

December 25, 2012

Dear Grandchildren and Kevin,

I guess you are beginning to know what is in this letter, but I also know you see something new each time that you read it. Our weekend in Hyannisport last summer when you taught each other the lessons was wonderful! We had such fun, and we both will remember that weekend with great fondness for the rest of our lives. You are all wonderful children and we enjoy so much seeing you play, compete, study, learn and grow towards adulthood.

It is a lovely thing to see that you value kindness and good humor. You value honesty and intelligence. You value hard work and love for other people.

We know that you are learning positive life lessons from your parents, teachers and friends, as well as from your experiences, both good and bad. Even so, we consider our six life lessons to be our most important gift to you. We believe these lessons will help you grow become a strong and wise person. More specifically, we believe the lessons can help protect a person from being demolished by drugs and alcohol. Most people can experiment with illegal substances and escape unscathed. Some can not. There is no point in taking the risk and discovering that you are the unlucky one. As you know, almost invisibly, people throughout our society are being destroyed. Not one of those people expected to be ruined. And not only is the individual destroyed, but great damage is inflicted on others as well. Obviously it is important to avoid the path to destruction. Perhaps even more important, we believe the lessons will help you grow into an adult with great inner strength. We hope our lessons will be something you grow to treasure, and that you share with your own grandchildren.

Life is different for children than it was when we were young. Children are more protected today than they were long ago. That's good in some ways and bad in others. We believe that it may be more difficult for children to learn these things now than it was when we were children, Our society had been scorched by the great depression and World War II. We'd like you to continue to think about these lessons and to decide if you think we are right. Talk to your parents about the lessons and see what they think. You cannot learn the lessons by quickly reading them, or even slowly reading them, but will have to work to make them part of your life. We know that if you build the lessons into your bones that you will be a better and stronger person than if you do not.

These are the lessons:

- 1) **You alone are responsible for your life.** Your parents, your family, your teachers and the government are not responsible. They can help you or hurt you, but they are not responsible. You alone are responsible for determining whether you will be strong or weak, kind or mean, trustworthy or dishonest, hardworking or lazy; whether you learn or don't learn. It is up to you to choose your path, and you can choose the easy way or the hard way. Surprisingly the path of strength is the easy way. Don't choose the wrong path.

- 2) **Conscious Choices.** This lesson is closely related to the first one and helps you stay on the correct path. There are inner reasons which motivate all behavior. People, especially children, very often are not aware of what inner need is motivating their behavior. If you know you are on the wrong path and engaging in bad, destructive, lazy or dangerous behavior or are frustrated or unhappy, find a quiet moment and consider that thoughtfully. For example, when children go out and destroy mailboxes with a baseball bat, they are not angry at mailboxes. Maybe they feel like a loser because they don't have a girlfriend or boyfriend and so they do something destructive like destroying mailboxes. Unfortunately, destroying mailboxes does not help them find a boyfriend or girlfriend. They aren't doing something to get what they want or need. What inner reasons are really driving your negative or destructive choices? What do you really want or need? What can you do to improve your chances of getting what you need? Thoughtful and determined behavior helps get what you need. Destructive behavior does not. Try to make the important decisions in your life conscious choices, not unconscious ones. This sounds easy but is very difficult.
- 3) **Learning.** Opportunities to learn are a blessing. This is exercise for your brain, just the way that physical activity is exercise for your body. Discover whether you learn best through reading, listening or experience, and then work to develop your learning skills. The happiest adults continue to learn throughout their lives.
- 4) **Work to overcome your weaknesses.** This lesson is closely related to the third one. All children have weaknesses and flaws – the things you don't like about yourself. You are supposed to have flaws, because you aren't finished at age 8. You won't be finished at age 21. You probably won't be perfect until age 65 so don't consider yourself a loser because you have weaknesses. Consider your flaws to be opportunities for growth. Work to improve yourself throughout your life. Pick the weakness that bothers you the most, then develop a plan to fix it. If you work at it for several years you will overcome the flaw. Then pick another one.
- 5) **Risk.** Our genetic code governs much of our growth from babies to adults. Babies are coded to become independent of their parents as they grow. This is a critically important part of growing up and is a good thing. One of the elements in this is the genetic drive to overcome the fears and anxieties of our childhood and to leave the safety of our parents' protection. Children are coded by their genes to take risks; this is something that feels good; children are genetically wired to enjoy risk. But there is a dark side to this as well. Sometimes children overstep and get badly damaged or even killed. A wise person will avoid certain risks as he or she develops independence and courage. One key for an ethical person appears to be avoidance of risks that are illegal or criminal. If a risk is illegal, that is a strong signal that the risk should not be taken. Obviously it also is not a good idea to take a risk that may hurt you badly, get you killed or destroy your life.
- 6) **People are animals that run in packs. Your genes have coded you to want to be with your peers and do what they do.** Many animals are genetically structured to work and live in packs. Often the leader of the pack determines its behavior. People are such animals- this is in our genes. This is a good thing; we benefit from being part of a family, a community, a church, a company, and other groups. We accomplish much more as a team than as a bunch of solitary individuals. But at times this genetically driven pack behavior can be a bad thing. Be alert for the times when the leader or the pack is on the wrong trail. Practice standing up against your peers. This can be

uncomfortable, but it also can be fun. The strength and willingness to stand alone and to challenge the pack can be of great value in your life, when you are an adult as well as when you are a child.

Merry Christmas to our lovely grandchildren and to Kevin!

Love,

Rainbow and Anni