

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 135

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will focus on Abigail Adams. Learning about her will not only be an inspiration to all the young women in our family, but to the young men as well.

Abigail Smith Adams was born in 1744 at Weymouth, Massachusetts. Like other women of her time she lacked formal education, but had a keen mind and was an avid reader. In 1764 she married John Adams and bore him three sons and two daughters. Both her husband and her son became President of the United States. The story of her life adds meaning and significance to the old adage, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world". Though she was in a very prominent social position, her major focus was still her family. The deep roots of her puritanical Christian faith were indelibly impressed on her children. For example, let us consider the training she gave to her oldest son, John Quincy Adams. He was born in 1767, nine years before the Declaration of Independence. When he was eight years old she took him to a spot from which he could "safely" watch the Battle of Bunker Hill. When he was nine years old he was assigned to take the family mail on horseback from Braintree to Boston, a round trip of 18 miles. During the next two years young John twice accompanied his father on diplomatic missions to Europe. At thirteen his mother wrote him : "Great necessities call out great virtues" and "form the character of the Hero and Statesman".

At fifteen John Quincy Adams became the secretary of the United States mission to Russia. At sixteen he returned to America and became his father's private secretary. At twenty he graduated from Harvard. The impact of his mother's faith was revealed in his senior oration: "The Importance and Necessity of Public Faith to the Well Being of a Nation". Harvard College was America's first college, and its original motto was "For Christ and the Church". Prior to the Revolution, ten of its twelve presidents were ministers. In the course of his young life John mastered Latin and Greek. His excellent command of French proved valuable in his diplomatic career, as well as his knowledge of Spanish, German, and Dutch. His father taught him algebra, plane and solid geometry, trigonometry, and even some calculus. But again, the foundation of his education was the Holy Bible. For many years he arose before dawn and read the Bible for an hour. He was a serious student of the Scriptures, reading them in various languages and carefully considering the notes of commentators.

In 1784, Abigail joined her husband at his diplomatic post in Paris, and later in London. During these years she was learning valuable lessons that would help her son in furthering his career. In 1794 President Washington appointed him Minister to Holland, and later was given appointments to Portugal and Prussia. Young Adams was only 27 at the time. In 1796, Washington retired and Abigail's husband, John, became President. His strict adherence to principle made him an unpopular president and he was soundly defeated for reelection in 1800.

John Adams, however, considered character more important than popularity. Young John would follow in his father's footsteps and also become an unpopular, one term, president. Until recently, these two men were the only father and son to both serve as president of the United States. Under the godly instruction of his mother, John Quincy Adams developed a strong hatred for slavery.

With reference to the Missouri Compromise of 1820 he wrote: “Slavery is the great and foul stain upon the North American Union. If the Union must be dissolved, slavery is precisely the question upon which it ought to break . . .” Hated and vilified by leaders from the South he was threatened with being brought before a South Carolina grand jury. Adams responded: “If the gentlemen from South Carolina, by bringing forward the resolution of censure, thinks to frighten me from my purpose, he has mistaken his man. I am not to be intimidated by him, nor by all the Grand Juries of the Universe . . . Not a single word of what I have said do I unsay; nay, I am ready to do and say the same tomorrow.” Adams became a congressman after serving as President. At 79 he was still getting up before dawn. One morning in 1846 he suffered a paralytic stroke. After a partial recovery he returned to his work in Congress, but suffered a second stroke on Feb. 21, 1848. An unpretentious bronze marker was placed at the spot where he fell. Before passing on he said: “This is the last of earth, I am content”.

The late Mike Pratt was our Youth Minister at Fairview when your parents were young. He warned everyone: “be careful who your heroes are”. While this has always been true, it seems especially relevant today. Fortunately, we have the freedom to study history and find inspiration from men and women who have lived and died long before we were born. Abigail Adams and her family have set a worthy example.

Jesus, of course, is our ultimate Example and Guide. Paul wrote: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). This same advice applies to everyone, including John and Abigail Adams.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce