them afraid of him.

Thirty years later, two days after his funeral, I put my name on the ballot to become a Selectman. I wanted to learn the process. I wanted to understand what he'd been fighting for.

I served for three years, representing over 8,000 people in my community. My oldest daughter watched me on the local access channel and told my wife, "I want to be a selectman when I grow up so I can protect people."

When she was eight, she stood on the steps of the State House protesting the exclusion of a presidential candidate from the Republican debates. Her picture made the front page of the newspaper—the same page that had featured her grandfather's arrest thirty years before.

We are the children of children, and we live as we are shown.

I hope that when my daughter is my age, she remembers both stories—her grandfather's and mine—and improves the community in which she lives. I hope she understands that standing up for what's right sometimes means getting pepper-sprayed. Sometimes it means risking everything on a single phone call.

Sometimes it means carrying a writ of habeas corpus in your pocket, just in case.

He did want to join the National Chiefs of Police Association and did manage to qualify by becoming a community Civil Defense Director.

Two days after his funeral, I put my name on a ballot to learn the process. For three years, I represented over 8,000 people in my community as a Selectman. Today, my daughter watches me on television and wants to be a selectman so she can protect people. I hope that when she is my age, she remembers my story and improves the community in which she lives.

While we cannot and should not try to control what our children will believe in;

we can influence:

1. how they will stand up for it;
2. what they will do about it; and
3. how they can protect others while who can't protect themselves along the way.

Today I represent people who cannot or do not vigilantly watch the day to day activities that can effect them in their community.

I attempt to protect them from abuses of action or inaction by their empowered officials and employees; and from the curses of ignorance and inactivity.

I hope that I can pass on the same desires to my children. When I was 7 years old; my father was arrested defending the rights of another; today my 6 year old daughter watches me on television, and wants to be a selectman so that she can protect and help people. I hope that when she is my age; she remembers my story so fondly; and does her best to improve the community in which she lives.

My oldest daughter will remember the presidential primary from when she was 8 years old in a different way. She will remember standing up protesting the exclusion of a presidential candidate from the Republican debates; and having that image memorialized on the front page of the same paper that highlighted her grandfather almost 30 years before.



Chapter VI.



"**Y**ou need to do the right thing... and I will tell you what the right thing is when you are old enough and it is too late to do anything about it..." – Something my father should have said

I believe the number one reason for divorce in the United States is marriage. That may sound simplistic, but many second marriages last longer than first ones because the mindset is different. Many first marriages are started for the wrong reasons, which leaves children with poor examples of what loving relationships should be. For reasons that escape me, the modern definition of a "normal" family was heavily influenced by television. *Leave It to Beaver* and *Ozzie and Harriet* were the cornerstones of a delusion that the nuclear family was the yardstick for normalcy, and the failure to measure up was a public failure.

For reasons that escape me; the modern definition of the "Normal" family was heavily influenced by visions presented in a box called a television. *'Leave It to Beaver'* and *'Ozzie and Harriet'* were the cornerstones of the delusion that the 'nuclear family' was the yardstick for normalcy; and the failure to measure up was cause for crisis. Admission that your family was outside this norm was a declaration of public failure.

An objective comparison might indicate that well more than half and in-fact more than nearly all families experienced frustrations' unaddressed by our new national yardstick. While *'Leave It to Beaver'* was never on my preferred viewing list; I knew of it's existence. That it provided guidance about "how things should be."

I watched how things went in High School when a young lady got pregnant; once word got out – she was removed.

The standard procedure in the 80's when I was in high school was that pregnant girls were removed instantly; and almost never let back. This was similar in the time of my grandparents; and great grandparents. But it was much more secretive.

While thinking about it – my mother was born to my unwed grandmother. When my great grandmother was born out of wedlock; she was raised by her grandparents - as sister to her own mother.

And SHHHHHH!

NOBODY BETTER EVER TALK ABOUT IT!

My father was into genealogy and wanted to trace back his family tree as far back as possible. He would go to the state library in Maine; and pour through books finding the next reference to his and my mother's ancestors.

He was very happy with his work and progress; with one simple exception – both sides of the family hated him for it.

My mother was born out of wedlock; with the name of her father blanked out on the birth certificate [a secret few people knew; which was who her father was, until her obituary was published – as no one dare mentioned it out loud.] My mother grew up with her mother's maiden name.

My Grandmother (my father's mother) was in a similar situation; where her mother was sent away while pregnant; and after the baby came – it was introduced as her sister. That side of the family was in such denial that once my father let the cat out of the bag; his mother became so upset that some of his sisters would no longer speak to him.

My grandmother threatened to disown him; and write him out of the will (now that I think about it – I guess that it is where he learned that tactic.)

I consider the situation I got into with my first wife while we were engaged; which meant moving up our wedding date by a couple of

months to accommodate an unexpected pregnancy. We were admonished by both of our families to “Do the Right Thing.” As I sit here and consider it; the definition of “the right thing” might be an interesting consideration.

My first wife’s parents were married (if I recall correctly) because they had an unexpected pregnancy situation. Where did this idea of “the right thing” come from; and was getting married really “the right thing?”

My first wife and I were planning on getting married after I had returned to work full time; as I had been in a significant accident. On the good advice of family and friends we entered into a marriage that lasted less than two years; and left the both of us frustrated with relationships.

We lived together for a number of years; and a piece of paper was not going to change my intended commitment was it? We were too young to get married.

She needed someone who I was not; and spent the last year of our marriage trying to find the right husband elsewhere. Less than a month after we were divorced she married again. She adopted my son and had his name changed to match that of his new father and brother.

This concept of the right thing seems a little strange to me. While I was growing up; nobody really offered good advice on the topic until someone got pregnant; and then – the solution was to “Do the Right Thing.” That is what they told my aunt – who is the same age as I am – when she got pregnant at 16; for her – “the right thing” was different she was told; give the child up for adoption like her big sister had done.

Do you see a repetitive pattern here? This problem is not about pregnancy; that is a symptom of a much larger problem.

We were not talking about functional relationships or even sex in any way that was not reactionary and based on public opinion. My father would not even sign the school permission slip to allow me to attend the regular scheduled sex education classes that were part of the curriculum. I was allowed to take a “non-sex-ed” relationship class. But sex was a

taboo topic; as was anything but the public presentation of a traditional family.

