

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA
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Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will feature a story told by the late Dr. Kenneth W. McFarland (October 12, 1906 – March 6, 1985). Dr. McFarland was born in Caney, Kansas, served as a principal in Cherryvale, and then later as superintendent of schools in Coffeyville. He was a famous author, educator, and speaker.

In his day, the Coffeyville school system had a tradition of celebrating commencement exercises for their high school and junior college at the same time. The event took place at the local football stadium and attracted four or five thousand people. One year, on the evening before the big event, a student named Nancy Hollingsworth asked for his help. Here was her story.

Nancy's father was an engineer on the railroad, but unfortunately was killed in a tragic accident.. Her mother worked at a local ladies' "ready-to-wear" shop and kept the family together. Nancy and her two older brothers had a very happy home. Their daily routine involved story time after supper. Nancy said they had so much fun that sometimes she laughed until her stomach ached. After story time, momma would tuck them all into bed, and kiss them good night. Even though their father was dead, their mother made them feel secure.

Then, one morning the children awakened to find their mother had died during the night. Naturally, they were hysterical. Their only living relative was their mother's bachelor brother "Uncle Ben". Unfortunately, he was the town drunk and only worked long enough to get money for booze. When Ben arrived at the house the children wiped their tears and said: "Uncle Ben, what are we going to do?"

Ben replied: "I don't know, kids, but whatever it is it won't be as good as you had. But when things quiet down a little bit after the funeral, I'll go down to the court and if you kids want to come and live with me, I'll pray God to give me the gumption to try and raise you".

Nancy told Dr. McFarland that since that day Uncle Ben had never tasted a drop of liquor, or missed a day of work. Her oldest brother Jim had become a medical doctor, her other brother was graduating from MIT as an engineer. She was graduating with honors from their Junior College and planning to continue her college education at Pittsburgh State University. During the graduation exercises for her siblings, Uncle Ben never felt worthy to sit in the special section reserved for families. Even though Nancy secured a ticket for him this year, he again refused the honor. Nancy pleaded: "Dr. McFarland, is there anything you could do to recognize Uncle Ben?"

The next night after all the graduates, parents and family members had been honored, Dr. McFarland said: "Ladies and gentlemen, I want all the Uncle Bens in the audience who have a graduate representative in the graduating class to please stand". As a hush fell over the audience Dr. McFarland continued: "Surely with an audience this size there has got to be at least one Uncle Ben who has a representative in the graduating class. We will not proceed with this commencement

exercise until he stands”. Then slowly, on the back row at the top of the bleachers, a tall, gangly figure slowly stood to his feet. Soon the entire stadium was rocked with gigantic applause.

Later, Dr. McFarland asked two questions to Uncle Ben. First, he said, “What were you thinking when this gigantic applause roared through the stadium?” Uncle Ben said he thought he was dreaming, must be asleep, and feared he was going to miss out on Nancy’s graduation if he didn’t wake up..

The second question was: “What did you tell the authorities when you went down to get permission to take over the kids? You didn’t have a very good case did you?”

Uncle Ben replied: “Doc, I don’t mind telling you that I didn’t have a case at all. But the judge asked me - of course he was well acquainted with me - ‘Ben, why should I give you the kids?’ I looked right at him and I said: ‘The Master said a man can be born again. He said that a man can change and stay changed - can change completely. And I believe that he meant any man can do that, even a drunken ne’er-do-well like me’”

The judge took off his glasses, turned around and looked out of the window for a few minutes. Then he turned and said: “I believe that deal included you, Ben. We’re going to turn the kids over to you. You can take them home, and in thirty days we’re going to come out and see how you’re getting along. If you’re doing a good job tending the kids and provided for them, we’ll leave them with you. But if you aren’t, then we’ll have to take them and find another home for them”.

Uncle Ben said that when he first took the kids to his house, they all knelt down around his bed. That’s when Ben promised: “God, if you will hold on to me, I’ll hold on to the kids.” He continued, “the five of us have been getting along real good ever since”.

Because you have been raised by parents who believe in God, it will be difficult for you to understand the sadness of those who haven’t. Someday, if God grants you the privilege of having children, I pray that you will be like Uncle Ben. If you hold on to God, He will help you to hold on to your children.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce