

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA # 138

Dearest grandchild, today's lesson comes from an article about Craig MacFarlane in the August 1986 Reader's Digest. I realize this is before you were born, but it is a true story and I hope it will inspire you to do even better in every area of your life.

Craig was a world class athlete with 103 gold medals. He began as a wrestler and won 20 matches in a row. Next he took up swimming and excelled in that too. On the track his natural athletic ability enabled him to excel in sprinting, javelin, and discus. During his high school years he achieved 11 national and 6 international championships in wrestling, skiing, swimming, discus, javelin and track. In early 1985, Craig became a consultant to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. At the same time a chain of fitness centers hired him to deliver motivational speeches to employees around the country. These achievements would be a credit to any athlete, but especially to Craig MacFarlane, for he is totally blind.

Herein is a very important lesson for everyone. Craig never saw his blindness as a handicap, only a minor inconvenience. Instead of considering himself a victim, he became an over-comer. He learned to play golf by developing what he calls "muscle memory". He has been known to sink a 50 foot put by walking back and forth on the green and mentally computing the terrain. On the ski slope, at nearly 60 miles per hour, he follows the swish of the guide's skis ahead of him. On water skis he set a new world record by making 34 wake crossings in only 40 seconds. He became the first sightless person ever to go off the ski jump. On his first attempt he crashed into the water. He insisted, however, on trying again and then made nine perfect takeoffs and landings in a row.

We can also learn a lesson from Craig's parents. They lived on a farm, and it was their gentle encouragement that helped him focus on developing his other senses to be razor sharp and thus compensate for his blindness. His mother taught him how to run his hands over blueberry bushes and learn how to distinguish the hard, unripe berries from the soft ripe ones. Soon he was going trapping with his father, milking cows, and pitching hay. Of course there was a lot of banging into things, stumbling and skinning his shins. These wounds were the price he had to pay for progress. Without this pain there would have been no gain. His parents wisely did not "protect" him from life. They sought never to use the word "can't" in his presence. It was their wise counsel, trust and encouragement that helped him to achieve goals that initially seemed impossible.

Unfortunately, both parents and preachers have a tendency to be patronizing. An absurd extreme of this paternalism was portrayed many years ago by a poster. It featuring a mother pushing her teen-age son in a wheel chair. The caption read: "Of course he can walk, but thank God he doesn't have to". How sad!

Stuart Briscoe is a preacher of the Elmbrook Church in Brookfield, Wisconsin. Under his leadership the church grew from 300 to over 7,000. He told me of his concern about how video taped lessons taught by professionals were robbing local people of the opportunity to develop their own spiritual gifts. In fact, he coined a slogan to emphasize this need. The slogan is: "Anything that is worth doing, is worth doing poorly". This catches us by surprise for most have been told that

anything worth doing is worth doing well. Both slogans are true, but you can never do things well without first doing them poorly. This is the way we learned to feed ourselves, tie our shoes, walk, talk, ride a bicycle, etc. Each mistake we made from a poor performance helped us to improve.

How tragic it is to protect someone from doing things poorly. The home is a place for children to learn, not for parents to parade and show-case their abilities. Home ought always be a place where everyone in the family, regardless of how young or unskilled, can grow to maturity by having the freedom to make mistakes.

In similar fashion, the church ought not be reduced to a stage where professional performers dazzle spectators with their ability. The church, like the home, ought to be concerned about the complete development and maturity of every member. This development can only come when we are free to push our own personal envelope and learn from the mistakes that inevitably occur. This is not only a lesson that we can learn Craig MacFarlane, but it is at least one important lesson for all who follow Christ.

The good news is that God is a very present help in time of trouble, and Jesus has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He will not abandon us like orphans. He is a work in us both to “will” and to “do”. (Phil. 2:13). That is, first He gives us the desire to do something, then he gives us the ability.

Someone has quipped: “The person who is good at making excuses, is seldom good at anything else”. With Christ is your corner there is never a reason to be negative. If Craig MacFarlane can overcome his handicap, we can also overcome our handicaps.

I love you,

Grandpas Boyce