We must encourage our children to be open, honest individuals who make decisions for the right reasons, not because they are obligated by social standards. We need to stop shielding our children from the fact that sexual desire exists. Sexual curiosity is not unnatural, but uneducated, reckless behavior creates genuine risk. We shouldn't shield them; we should give them open dialogue so they understand the impact of their decisions before they are forced into "doing the right thing" because they weren't given better choices.

We need to stop shielding our children from knowing that sexual desire exists. Sexual curiosity is not unnatural, or even bad in and of itself. It is uneducated and reckless behavior around sex education that creates genuine risk. The first conversation between parents and children about sex should not be about what is to be done about an unexpected pregnancy. Denial about the existence of sexual curiosity will never make it go away, it will just make it appear to be off limits for discussion.

While we cannot and should not try to hide sexuality from our children, we can prevent or reduce the risk of bad situations with open dialog, and a clear understanding by our children of what we believe in and what we expect of them in terms of behavior. They should also have a clear understanding of what the impact of their decisions are before they are forced into «doing the right thing.» because nobody gave them better choices. We as both parents and society fail them by hiding information from them that would have helped them make better decisions.

As parents we need to reward and encourage restraint, not just because we say so, but because our children know and understand that it is in their long term best interests to behave that way.

We are not; and probably have never been the "normal" society that we all seem to compare ourselves too.

Maybe we as a society will all gain benefit from identifying to ourselves our own potential dysfunction; which is imposing our world view on others; and accept that until and only if we ourselves decide to change it “we are who we are”.

This idea of imposing the “Do the Right Thing” concept and hiding anything outside of an arbitrary definition of normal “in the closet” has only served us badly for generations.

I watched with great distress the engagement of the «pregnant teenage daughter» of Alaska Governor and Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin. When Bristol Palin become engaged to Levi Johnston during the 2008 presidential campaign I was concerned that there might be external pressures on the relationship for political reasons.

I found it quite refreshing when Levi declared that he needed to «mature» before considering marriage. Maybe there is hope for these young people.

“It’s just us not, me not being mature enough, or something, and having a kid and thinking ... it could be better – better for us to separate for a while,” Johnston said in an exclusive interview with *Good Morning America*.¹

As I’ve mentioned, I didn’t have a traditional nuclear family. My parents couldn’t cohabitate. But it doesn’t end there—it barely starts there.

After the divorce, my father claimed he needed to be closer to his doctors, so we moved from Maine to New Hampshire. Within months, my mother moved into the house. “For the sake of the children,” they said.

Then came the boyfriend.

He’d been my father’s best friend for years—the man who’d played Santa Claus for me when I was four. At first, his visits seemed normal. Then they became regular. Then overnight.

1. <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Politics/story?id=7087811&page=1>

I remember coming downstairs one Saturday morning to find my father asleep on the couch, still wearing yesterday's clothes, a blanket pulled up to his chin. The bedroom door upstairs was closed. I heard my mother's voice, then his—the boyfriend's—laughing softly about something.

My father's eyes were open. He was staring at the ceiling.

"Morning, Dad," I said.

He didn't answer.

This became the pattern. The boyfriend would arrive after dinner. My father would retreat to the couch with a book and a pillow. In the morning, the boyfriend's car would still be in the driveway.

Nobody explained it. Nobody acknowledged it. We just lived around it, like furniture nobody wanted but couldn't throw away.

Then came the night my father knocked on my bedroom door.

It was late—past midnight. I'd been asleep. He stood in the doorway backlit by the hall light, holding our cordless phone.

"Take this," he said, pressing it into my hands. "If things get out of hand, you call the police."

"What? Dad, what's—"

"Stay awake. You need to be a witness."

He turned and walked downstairs before I could ask anything else.

I sat at the top of the stairs in the dark, the phone heavy in my lap, my heart hammering. Below, I heard the front door open. Voices. The boyfriend had arrived.

"We need to talk," my father said. His voice was different—formal, rehearsed.

"George, what's this about?" That was my mother, anxious.

"Sit down. Both of you."

A long silence. Then my father's voice, louder now: "She needs a husband."

"George—" my mother started.

"Which of us is it going to be?"

"What are you talking about?" The boyfriend sounded confused, defensive.

"You heard me. She needs a husband. You're going to marry her, or I will."

"You can't be serious—"

"Which. Of. Us."

My mother's voice broke in, sharp: "George, stop this—"

"You interfered first!" my father shouted. "Thirteen years ago, you interfered with *us*—"

"That's not—" the boyfriend stammered.

"Don't lie to me! Not now!"

The pronouns were all wrong. *Us*. Not "me and her." *Us*. Me and *him*.

I gripped the phone tighter, trying to make sense of what I was hearing.

"You want him," my father said, his voice dropping to something cold and bitter. "You've always wanted him. But he won't commit to you. He never has. So I'm giving you both a choice. Right now."

Silence.

Then my mother, quietly: "George, please—"

"Make an honest woman out of her," my father said to the boyfriend, "or I will. Again."

More silence. Then footsteps. The front door opened and closed.

The boyfriend was gone.

Within three days, my parents were remarried.

I was thirteen years old. I didn't understand what I'd witnessed. I knew only that something fundamental had shifted, that the adults in my life were playing out a drama I wasn't equipped to comprehend.

My father and I didn't speak about that night again until 2001—sixteen years later. Until that conversation, it had never occurred to me that my father might be gay. That my mother had been caught in a triangle that had nothing to do with her. That the man who railed against

"alternative lifestyles" had been living one all along, hidden behind a marriage, a ministry, and a carefully constructed wall of rage.

I was nineteen when I met Sarah and Jennifer at a community organizing meeting. They were smart, funny, passionate about local environmental issues—the kind of people I genuinely liked being around. When they invited me to their house for dinner to discuss a fundraising strategy, I said yes without hesitation. I considered myself open-minded. Progressive, even. My father's paranoia about "alternative lifestyles" was his problem, not mine.

Their house was a modest Cape in a quiet neighborhood, flower boxes under the windows, a rainbow flag hanging discreetly by the side door. I parked on the street and walked up the driveway, rehearsing talking points about the watershed protection initiative. The evening air smelled like cut grass and charcoal grills. Normal. Completely normal.

Sarah answered the door with a warm smile, wiping her hands on a dish towel. "George! Come in, come in. Jennifer's just finishing up the salad."

I stepped inside.

The living room was cozy—bookshelves, a worn couch, framed photos on the mantle. Jennifer called out a greeting from the kitchen. Everything was ordinary. Safe. Welcoming.

And then it hit me.

My stomach clenched, a sudden violent twist that sent bile rising in my throat. My skin went cold and clammy, sweat breaking out across my forehead and the back of my neck. The room tilted slightly, my vision narrowing at the edges. I couldn't breathe properly—each inhale felt shallow, insufficient, like I was drowning in open air.

"You okay?" Sarah asked, her smile fading to concern.

"Yeah, I'm—" My voice came out strangled. "Just... I think I might be coming down with something."

I wasn't. I knew I wasn't. But my body was screaming *danger*, every nerve firing in panic, my heart hammering against my ribs like it was

trying to escape. I felt nauseous, genuinely sick, my hands trembling as I gripped the doorframe for balance.

"Do you need to sit down?" Jennifer appeared from the kitchen, worry creasing her face.

"No, I—I'm sorry, I should go. I don't want to get you sick." The lie tasted bitter, but I couldn't stay. I couldn't breathe. I needed out.

I stumbled back to my car, fumbling with the keys, my hands shaking so badly I dropped them twice. Once inside, I locked the doors and sat there, gasping, waiting for my heart to slow down.

What the hell was wrong with me?

I didn't believe what my father believed. I didn't think their relationship was sinful or wrong or dangerous. Logically, rationally, I knew that. But my body didn't care about logic. My body had learned something else entirely—something wired so deep that conscious thought couldn't override it.

I could still hear my father's voice, years of sermons and warnings and barely-concealed disgust: *"Those people are confused. Lost. It's not natural. It's not right."*

I'd absorbed it all without realizing. The fear wasn't mine—it was his. But it lived in me now, in my nervous system, in the way my stomach turned and my skin crawled when confronted with what I'd been taught to fear.

I drove home in shame, understanding for the first time how deeply dysfunction burrows into us. How the things we inherit aren't just beliefs or values, but physical reactions—panic responses we can't control, even when we desperately want to.



Chapter VIII.



“Find a vision, identify the destination, develop a roadmap, execute your plan and have the time of your life.”

- George Lambert Jr.

I would like to say that I have had an interesting career; certainly a more interesting one than my parents. My mother went through several attempts at a career during the divorced period and then settled into a rhythm working for the federal government; working up the latter at the IRS. My father spent most of his adult life sick; and did not make what I would describe as a role model for structured employment. He did not have a "9-5 job" or any job for that matter; all of my life that I can remember. It is not that he did not want to work; it really was that working in a structured environment would have been near impossible. This is not to say that my father or family had a welfare mentality; where work was not important, productive contribution to society was a valuable part of my learning and growing up experience; cash flow on the other hand was always very tight...

My family always looked for ways to supplement the family income that were within his limits. These included everything from aluminum, copper, brass and gold recovery from the scrap metal pile at the local dump; to odd jobs like mowing lawns for neighbors. I spent a great deal of time working at a local farm picking produce; splitting wood; making apple cider; and being a general farm hand. When I got a little older I wrote software for small businesses and helped people with computer work while I was in High School. When I was a freshman I made a couple of hundred dollars in "software assistance" to some upperclassmen

who needed "coaching" in completing their final projects for profit (lets call it my first real consulting gig).

I never thought of myself as a slouch; and did odd jobs; and really wanted to get a job the summer between my Junior and Senior years of high school. My father was forbidding me from getting a job; he declared that it would probably be the last summer I would have off for a long time. Like so many times before - he was right. I skipped working that summer. It was the last real time I had not working; except for times of illness and recovery.

Once I started working - it was straight into a job; and then another on the weekends. Before long I had managed to acquire three jobs. The job that I liked the most was selling computers for Radio Shack. I enjoyed the computers; because I was good with them and understood them. I enjoyed the process of selling more than I thought that I might. Before long I found myself moving out of the structured 9-5 mentality. I was often asked to assist customers that I met at Radio Shack; in doing a wide range of external tasks like installing VCR's so that you could watch one channel and record another, choosing and setting up computer software, or helping businesses setup databases. What I realized was that I could get paid more for solving specialty problems.

As a commissioned sales person who got paid on performance, and as a regular contractor who was getting paid for specialty expertise; I had discovered a magic recipe. There is a disconnect between working hourly and getting paid for solving problems. I remembered in school being taught in a basic business class that you could buy and sell things. But somewhere in the translation the magic benefits of "keeping the profits" were lost in the translation. I was a good sales person and a reasonable consultant for doing higher tech odd jobs. But my odd jobs were fed from by local access to customers via my position as a retail sales person.

While working for Radio Shack and consulting I managed to attend a semester of College that my parents insisted that I attend. I was good at consulting; and sales – but college was another story. Both of my parents

thought it was a good idea; there was only one problem. I did not fit the mold; and the system appeared inflexible. My classes at vocational school had earned me a number of credits in advanced topics for a 2 year degree with UNH. But did not enable me to escape a large number of prerequisites. While I had acquired 18 credits for things like programming; database design; and operating systems; I needed to take a number of introductory classes like “introduction to keyboarding class”.

After rather aggressive conversations with both a department head and dean my college career came to an abrupt end. I had planned on taking a semester off and finding another educational strategy.

I met her at a nightclub in Portsmouth on a Thursday night—one of those rare evenings when I wasn't working or consulting or trying to prove something to someone. Her name was Lisa, and she had this way of laughing that made the whole room feel lighter. We talked for hours that night, about nothing and everything, and by the time the lights came up at closing, I knew I wanted to see her again. Within weeks, we were inseparable. She became my escape from the pressure of work and family expectations, the one place where I didn't have to be anything other than myself.

April 14th, 1987. A Tuesday morning. I was running late for my shift at Radio Shack, driving my beat-up Chevy Citation down Route 101 with the windows cracked and the radio playing something forgettable. The sun was just clearing the trees, that blinding early-morning light that makes you squint even with the visor down. I was thinking about a consulting job I had lined up for the weekend, mentally calculating what I could charge for setting up a small business network.

Then the dog appeared.

A golden retriever, maybe, or a lab—I never got a clear look. It bolted from the shoulder into my lane, maybe twenty feet ahead. No time to brake. Pure instinct took over: I yanked the wheel hard to the left.

The Citation's tires screamed. The world tilted. And then—impact.

The sound was enormous, a metallic crunch that seemed to come from inside my skull. The steering wheel slammed into my chest. My head whipped forward, then snapped back with a force that felt like being hit with a baseball bat. Everything went white for a second, then red, then a sickening gray.

When my vision cleared, I was staring at the crumpled hood wrapped around a massive oak tree. Steam hissed from the radiator. The windshield had spiderwebbed but hadn't shattered. My hands were still gripping the wheel.

I tried to turn my head to check the dog. I couldn't move.

Not wouldn't. *Couldn't*. My neck was locked in place, a bolt of white-hot pain shooting down my spine when I even attempted the slightest rotation. Panic flooded through me—the kind of primal terror that comes when your body simply refuses to obey. I could move my arms, my legs, but my head was frozen, my vision locked straight ahead at that destroyed hood and the tree bark pressed against the grille.

"Don't move! Sir, don't move!" A voice, somewhere to my left. A woman, maybe a passing motorist. "I called 911. They're coming. Just don't move your head."

I wanted to tell her I couldn't move it if I tried. But speaking hurt, so I stayed silent, breathing shallow breaths, trying not to think about what it meant that I couldn't turn my neck.

The paramedics arrived within minutes, though it felt like hours. They stabilized my head with their hands first, then carefully fitted a cervical collar around my neck—a rigid plastic brace that held me completely immobile. They asked me questions: Could I feel my fingers? Yes. My toes? Yes. Could I squeeze their hands? Yes, yes, yes. Each affirmative answer felt like a small miracle, a confirmation that I wasn't paralyzed.

But I also wasn't okay.

At the hospital, the X-rays told the story: fractured C5 vertebra. The doctor, a middle-aged man with kind eyes and a terrible bedside manner,

explained it to me like he was reading a grocery list. "You're lucky," he said. "A few millimeters in the wrong direction and you'd be quadriplegic. As it is, you'll need to wear the collar for at least three months. No work. No driving. No sudden movements. You'll need someone to take care of you."

I was nineteen years old. I'd been living on my own, supporting myself, making my own decisions. And now I couldn't even turn my head to see who was standing next to my hospital bed.

The choice came down to this: my parents' house or Lisa's parents' house.

My mother visited the hospital the day after the accident, her face tight with worry and something else—vindication, maybe. She'd never approved of Lisa, thought I was too young to be so serious with anyone, thought I should be focusing on school and career. "You'll come home," she said, not quite a question. "We'll take care of you. You need proper rest, proper care."

My father didn't visit at all. He called once, asked if I was going to live, and when I said yes, told me he'd see me when I got out.

Lisa came every day. She brought magazines, read to me, held my hand. Her parents—working-class people from Dover who I'd only met a handful of times—came with her on the third day. Her father, a machinist with calloused hands and a gentle voice, stood at the foot of my bed. "Our door's open," he said. "You need help, we'll help. No questions asked."

When the doctor cleared me for discharge a week later, I had to choose. My parents' house meant familiar territory, but also judgment, pressure, the constant reminder that I'd failed to meet their expectations. Lisa's parents' house meant the unknown, but also acceptance, warmth, a place where I didn't have to prove anything.

I chose Lisa's family.

The decision felt monumental at the time, like I was choosing not just where to recover but what kind of person I wanted to be.

Independent, even when independence meant accepting help from people who barely knew me. Forward-looking, even when I couldn't physically look anywhere but straight ahead.

Physical therapy was brutal. Three times a week, a therapist named Karen would manipulate my neck through tiny ranges of motion, each degree of rotation feeling like broken glass grinding against bone. I'd leave sessions drenched in sweat, nauseous from pain, wondering if I'd ever be able to turn my head normally again.

Four months later, I was back at Radio Shack part-time, still wearing the collar, still moving carefully. The neck would never be quite right—I'd have chronic pain, limited range of motion, a permanent reminder of that split-second decision to swerve. But I was walking. Working. Living.

The accident taught me something my father never could: that vulnerability isn't weakness. That accepting help doesn't diminish you. That sometimes the strongest thing you can do is admit you can't do it alone.

It also taught me that the people who show up when you're broken are the ones who matter. Not the ones who expect you to be strong, but the ones who help you find your strength again.

Living with my girlfriends family was very strange but educational. They were a very blue collar family, who had a completely different world view about earning a living. They could not understand not having a predictable income; and found working on commission to be a "foolish mans game." Not a single one of them had a profession or even what I would call a career. They simply traded hours for dollars; and worked hard most all of her relatives worked between two manufacturing companies. These people understood spending time; and creating value for money. Not only that – they seemed offended at the idea that the investors who owned the property that they rented made money from them. They rented everything; and did nothing to find a way to acquire real wealth or create financial independence. While I was trying to get

back on my feet, I told them that I would find a way to overcome my limitations and circumstances. I can say that while I did marry into that family; I ended up divorced from that family as well.

After the divorce I did not see the day to day changes in the family. But I saw my former father in law working at 7Eleven across from the school that I was teaching at 15 years later. It appears that they never escaped their “hours for dollars” circle. (It is sad to say that the hourly employee mentality of trading hours for dollars and not creating new value in the world is a trap for those who are unwilling to explore the alternatives.)

I was willing to learn from anyone who was willing to teach me; I read books all of the time; and took advice from people who were closer to where I wanted to be. Ignored advice from people who did not understand where I was trying to go. I became obsessed with learning about creating value; selling that value. Improving the teams and communities that I worked in. I became totally committed to my own success; and did not what either of the two families that I had lived with had. My girlfriend (who was to become my first wife) thought it was crazy that I spent all of my off time trying to learn about other computer and business things. She taught me something that I had never considered before; she could not imagine life outside of her current circumstances. I could not imagine long term life inside of mine. It is important to realize that where we are is only our current position in the universe. Is neither our final destination or a trap to keep us from getting to it. Where we are is the place that we need to build a roadmap from; and the place from which we must begin envision our future.

I was lucky enough to have caught the attention of individuals who were farther along my road than I was; and they worked with me to glimpse a possible future that was more attractive than the one I was currently working towards. I left radio shack with 7 other individuals who were computer specialists; to work in one of the first computer and home office stores in a major retail outlet. It was a prototype store

concept that we made so successful that it was replicated nationwide. It was really interesting to participate in inventing and executing a possible future.

While I worked for a large retailer company and made a name for myself; I had caught the startup bug. I left that company to go to work for another startup as a risk taking partner. After a little over two years; I left that business partnership because it did not meet the combination of the financial and emotional requirements to make it interest. In making the decision to leave that startup with a complete loss of my investment; I realized that it was more important to have a combination package of workplace happiness; job satisfaction; and financial reward. It was important to create a situation for life balance where one could feel rewarded for their efforts.

The next company that I went to work for was closer to a work life balance. But did not make the entire package. While I did meet my best friend; my wife; and a large number of people I still call friends; and got a great deal of knowledge about the computer software startup business it did not meet all of my life goals. In the end I had to choose between my job and my future wife; I chose well, and sided with the future wife over the job. That company is long since dead; and the best friend still is my best friend; and the wife still putting up with me 15 years later.

In February 1994, just before valentines day my best friend; and the CEO of the company that I was working for terminated my employment for making a life choice between my fiancée and my job. A few months later he sold the company and we began working on a definition of acceptable work-life balance. During that time frame I participated in the management teams of two back to back hyper-growth startups. Two years in a row I joined a software company of less than 10 employees and assisted in growing them to having over 100 employees each.

After I left the second hyper growth company; I started my own “.com” to build my own lifestyle company. I spent a few years doing my own startup; until we had in-fact created just such an environment.

While I would never have predicted exactly where I would end up; I did find a way to move step by step to establishing a lifestyle that matched my goals and objectives. Today, I work with people that I really like. I have the freedom to peruse my interests; I create value; and have worked to establish a platform to give me the ability and freedom to execute my future opportunities, interests, goals and objectives.

If I hadn't learned to invest in my future, and work both hard and smart – I wouldn't have the opportunities I have before me today. I wouldn't be able to share these opportunities with my friends and co-workers. If I had bought into the limited vision of the “trade hours for dollars” of my ex-wife's family I wouldn't have pursued my options and learned to accomplish my goals. If my parents had taught me to work the welfare system, I might have exploited my early injury; and found myself trapped and struggling at the bottom of society.

If I had not committed to a vision, identified where I wanted to get to next, developed a plan to get to the next step, and executed that plan and repeated the process on a regular basis; I wouldn't be here today.

It would be very easy to allow your children to set their goals too low; or to get by with whatever comes along; instead of teaching them to invest in the long term benefits of planning, hard work and values.

Teach them to build networks of future value. To create opportunity for themselves and those around them.



Chapter IX



Your word: it commits you; restricts you; and defines you – treat it with great respect.

Based on my experience, the true measure of a man will be taken by his own reckoning in the last microsecond of his existence. While I do believe in a supreme being; and a final judgment; I believe that my supreme being will consider my life “in context and perspective”. I do not believe that at my judgment the question will be did you violate the law “Thou shalt not kill” as much as I will be judged on the question of “Did Thou st commit murder.” The subtleties are different but great. If my role at some point in my life I were to become an executioner for the state as part of a jury that did convict a serial killer and sentence him to death; I might be guilty of “Thou shalt not kill” but I wouldn't be guilty of the more strict interpretation of “thou shalt not commit murder.” According to the Bible not all killing, the taking of a life, is murder. Murder is the unlawfully taking of human life.

The subtleties of the law can be boiled down to a series of rules that direct us to respect our god, our family, our communities and our selves. When we evaluate the law; either natural, divine, or proscribed by our communities we are constantly put into situations by which we must at every opportunity select which has precedence.

It is how those choices are evaluated and carried out that I believe will dictate how I will measure my existence in my final moment. At the end of my life; I will regret the people that I did not help; the family obligations that I did not meet; the friends that I did not support; and the rules that I did not protest for the betterment of society. The law is

not absolute; it is a guide to evaluating the situations we find ourselves in on a daily basis. I may some day be required to speed to take someone who is dying to the hospital. There are so many situations test the balance between simple right and wrong. It is in those decisions that our true character is tried and discovered.

As previously discussed, I have been instructed to “do the right thing” a great many times in my life. But as I have gotten older; I have realized that identifying the right thing is much harder.

If I were to simply use the limits imposed by the law; I might not steal. But I might push the limits of usury and participate in “predatory lending practices” against the poor and ignorant; like large banks and corporations have been doing in the early years of the 21st century. I might not participate in extortion. But I might use my influence to gain a competitive edge in some business situation. I might not lie. But I might knowingly spread information based on questionably acquired facts to accomplish some goal. All of these situations; while not actually stepping over the line are based on decisions directed by our moral compass.

Where would we all be if the President of the United States started a war, and actually knew that there were no weapons of mass destruction; that would be wrong; right? But; what if we were asked to consider if there MIGHT be weapons of mass destruction? Would it be OK then; for the greater good? It is our obligations and ultimately our word that will guide many of us to make “our right decision.” Notice I did not say or imply that there is “a right decision” or “the right decision” no; I said - “our right decision.” Each situation that we make a decision about will need to be evaluated based on our own rules; values; and principals.

For me; as I get older it keeps getting easier. My moral compass has realized that “the greater good” is magnetic north; and will guide my decisions. The next indicator for my compass is what was the letter, spirit and intension I had when entering into plans; decisions; and commitments.

Another indicator I have is –

Has some situation, external circumstance, or withheld information impacted the original basis of my plans, decisions, and commitments?

I also have to consider:

- What is the eventual outcome of my decisions?
- Who are the beneficiaries of my decisions in both a positive and negative manner?
- Were any of those outcomes unanticipated?

The final gauge of my decision making process is:

“If I were making this decision in the light of day and would be accountable to explain my behavior to both my family; friends and enemies would I be proud of the decision I am making right now with the best information I have at this moment in time.”

I have gotten to the point in my life that I try not to second guess myself. I make decisions. I adapt to the situations that arise based on the decisions that I have made. I may not get the decisions right. But at least I live in a way that allows me to live unashamed based on doing the best I can with where I am at any point and time in my life. I have learned that I cannot change my past. I cannot dictate my future; I can only deal with this decision; this moment; this instant in my journey and the rest will sort it self out.

My friend Joe OBrein (the chief of police) tells me that as a police officer; «Your Word» is your “stock in trade” and it is all that you have; and as a public official I find it very much the same. I am going to make bad decisions all of the time. But I have to make those with the conviction that given the same details and options; I would make it again the exact same way. I feel the same way about giving my word.

I hear people talking about integrity all of the time; I do not believe that a man truly knows the metal of his integrity until faced with a life changing decision; that will in some way alter his reality; in a way that he has desired and strives for; where all that he has to do is betray his own given word and bond. It is in the moments of contemplation

and reflection on that moment; that a man can then truly measure his comments to integrity and convictions.

- How will your children make decisions when no one is watching?
- What will be magnetic North for their moral compass?
- How far will they go to follow the law, or to even challenge it when it is wrong?
- Who will then defend and who will they exploit?
- Where will you teach them to draw the line?



Chapter X



"There are only two fears we are born with: fear of loud noises and fear of falling. These are part of our wiring and serve to keep us alive. All the rest are learned."

Article Fear - Taming the Enemy Within - David Kynan

I recently took my wife to the Haunted House Theme Park located in our community. As part of their procedure for tracking patrons, the hand stamp each guest with a rubber ink stamp. My wife held her hand out and had it stamped without incident, but I told the girl at the counter that I do not accept hand stamps. I never allow anyone to stamp my hand.

It had been nearly two years since my father has been dead but it was just like he was standing there beside me, reminding me that "I should never allow anyone to mark my hands." I have not accepted a hand stamp in as long as I can remember. I do not let my children have there hands stamped when I am with them. When my children come home from school or another event and I find that they have had their hands stamped I get the physically uncomfortable reaction of being sick to my stomach. I often make them immediately wash the mark off. To this day I do not even allow my children to use faux tattoos, at least when I am around.

The only reason that I have for this reaction is the paranoia of my father and his aversion to having his hand stamped or his body otherwise marked. I will not get a tattoo; nor would I have even considered dating a girl that had a tattoo.

I've had heated arguments about not wanting to "allow" my wife to get a tattoo is she wanted one (while I have learned that my wife makes her own decisions - and I have to accept those decisions, since she is an individual not property that I can control making the decision hers, and hers alone.) Tattoos and hand stamps were a gigantic fear passed on to me from my dad, not genetically but by environmental influences. For years there have been questions about the impact of Nature vs. Nurture on the influence of children. But when the intersection of Nature and Nurture conspire to create artificial fear and bias that fear can be as real as gravity in the mind of the influenced individual.

While the stated reasons for the fear of being marked has a level of justification. Based on historical facts and religious beliefs, the actual reality of my fear has nothing to do with either of these concerns. My fear is purely the creation of my father; who passed his fear and paranoia not biologically, but purely by conditioning and upbringing. This set of fears were contrived, justified and applied to both a historical context and a religious context.

My father had noted that religious persecution of the Jews in Germany, and "the Mark of the Beast" in the Bible book of Revelations included the marking of individuals as a precursor to persecution, and therefore we should protest all types of markings of individuals as a defense mechanism.

As I consider what appears to be a completely irrational fear from a logical perspective, nothing changes about the way that It makes me feel. I still refuse to have my hand stamped. I still get tense when my children have their hands stamped, and yet there is no logical basis for this fear. I know that the stamping of my or my children's hands at a theme park is not a precursor to imprisonment. The teachers at our children's school are not out to cart them off to concentration camps, or send them off as victims of the Antichrist (at least not at as long as we send them to a catholic school.) Yet this fear that I have learned persists. I feel its effects every single time I see marked hand in my house. All of my logic says that

this fear is irrational and yet it is as real to me as any other fear that I have ever learned.

My nurture has wired a number of fears into my head that I will undoubtedly pass on to my children. I am not saying that passing on our fears, bias and prejudice to our children is new, or necessarily bad.

We need to pass on fears and lessons as long as it is done with forethought and in a way that makes them better and stronger individuals. It is a good idea for me to teach my children that jumping off of a roof is a bad idea; since they might get hurt by the sudden stop at the bottom. But I do not think that I should be encouraging them to eliminate potential life partners based on tattoos.

I do not wish to encourage bias based on gender which was acceptable as little as 100 years ago. I do not wish to encourage racial bias, although just two generations ago, that would have been an acceptable practice. I do not wish to encourage bias based on sexual preference or orientation, although that was an acceptable practice when I was growing up. I do not wish to encourage fear based on anything that is not real and tangible. I do not want my children to be scared of ghosts - while my lovely wife thinks that the case for ghosts is still open to debate. I want my children to use fear as an early warning system to keep them from making bad life choices, not as a chain to restrict their behavior.

I have many irrational fears, and will probably spend many of the upcoming years of my life finding ways to overcome them. But I will endeavour to be aware that my children will learn to fear what I fear. So I will not fear wearing pink. I will not fear standing up for the rights of others who are being mistreated for risk of being embarrassed. I will not fear singing badly because someone else might judge my voice. I will not fear dancing for fear that someone will laugh at me. I will not fear trying because I might fail. I will not fear questioning a strongly held belief that might no longer serve the needs of society simply because that is the way that it has always been. Some of the most insidious behaviors of

our society are based on behaviors or prejudice that we do not realize are painful to others.

There are almost unnoticed prejudices made by young people based on concepts like socio-economic class structure, intelligence, athletic ability, physical appearance, learning ability, or other social acceptance criteria. While those prejudices are not the focus of legislation; or school discipline they are the potential fruits abused by our children, and should be discouraged at all cost. If we are displaying these characteristics to our children, then we are conditioning our children to not only find them acceptable, but to propagate their negative impact to future generations.

The best legacy that I can leave my children on the topic of fear is that "I will endeavour to work to make sure that those around me are not subject to my irrational fears; and will do my best to condition myself not to be chained to the irrational fears of my father or his father or his father before him."



Chapter XI



"When you care enough to send the very best." - a Hallmark salesperson

In 1944 Hallmark adopted their marketing slogan, the same year my father was born. Hallmark has their branding down to convincing you that a card is a great way to celebrate holidays. My wife Rhonda is really into sending cards for the holidays.

In her family it would be considered a big tradition. In my upbringing I would say that it was given limited value. My father would not only not send cards, but would say all year long that anyone who really knew him would stuff a dollar in an envelope and mail it for his birthday or any other card holiday.

We inherit our values from parents, friends and colleagues. I can't think of how my social and family circle was into sending or giving cards until I met my wife Rhonda. I have to admit that she was very forgiving of me when I did not get her cards (or even consider them) regularly on holidays. I would always try to remember special dates, and get her gifts that would be interesting to her, but searching for just the right card and just the right message was never one of my values. I would prefer to get a gift certificate or something else that I thought she would enjoy. I did not value or enjoy the process of going out to get a sensitive and special card. Come to think of it, I would guess that sensitivity was not really a big deal in my upbringing.

I can recall with great clarity that I did not get a card for my high school graduation. But I can remember the big argument about it. I got an envelope with money for a suit, but my father had no intention of

giving me a card or attending. To be honest, I do not recall if my father attended my high school graduation. But I know he was not planning on it when I left the house. It was not important to him, and he thought that he did not need to go; I was grateful to my mother that she came to my graduation. I know that she was there. I appreciated that she recognized that it was a significant achievement. I did appreciate the envelope with money in it. To be honest I probably would still have the card, if he had written it. I did have a suit and was dressed for the occasion, but who would notice under my cap and gown anyway.

I do not think that he even knew how board or frustrated I was in school. He just thought than I should go and get a GED and graduate early. But to me it was a very special day, a reason for a sense of accomplishment. But what I remember most about that day is that he could not be bothered to show up. But that was neither the first nor would it be the last time.

My father would not participate in my wedding to Rhonda either. It was not that he did not like Rhonda, he thought she was terrific. He just had no desire or intention to participate in the process. He would not even be bothered to honor Rhonda's request to complete a list of family members that he wanted invited to the wedding from his side of the family.

Not a one of my father's 8 sisters or even his mother were never invited to my wedding. He could not be bothered to care about participating in the process and completing an invitation list. For years there were questions about why none of them were invited, and in a fine Lambert family tradition, I said, I did not have the addresses since I don't keep a Christmas card list. While I am disappointed that he did not show up, and I am disappointed that I did not invite a single member of his side of the family to our wedding, we did keep a seat open for him just in case he changed his mind. It was a lovely wedding ceremony, and one of the happiest days of my life, but neither my wife nor I ever got to read a card from him.

I do not think that my father had set a good example as a role model for Hallmark moments. I have often been told that it is the thought that counts.

Hallmarks marketing message of “When you care enough to send the very best” is well known so what does it mean you care so little that you can’t be bothered. I can assure you that if you forget to call on his birthday, fathers day, or veterans it would not go without being mentioned. And “god help you” if on his birthday you did not at least send him a dollar in an envelope; for you would surely hurt his feelings.

If it is really the thought that counts, my life is full of a great many thoughts of good wishes for friends and family. It was not until being married to Rhonda that we have gotten into sending Christmas cards. Rhonda and I receive a great many cards from family and friends, and she goes to the effort of finding that “special family card”, or creating “a personalized card” to send to people. For me it was not part of part of my history or even my value structure, until she shared it with me.

We all learn to value certain things based on our upbringing. For my children sharing holiday cards has become an important tradition to them and to us as a whole family. Each of my 3 daughters picked out and signed Christmas cards for all of their friends. To my family reminding others with a special message that “you are being thought of and considered” is important to them and has become part of their value system and tradition. My girls have learned from their mother that they feel special when being recognized by a that special card. They now treat with great respect sending Valentines Day cards, birthday cards, and memorializing other family events.

It is not necessarily the things that we do, but the things that we don’t do that leave lasting impressions. When we fail to fulfill the expectations of those who rely on us as part of their support structure, it can have long term consequences on their self image, behavior and values. Others will evaluate their perceptions of level of importance by the way that we recognize and acknowledge what they consider

important. It is said that customers “vote with their dollars” as a measure of satisfaction. The measure of satisfaction, praise, and recognition that people feel from family and friendship networks is often measured based on the emotional value system of the recipient. In these situations casting votes of praise, accomplishment, and satisfaction may be done in a much simpler and more meaningful ways. The long term impacts of proper praise and recognition will ultimately be judged by the recipient of that attention and be reflected in their own attitudes about the world and ultimately in their self image.

So if you really do care enough to give the very best, make a commitment to understand how those around you expect praise and recognition. Be aware of how your actions, decisions, judgments, and behaviors are reflected both positively and negatively in their long term attitudes and self image. Find ways to meet or exceed their expectations; while at the same time preventing long term frustration, doubt or dissatisfaction because of your unintended actions or inactions.



Chapter XII



« You're always free to change your mind and choose a different future, or a different past. »

Illusions - The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah"

by Richard Bach - 1977

The first time I ever read, You are always free to change your mind and choose a different future or a different past, it did not make any sense to me.

I can assure you based on my personal experience, your past can completely change in less than 90 seconds. Mine did.

While sitting in my fathers hospital room while he was in a coma in the last month of his life there was a discussion with his doctor about his medications. There was one I had never heard of and I asked what it was for. His answer would literally change my future, and my past.

He said that the medication in question was for Schizophrenia. This is a disease that I had seen in others, and I knew something about.

Google describes Schizophrenia this way.

Schizophrenia is a mental disorder that makes it difficult to tell the difference between real and unreal experiences, to think logically, to have normal emotional responses, and to behave normally in social situations.

This means that the most formative individual in my life was giving me advice based on a medical condition that distorts reality. I learned much of my value structure from someone that did not have a firm grasp on what I experience as reality.

That means that every decision followed, every value, every idea, every concept, ever fear needed to be re-evaluated.

Ever moment needed to be reconsidered. It means that every story that you have read here – might need to be reconsidered. Because – it may have a completely different meaning. The best news is that many of the things that made me feel bad, might not have been his fault.

It also was a choice for me to realize that all of my past experience was subjective.

It is not simply the facts, but how I value those experiences that matter. Even if there is not Schizophrenia in your past, you still have the ability to reevaluate the external influences on your past – and put then into the right context and perspective.



Chapter XIII



"When I was your age Pluto was a planet."

I have heard that the only constant in the universe is change, it is useful to consider that the more things change; the more things stay the same. Conflict or misunderstanding between parents and children has always arisen from changes in values based on where we are in our developmental cycles. As a parent, I have significantly different values than I did as a child or teenager, but I suspect that much of that would have been different if I had been better equipped to participate in the world.

When I was young, I considered so many of the yardsticks in my life to have measured me a failure. I was too short, too fat, too smart, too this, too that, and ultimately too unloved and unlovable.

The first time that I came into contact with someone who apparently would love me for me, I fell in love and got married. When the novelty wore off, the whole thing fell apart. Like Dorothy in the "wizard of oz" I needed a journey and adventure to realize that there is no place like home.

I guess my biggest fear is that my children might believe that they are not loved; or not good enough because of the things that I say or do. It is so easy to fall into a trap of saying things that you do not mean that may have impact on them for years to come.

We must teach our children that they are acceptable "just as they are".

We must Separate who they are from what they do. Say, "I love you and always will, but I don't like your behavior or find it acceptable."

We must praise our children and be positive when they do well.

We must encourage our children when they fail, and thank them for trying their best.

We must accept that we have an influence on their values but cannot control their decisions.

We must set expectations that are reasonable, and boundaries that are clear and consistent. As they get older we must endeavor to remember that when we were young this is what they said about us:

"The world is passing through troublous times. The young people of today think of nothing but themselves.

They have no reverence for
parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint.

They talk as if they knew everything, and what passes for wisdom with us is

foolishness with them.

As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behavior and dress."

It sounds so familiar but that was written some 700 years ago, but it was not the first time such sentiments were presented. In the Eighth Century Hesiod was quoted as saying "I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on the frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words. When I was a boy, we were taught to be discrete and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly wise and impatient of restraint."

For generations the parents of children have seen the youth of their day as being less mature, less restrained, less wise than they were at that age. I wish to admonish you that while we may remember the past fondly and differently, many of the fundamentals remain the same only the definitions have changed.

If we are not careful, we risk teaching our children to value themselves by unrealistic yard sticks. They could measure themselves against the unrealistic expectations that we have set for them; without even knowing that we set them.

They will see, learn and acquire our fears, our bias, and our prejudice. They may even pass those on dysfunctional behavior to their children because they have been taught that these behaviors are "the right thing to do" even if they were unable to maintain the standard themselves.

Are we as a society ready to admit that our children deserve a better value system than the one imposed on us by our parents who did not know any better?

Do we need to impose value systems on our children that they will need to spend years in therapy to eliminate? It is important that about all else, we inspire our children to be the best that they can be, encouraging them to use their own potential as the yardstick. They must be taught to value competition against their own personal best performance as more important than measuring their success against the performance of others.

We must encourage our children to be the best individuals that they can be and strive to improve themselves, their communities, and their society by learning to measure those things based on improving where we are now, and where we can be in the future. Above all else we must learn to love, unconditionally. We must accept that "being loved and accepted for who we are - just as we are" is an essential need of every individual.

My middle daughter was nine when she came home from school with a math test marked 73%. She dropped her backpack by the door, walked straight to her room, and closed the door without a word. I found her twenty minutes later, sitting on her bed, staring at the test paper in her lap, tears streaming silently down her face.

"I'm stupid," she said when I sat down beside her. "I studied so hard. I really tried. But I'm just not good at math like Emma is." Emma—her older sister, the one who brought home perfect scores without seeming to try.

My chest tightened. I could feel the old machinery starting up inside me, the inherited response system clicking into gear. *She needs to work*

harder. She needs discipline. She needs to understand that 73% isn't acceptable. Push her. Make her better. Don't let her be soft.

I heard my father's voice, clear as if he were standing in the room: *"If you'd applied yourself, you wouldn't be in this position. You're capable of more. You're just being lazy."* The words I'd heard a hundred times, the words that taught me I was never quite enough, that love was something you earned through achievement, that failure meant you were fundamentally deficient.

I looked at my daughter's face—her red eyes, her trembling lip, the way she was gripping that test paper like it was a verdict on her entire worth as a human being. And I made a choice.

"Come here," I said, and pulled her into my lap like I used to when she was small. She resisted for a second, then collapsed against my chest, sobbing. I held her and let her cry, stroking her hair, saying nothing.

When the tears slowed, I took the test paper from her hands and set it aside. "Look at me," I said gently. She lifted her face, eyes still wet. "I need you to hear something, and I need you to believe it. You are not stupid. You are not a failure. You are not defined by this number on this paper."

"But I—"

"Listen. I love you exactly as you are, right now, in this moment. Not because of your grades. Not because of what you achieve or don't achieve. I love you because you're *you*. That will never change. Ever. Do you understand?"

She nodded, but I could see she didn't quite believe it yet. The world had already started teaching her otherwise.

"You studied hard," I continued. "You gave it your best effort. That's what matters. Not whether you're as good at math as Emma. Not whether you got a perfect score. You tried your hardest, and I am so proud of you for that. Some things come easier to some people. That's okay. You have gifts Emma doesn't have. You're kind. You're creative.

You notice when people are hurting. Those things matter just as much—more, even—than being good at fractions."

I felt her body relax against mine. "Really?"

"Really. And you know what? If you want help with math, we'll get you help. If you want to work on it together, we will. But not because you're not good enough. Because you want to improve. There's a difference."

She was quiet for a moment, then whispered, "I do want to get better at it."

"Then we'll work on it. Together. But whether you end up great at math or just okay at math, I will love you exactly the same. Promise."

"Promise," she said, and hugged me tight.

In that moment, sitting on my daughter's bed with her in my arms, I felt something break inside me—not painfully, but like a chain snapping, a weight lifting. This was it. This was the moment the cycle ended. My father had measured me against impossible standards and found me wanting. I had spent decades trying to prove I was enough. But my daughter would know—*all three of my daughters would know*—that they were enough, just as they were.

I've had versions of this conversation with each of them. With my oldest when she didn't make the soccer team. With my youngest when she struggled to read as quickly as her sisters. Each time, I feel the old programming trying to activate, my father's voice telling me to push harder, demand more, make them tougher. And each time, I choose differently.

They will carry this with them. Not his dysfunction. Not his impossible standards. Not the belief that love must be earned. They will carry the knowledge that they are loved unconditionally, that their worth is inherent, that failure is just part of learning. And when they have children of their own, they will pass *this* on instead.

The cycle breaks here. With me. With them. With this love.

I was once admonished by a wise old tent revival preacher on relationships:

"when your wife's feet hurt take her to the podiatrist, because if you don't she will think you don't love her. If she thinks you don't love her she will need to see a psychiatrist. She will want to see the psychiatrist more often and the psychiatrist is much more expensive. So as a practical matter of cost and over all happiness, take care of the problem once and early. "

—Billy Joe Clegg.

Well the same lesson can applied to our children. Let's fix our children's problem early, before they need therapy.

Teach them that relationships are complicated.

Teach them that people say stupid things that they do not mean

Teach them that well meaning and wise sounding people like Billy Joe have a habit of also saying ignorant and hurtful things like "I am going to eliminate 'queers' and 'homos' and ' pornos' and 'pinkos.'" and should be summarily disregarded when they do.

Teach them that being different is the key to individuality; we do not all start of this life from the same place. We all start with a different set of circumstances, and it is not where we start from but where we have come to that makes us who we are.

Teach them that it is not what they do when people are watching, but what they do when no one is watching that defines character.

Teach them that "there is nothing like family and there is no place like home" and Last but not least –

As I learned from my two Dr Seuse friends, we must all learn to accept the world as it exists.

Teach them that it's always one thing or another, but things are what they are.

And, the only good measure of ourselves are the things really we care about!

