

Preface

I prepared this little booklet for my children, Paul, Scott, and Matt as a Christmas gift in 1998. Since then, the hour glass has turned many times: the boys are now fine young men with children of their own. But the time-tested wisdom between the covers of their little book has held fast since those days, as it has for centuries, and has risen in relevance and importance with each passing day, for our times are now turbulent and burdened with uncertainty, in the end a function of the great social destroyer of our day, the disease of self-service.

Today, our precious world teeters on a dark and precipitous edge of doubt as many grope blindly or grasp at lifelines that might have held a few years ago, but which, today, seem tied to nothing solid, nothing predictable.

If we are to ever find our way to a better world, to become what we can be, to carve out a legacy for the next generation, then there must be a total change in our values, in our thinking, in our world view and our attitudes to truth, to the beauty of the natural world... to love.

Between the covers of this book, you will not find a set of marching orders. You will find, instead, a reasoned, unfolding set of ideas, forged not by my hand, but gleaned with care from the pages of history; from the world's great teachers: words of wisdom that have stood the test of time that are today especially suitable for contemplation by the mature mind, expressed in a language that is simple, and easy to understand: a door opener for dialog between thinking adults, or between concerned parents and their children.

Hopefully, as water primes the pump, the words in this little book will bring forth for you and yours, Dear Reader, an upwelling of new ideas, new directions, new passions...and above all, a new way of looking at our precious world and our place in it.

Blessings be,

Ron MacInnis,
Spring, 2009

From the original edition, December, 1998

To My Children

It is with the deepest of love, and concern for your well-being that I have finally tried to organize the many quotes I have been hurling at you over the years into some sort of train of coherent thought. What I have tried to do in this humbling exercise is to look back over my own half century on earth, and to sum up my thoughts about life, love and happiness: to share with you the fruits of my experience, but most important to let you sample the wisdom of others far more knowledgeable, and far more able with words and ideas than I.

You boys, all three of you, despite many of your mother's and my clumsy attempts to guide you, are becoming fine young men: you each are clearly aware of, and in touch with the essence of who you are; each of you has a noble heart, and you know well the joys of helping others. Your Mom and I are very proud of you.

So in many ways, you don't need this little tome. But then again, pearls of wisdom always come in handy, especially if they bear the seal of someone whose wisdom has born the test of time, as is typical of the people I have quoted herein.

So join me now for a condensed journey of exploration of my life and yours, of the glory of the world around us, of the possibility before you, and the potential for contentment that can only come from the Thankful, Loving Heart.

This is also a book about changing the world for the better. And that brings its own rewards.

Your mother says I preach too much. Maybe now, I'll just have to point to this book.

Love,

Dad
Christmas, 1998

Let's start here:

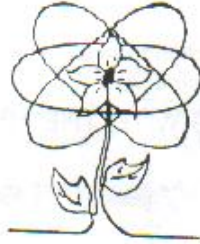
Seeing with the Heart

*It is only with the heart that one can see rightly.
- St. Exupery*

Here you have the core of it: and that's what this little book is about: seeing the world and the people in it with your heart. For the world is too vast and miraculous and wildly and wonderfully mysterious for mere science to decipher: too complex for human minds to fully explain or understand; too beautiful to bear the dissection that comes with analysis.

No, we must look at life with our hearts.

But where do we start to look at life "with the heart?" As with any problem in life, there are many different starting points. But I would propose that we begin where I made many of my life-stabilizing discoveries: in the Garden with our Mother, the Earth.



The Earth as Teacher And the Path to the Thankful Heart

The earth is your grandmother and your mother and she is sacred. Every step that is taken upon her should be a prayer. - Black Elk

If I had but two loaves of bread, I would sell one and buy a hyacinth, for it would feed my soul. - The Koran

*Speak to the earth and it will teach you...
- The Bible: Job 12:8*

This thought of the earth as a teacher is expressed in another, rather delightful way by our Native American friends:

*Did you know that trees talk? Well they do. They talk to each other and they'll talk to you if you listen. Trouble is, white people don't listen.
-Walking Buffalo, Canadian Stoney Indian*

Think of it as you will; what is important is that however you do it – by pressing your ear against a tree trunk, by taking photographs, by reading what the great poets had to say, or by going for a quiet walk in the forest – what is important

is that you come to know the earth, hear the earth, and that you

Come forth into the light of things and let nature be your teacher. - William Wordsworth

What can nature teach us? What does she have to show us that will calm us? Console us? Guide our wayward thoughts and bring us peace of mind? And “The light of things?” What light?

Perhaps before we address that question, we should hear from others who have known nature’s teaching, and we might note the depth of their passion. Maybe we will find something worthy of note in these lines from John Ruskin.

There is material enough in a single flower for the ornament of a score of cathedrals.

And here is Thoreau whom I quote, as you know, frequently. One day he was surprised (and honored) by a little bird ...

I once had a sparrow alight upon my shoulder while hoeing in the village garden, and I felt more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn.

And one of my favorites:

Consider the lilies of the field and how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
- Matthew 6:28-29

All of these authors have been touched by the mystery, the majesty, the incredible beauty of the earth itself. But where does this lead? Other than the fact that that nature is pleasant to behold, what can come of a study of her ways?

One of the wisest and gentlest of all men was Albert Einstein. Here is his answer to that question:

The most beautiful thing we can experience in life is the mysterious.

Take a close look at a flower one day, boys. What hand paints its petals? What voice bids its leaves reach up? Its roots down? Herein lies the connection to the divinity, the mystery, the spiritual connection to the Great Oneness; to the Great Spirit of all that is. This can only be seen or felt with the heart.

Nature is full of genius, full of divinity, so that not a snowflake escapes its fashioning hand. – Henry David Thoreau

Abe Lincoln chose to express himself this way:

I cannot conceive how a man could look up into the heavens and say there is no God.

Call it what you will: when we relax in the presence of nature and allow its majesty to touch us, the miracle and the mystery of it to wash over us, we are moved to a state of reverence: we are humbled, and we see ourselves in our place in the Great Order of Things. The beauty and elegance of all this floods our hearts with gratitude and we become wrapped in the glory and grace of it all. Herein dwells the light of which Wordsworth spoke. Once experienced it is never forgotten and will be a source of strength and deep understanding for the rest of your life.

May its hand one day touch you with the grace and sense of gratitude I have come to know so well...

Extending this thought, two thousand years ago another wise man cast his vote on the subject in what I think is a pivotal idea in the understanding of human nature and the world around us, and what it may take to change that world for the better:

*A thankful heart is not only the greatest
virtue, but the parent of all other virtues.
- Cicero*

The virtue of the Thankful Heart. The “parent of all other virtues.” What does this tell us? Would that I could wish, into the bosoms of so many that I know, the grace of a thankful heart. How their lives would change.

The thankful heart lives in peace. It reaches out; it is loved by all who know it. It lights the path to a loving, comforting walk with life and to that which is greater than ourselves; it is strength in the face of adversity; it is stability, equanimity, compassion. The thankful heart cannot help but love the world and everything in it. And that is what is missing today from the lives of so, so many as they chase materialist dreams and desires whose realization always lies, and always will lie just over the next hill. And that is a sad fact, for such desires know no bounds, and the world cannot afford the price of their fulfillment.

*Until he extends his circle of compassion to all living things,
man will not himself find peace. - Albert Einstein*

Saving the Earth

Part of the task now before you, boys, is to watch over and protect the earth. This is a troublesome business, a function of the greed and mindless habits of generations past, my own among them.

We have forgotten how to be good guests, how to walk lightly on the earth as its other creatures do.

- Stockholm environmental conference, 1992

The wars and destruction that one hears so much about these days trace back behind the newspaper headlines to mindless personal greed and a failure to acknowledge the rights of others, including those as yet unborn.

We have not inherited the earth from our fathers, we are borrowing it from our children. -Native American saying

Despite the biblical injunctive...

Do not harm the earth, the sea or the trees... -Revelations 7:3

...we have clear-cut and pillaged and dragged our way down a road that leads eventually to total global collapse, with precious little regard for the needs or rights of others, so that now, to put it frankly,

We are at a major turning point in human evolution: we are at the greatest crisis of growth since the Neolithic Age.

-Roger Garrotee, French scientist

I do not feel that I am laying a burden on you by stating this, for I know that if you choose to go down these roads that we are here exploring, you will move into mental and spiritual realms that are their own reward. For there is great peace of mind to be had in getting to know the earth and her ways. And even more in achieving some goal, however small, that helps to make the world a better place to live. (Like Thoreau's axe that he sharpened before returning it, it should be a life goal to leave the world a better place than it was when you found it.) Such will be the very necessary work of planet saving that must be done over the next number of years:

The real work of planet saving will be small, humble and humbling, pleasing and rewarding. Its jobs will be too many to be publicly noticed or rewarded, too small to make anyone rich or famous.

*- Wendell Berry, university professor
and Kentucky farmer*

How you do this, should you choose it as a personal mission, is up to you. (There are many ways: you have only to choose which works best for you.) But it starts with the beauty; the miracle, the recognition of the privilege of life and the breaking of old habits, of outdated perceptions.

Unfortunately, if you choose to embark on this mission, there will be many who will not understand.

*The tree which moves some to tears of joy
is in the eyes of others only a green thing
which stands in the way...*

-William Blake

And many people will continue to fail to see the miracles around them...

*If spring came but once a century instead of once a year,
or burst forth with the sound of an earthquake and not in
silence, what wonder and expectation there would be in*

all hearts to behold the miraculous change.
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

But recognize that life on this planet could be changed overnight if people would just “step into the light” and let nature teach them: if they would recognize the enormity of the privilege of their lives; the glorious rhythms, and the unfolding miracle of the world around them, and the gracious bounty that the earth provides, and the ease with which they could share with those less fortunate.

*There is enough for everyone's need, but not
enough for everyone's greed.*
Mahatma Gandhi

Almost without exception, every modern problem I can think of traces its roots to this “ghost in the machine,” this flaw in man’s character, this uncontrollable old brain urge to hoard and control that is still left over from the days when such behavior was a genetic necessity. That is why there is such an egregious and widening gap in the world today between the haves and the have-nots.

*In all life one should comfort the afflicted, but
verily, also, one should afflict the comfortable, and
especially when they are contentedly, even happily
wrong.*
- John Kenneth Galbraith

We now have the intellect and the technology to rise above these old ways. All we need to turn the world around is the will. This will only come as people become attuned to, and stand the awe of the beauty and the miracle of the Creation in the world around them.

Back, for a moment, to Mother Nature. Thoreau once said:

In wildness is the salvation of the world.

I think he might be right.

Life's Journey

Some General Thoughts

So where do we go from here? How do we get from a quiet clearing in the woods (described above) to today's fast lanes on the highway of life? And what does all of the above have to do with survival in the modern world anyway?

Quite a bit, actually.

Back to the Thankful Heart and its direction:

Set thy heart upon thy work, but never on the reward. Free from selfish desires, be not moved by success or failure... and with inner peace, fight you thy fight.

- Bhagavad-Gita

From the loving heart comes a singularity of purpose: a vision, a direction.

Nothing contributes so much to tranquilizing the mind as a steady purpose - a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye.

-Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

So...

Use what talents you have; the woods would have little music if no birds sang their song except those who sang best.- Rev. Oliver G.

Wilson

And remember:

Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. - The Bible (Luke 12:48)

You have been given some wonderful talents, boys. As it says in the Bible, you will be at your best if you

Let not your light hide under a bushel.

We all feel better in life and about ourselves when we develop our natural talents. Set your sights on whatever you want to do with your lives and always remember:

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. - Lao Tzu

Approach your goals, whatever they may be, with calm, planning and patience and a good heart, for:

*Happiness is not a station you arrive at,
but a manner of traveling.
- Margaret Lee Runbeck*

Know your own heart, and listen carefully to it. For it reflects the wishes of your soul, which is intimately connected to Love and the Greater Good. Do not worry if others do not understand: there is disagreement enough in the world to confuse the wisest of us.

And know that the voice of authority is not always the voice of wisdom...

*I tremble for my country when I reflect that
God is just. - Thomas Jefferson*

*I never apologize for the United States of
America: I don't care what the facts are.
- George H. W. Bush*

While there is much positive work you can do in life, there is also a great deal you will not be able to change that you simply have to accept.

Life has no other discipline to impose, if we would but realize it, than to accept life unquestioningly. Everything we shut our eyes to, everything we run away from, everything we deny, denigrate, or despise, serves to defeat us in the end. What seems nasty, painful, evil, can become a source of beauty, joy, and strength, if faced with an open mind. Every moment is a golden one for him who has the vision to recognize it as such.

- Henry Miller

Everything, positive or negative, happens for a reason, as our souls are forged on anvil of life. Accepting that which is negative and learning from it is vital to living successfully. In the end it will strengthen you.

So don't lose heart as you pursue your goals. Think, rather, of the words of Henry Ford. (His cars still don't bear the test of time very well, but some of his words do.)

Think you can or think you can't: either way, you'll be right.



The Secret of Life

If I had but an hour left of my life, and I had to sum up my thoughts and leave a single bit of advice to you, my children, that embodied all my thinking, all my reading, all my conversations and whatever shards of wisdom I could muster, then what I would say to you, with my last breath, would be this:

Go forth, boys and love the world.

This, better than any other aim or goal, will give meaning and depth to your life.

*Love comforteth like sunshine after rain.
- Shakespeare*

This works for the receiver and the giver.

Whatever your work may be, let it be in the service of your fellow men and women. Herein will you find your greatest reward. Let your work, in some way, reflect your love of those less fortunate than you.

*And now abideth faith, hope, love, these
three: but the greatest of these is love.
- 1st Corinthians*

Looking back on my own life, and what I consider its greatest rewards, my most comforting moments, and the peace of mind I have to this day have resulted from my attempts to help others. This, of course, reminds me of the words of Mother Theresa who, despite her gift of hyperbole, touches here on a great truth:

A life not lived for others is a life not lived at all.

This, in so many words, is what Jesus taught. Not only was he a great spiritual leader and a gifted teacher, he was, I think, a great psychologist. His theories work well in practice. Love is very powerful, The Loving Heart can move mountains, and the Loving Heart begets its own rewards.

*You are not here merely to make a living,
You are here in order to enable the world to
live more amply, with greater vision, with a
finer spirit or hope and achievement. You
are here to enrich the world, and you
impoverish yourself if you forget the errand
- Woodrow Wilson*

Just think how the world would change if we all took Mr. Wilson's advice to heart, for our world, as we all know, is at a turning point.

I still live in the hope that...

*Some day, after we have mastered the winds, the waves,
the tides and gravity...we shall harness...the energies
of love. Then, for the second time in the history of the
world, man will have discovered fire.
- Teilhard de Chardin*



The Measure of your Success

*If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching
Or cool one pain,*

*Or help one fainting robin
Into his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.
- Emily Dickinson*

*I want it said of me by those who know me
best, that I always plucked a thistle and
planted a flower where I thought a flower
would grow. -Abraham Lincoln*

*Come, 'tis not too late to make a better
world. - Alfred Lord Tennyson*

If you can look back, boys, and see that you had left the world a better place than it was when you found it, then you have reason to congratulate yourselves.

And if you can learn to

*live content with small means; to seek
elegance rather than luxury, and refinement*

*rather than fashion; to be worthy... to study
hard, think quietly, talk gently, act frankly;
to listen to the stars and birds, to babes
and sages with open heart; to bear all
cheerfully, do all bravely, await occasions,
hurry never; in a word to let the spiritual,
unbidden and unconscious, grow up through
the common, - William Henry Channing*

...then you will have arrived at an uncommon destination that will, if you look into the mirror of your hearts, reflect back to you the fact that you have lived your lives honorably and well.

What more could a father wish for his children?

It is with the deepest of love and respect that I submit this to you, my sons, Paul, Scott and Matt, on the occasion of Christmas 1998.

Love,
Dad