

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 64

Dearest Grandchild,

Just finished reading *“You Have a Brain”* by Dr. Ben Carson. It’s a good book for anyone, but was especially written for teenagers to help them “think big”. The title of the book comes from the oft repeated question from his mother when he had done something stupid - “Do you have a brain?” Yes he did, and the use of that brain became an integral part of his success.

Let’s begin with a few facts about Ben’s mother. Sonya Carson was one of 24 children born to a poor family in rural Tennessee. She was 13 when she married Robert Carson who was 15 years older than she was. Sonya had two children by him, only to discover that in addition to his problems with alcohol and gambling, he was also a bigamist with another wife and other children. That’s when Sonya left her “husband” and became a single mom. As a poor woman with two children, she regularly had two or three jobs.. She often worked such long hours that there were times when she did not see her sons for four or five days. Her work schedule sometimes required her to leave for work before the boys got up, and to come home late after they were gone to bed.

. When Ben brought home an unsatisfactory report card in the fifth grade, she establish strict rules to help both boys do better in school. First, she restricted watching TV to only two programs per week. Second, she required them to read two books each week. These books were obtained at no cost from the public library. Even though Sonya was illiterate, she demanded that the boys write book reports and read them to her. Her diligence paid off! Both of her sons became good students, graduated from college, and enjoyed respectable careers. She was a godly mother who taught her sons: *“Learn to do your best. God will do the rest”*.

In the 5th grade Ben was known as the “class dummy”, but his reading soon changed that. A turning point came when Mr. Jaeck, his science teacher, came into class with a big, shiny black rock. No one knew what it was but Ben. He correctly identified it as Obsidian and even explained how it was formed after a volcanic eruption.

Soon after this event it dawned on Ben that he could be smarter than any of his classmates if he read enough books. He now considered television a waste of time and chose instead the disciplines of reading and learning. To show the importance of reading a broad variety of books he describes an interview he had with Dr. George Udvarhelyi. This interview was to see if he would be accepted for a residency position at John’s Hopkins Hospital. There were 125 applicants and only 2 openings. For an hour or so, the interview did not deal at all with medical questions, but with different composers and classical music. Dr. Udvarhelyi had Carson’s academic records so he was well aware of his good grades and knowledge of medicine. Ben believes that his in depth knowledge of classical music and composers enabled him to be accepted. You never know when something you learn today might help you tomorrow.

Dr. Carson became the chief of pediatric neurosurgery at John's Hopkins at the tender age of 33. During his career he performed some 15,000 surgeries. Several were medical firsts that propelled him to international fame. One such surgery was in 1986 and involved the first time ever that a shunt was inserted in baby's brain while it was still inside it's mother's womb. Another first involved the separating of Siamese twins conjoined at the back of the head. This surgery was successful because Dr. Carson utilized three innovative techniques never before used simultaneously. Twenty two hours later the twins were successfully separated. It was again the first such successful surgery in medical history. Soon Dr. Carson was delivering a couple of speeches every week and traveling the world performing difficult and life saving surgeries.

Dr. Carson's book is filled with many lessons that can be helpful to anyone. Permit me to point out just one regarding the importance of honesty. To illustrate this point Dr. Carson related how exam papers from a psychology test had been "inadvertently burned" and all students were required to retake the test. The professor distributed some 150 exams and then walked out of the room. This new test was so different and difficult that discouraged students began leaving the room without completing the test. Some intended to buy time for more study by lying and claiming not to have seen the notice about retesting. Ben stayed behind and was determined to do the best he could. A half hour later he was the only student left in the room. Suddenly the door burst open and the professor walked into the room with a photographer. They took Ben's picture and explained "*We wanted to see who the most honest person in the class is, and you won*".

As a presidential candidate his opponents spend thousands of dollars on "opposition research". At present they are attempting to portray Dr. Carson as a liar. We'll see! Fortunately we live in a country where a man is presumed to be innocent until he is proven guilty.

None of us exists in a vacuum. Dr. Carson knows that a large part of his success is due to the tireless efforts of his godly mother. Please prayerfully consider this beautiful tribute he penned to her. "*She is a woman who only had a third grade education. She came from a family of 24 children and she got married at 13. . . At Detroit she found out that her husband was a bigamist . . . She had the responsibility of raising two young sons and had to find a way to stand up on her own. I want to add that she is a very attractive woman and she could have remarried. She relinquished all of that and dedicated her life to her children. . . our mother made life rich and extremely full. She wanted to make sure that we would have a good start in life. She basically sacrificed her life for us. My mother is the one who made it all possible for my brother, who is a successful engineer, and for me. We looked toward her for guidance since our childhood. We learned from her that there was opportunity in life and that we could do anything we wanted. Our mother is a very smart, strong, sincere, compassionate lady. She is the anchor of our lives. We feel very blessed and we are grateful. We credit her as being the one who made sure our family would stay strong. We give all our respect and tribute to her.*"

Please follow the example of Dr. Carson. Love your mother and use your brain.

I love you,
Grandpa Boyce