

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

200

Dearest grandchild,

Many years ago I heard the late Dr. Wilson Greatbatch speak at a Scripture Science Forum in Joplin, Mo. Because I am unable, at this time, to put my hands on a copy of his remarks on that occasion, the following is a condensation of an excellent article, "Man of the Millennium" by Joseph Radder.

Radder says there is a reason Dr. Greatbatch is not as famous as Jonas Salk, Thomas Edison, and Alexander Graham Bell is that he wanted it that way. As the inventor of the "implantable pacemaker" he could have been both rich and famous, but chose obscurity. He lived in the little town of Clarence, N.Y. His home was a small, red brick, 19th century school house. His workshop was his garage and his desk was a door supported by two filing cabinets. His book shelves were wooden planks stacked on bricks. Wilson was a deeply religious man and was quick to credit God for all of his successes. He received over 150 patents as well as numerous other honors.

During W.W. II his military career exposed him to many dangers. When so many died around him he concluded that God had spared him for a purpose. Consequently he devoted the rest of his life to serving others. Arguably, his most famous contribution to mankind was the pacemaker. He developed it while working as an assistant professor at the University of Buffalo. There he "accidentally" discovered the way to make an implantable pacemaker. In retrospect, of course, he knows this discovery was not an accident at all. God was orchestrating his life for a purpose.

Greatbatch describes the event this way: *"The oscillator required a 10,000 ohm resistor at the transistor base. I reached into my resistor box for one, but I misread the color coding and got a 1 megaohm resistor by mistake." When he plugged in the resistor, the circuit started to "squeg" with a 1.8 millisecond pulse followed by a 1 second interval during which the transistor was cut off and drew practically no current. I stared at the thing in disbelief, he said. Wilson Greatbatch immediately realized he had discovered the way to drive a human heart."*

It wasn't easy to find a heart surgeon willing to try Greatbatch's idea. Finally, Dr. William Chardack, chief of surgery at Buffalo's Veteran's Hospital, agreed to help. On May 7, 1958 the remarkable pacemaker was successfully implanted in a dog. After two years of extensive trials it was deemed ready to be implanted in humans. The year was 1960 and the transplant was successful!

When faced with uncertainties, Dr. Greatbatch would always take his problems to the Lord in prayer. He smiles: *"and I always got the answer"*. At the time of this amazing discovery, Greatbatch was an employee of the Taber Instrument Corp. They were enthusiastic, but balked at investing in the project as no one would sell them insurance. With only \$3,000 in savings, Greatbatch launched out on his own. Working alone with God allowed him to make faster progress because he didn't have a bureaucracy to fight.

Early in the 1960s Greatbatch entered into a licensing agreement with Medtronic. They would manufacture the pacemakers, and Greatbatch himself would provide the batteries. The battery business itself grew to include three large plants and research facilities on Wehrle Drive in Clarence.

Wilson Greatbatch Ltd. Is a unique corporation. It fully funds college tuition and books for all employees and their children. He doesn't believe in retirement and developed a solar powered canoe in 1991. His philosophy is summed up in these excerpts from his 1987 commencement address at Clarkson University: *"Success and failure are relatively unimportant in living a happy life.... I don't think the Good Lord really cares if you succeed or fail. But he does care that you try and try hard...I should not crave success...The reward is not in the results, the reward is in the doing.... No one in the world has anything that I want badly enough to take it away from them...Don't fear failure, don't crave success...Things will work out. You will find true happiness and the Lord will smile on your efforts."*

Dr. Greatbatch died on September 27, 2011 at the age of 92, but the rich legacy of his life lives on. The late Mike Pratt warned: "Be careful who your heroes are". It seems that Dr. Wilson Greatbatch is a hero worth emulating.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce