

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 86

Dearest Grandchild,

Just got back from my Uncle Bob's funeral and want to write down a few reflections while the memories are fresh on my mind.

Robinson Crusoe "Bob" Myers Jr. was my mother's younger brother. He was born Dec. 7, 1926 in Fairfax, OK and died April. 16, 2016 in Fayetteville AR. As you probably remember, there were 16 children in the family. I think Uncle Bob was # 13. FYI Aunt Frances is the only survivor of the 16 siblings. She is 86 years old but still physically and mentally alert. I stayed at her home a few weeks ago on the way to Cuba and she got up at 2:00 a.m. to drive me to the airport.

Uncle Bob was also mentally and physically alert up to the very end. On the last day of his life he went to the gym to exercise, walked on the tread mill, and then went to the weight room where he died suddenly from an apparent heart attack. He was 89 years old.

Last year, one of the cousins who likes to record family history, did a video interview with Uncle Bob. On this video he described their poverty and explained that they lived in a 3 room house. Not a 3 bedroom house, but rather a house with only 3 rooms. Bob, and 4 of his brothers slept together on the porch in a single bed. He said there were 3 at the head of the bed, and 2 at the foot. In the winter they would often have snow on their covers.

There are many who believe that poverty produces crime. This was not true in the Myer's family. Uncle Bob said on the video that as a young man he came home one day with a fountain pen which he found on the school room floor. When asked by his father if he knew who dropped the pen, he confessed that he did. He father then said: "Son, you did wrong! You need to take the pen to school tomorrow, give it back to the owner, and apologize for taking it home with you." He did! And at 88 years of age it was a lesson in honesty that he had never forgotten. Grandpa Myers was a God fearing man who practiced what he preached about honesty. Consequently, my mother, Uncle Bob, and all the other Myer's children turned out to be honest, hard working citizens who made positive contributions to society. Poverty did not produce crime in our family.

One reason why government solutions to poverty tend to fail is that they leave out God. Take, for example, the Atlanta Project initiated by President Carter. I recently read about it in the book "*Toxic Charity*" by Robert D. Lupton.

It seems that one night in 1990 a homeless man froze to death within sight of the Carter Center in Atlanta, Ga. Since Carter had a Nobel Prize and had traveled the world doing humanitarian work, this unfortunate death so close to his door step demanded his attention. At that time Atlanta was the poorest major city in the U.S. with more families below the poverty level than any other metropolitan area. The fact that Atlanta was scheduled to host the 1996 Olympic Summer Games made the eradication of poverty even more urgent.

Immediately Carter convened a blue-ribbon cabinet, appointed a highly a competent staff, and secured a state of the art communications center. Millions of dollars began flowing in from wealthy donors and foundations. Twenty inner-city neighborhoods were targeted for transformation.

Within a year a dizzying array of initiatives began to impact these communities. There were about 25,000 needy people in each selected area. Partnerships were established between schools, community groups, service agencies and government officials. The Atlanta Journal and Constitution launched a weekly section in their newspaper called “City Life”. Everyone wanted to be part of this history making Atlanta project transforming the inner-city from poverty to prosperity.

Two and one half years into the project, however, the “success” of the project was in question. By year five TAP was running out of gas. Carter’s biographer observed that the initial enthusiasm couldn’t be sustained. By 1997 the twenty original communities had dwindled down to four and 89 full time positions were eliminated. According to a scathing Stanford University analysis “*TAP’s greatest achievement to date: consolidating application forms for social services from sixty-four pages to eight. All of this for \$33.6 million.*” Eight years after TAP began it changed it’s name and disappeared into an expansive institutional bureaucracy.

Lupton laments that these “top down” charities never seem to work. Real transformation occurs, he said, one person, one family, and one neighborhood at a time. Lupton observes that no country in the Western Hemisphere has received more charitable contributions than Haiti, and yet after decades of relief the Haitians are now 25% poorer than when the charity began. He quotes Zambian-born economist Dambisa Moyo in her book “*Dead Aid*” that after giving a trillion dollars in charity to Africa in the last 50 years, the Africans are also in worse shape now than when the charity efforts began. She wrote: “*Aid has been, and continues to be, an unmitigated political, economic, and humanitarian disaster for most parts of the developing world*”.

But let us return to Uncle Bob and the happy memories associated with our family. All 7 of his children were present at his funeral. Some had come from as far away as Hawaii. The rich legacy he left, like the one he received, involves something far more precious than money. Faith, the Bible teaches, is more precious than gold (1 Pet. 1:7).

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce