

Grandpa Gary's Ethical Will

Preface:

In an ethical will you describe your values and philosophies to your grandkids. You give them the will when you are still alive and I did that for Christmas 2009. My paternal grandfather died before I was born and I didn't have a close relationship with my maternal grandfather. Modern families are spread out across the U.S.A. and we don't get to spend much one-on-one time with grandkids. I wanted my grandkids to know more about me and the people who mentored and influenced me. I wanted them to know I was not always like I am now. Many of my rough edges have been smoothed and shaped by the trials and tribulations of life's journey. Except for some minor editing and the addition of ancestor quotations, this version is the same as 2009.

Grandpa Gary's Ethical Will

My Philosophies

My Values

and

People Who Inspired Me

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23 November 2009**

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Dedication

This ethical will is dedicated to my children. All of them have achieved their mother's goal: "To raise my children to be respectful honest citizens".

In Memory

This ethical will is written in loving memory of my daughter Kim and my wife Maxine

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Introduction

During my adventure to become a writer I discovered information about the ethical will. I read a book about writing an ethical will and filed away the information for future use. After I completed the stories about my spiritual experiences, I pondered my next project. The positive responses I got from the spiritual experience stories convinced me to write an ethical will.

I was also working on a writing project about the people I encountered on this journey of life that inspired me. After completion of the first draft of the ethical will, I decided to include the inspired stories as part of the will.

I will share with you a brief glimpse of the people who inspired me to become who I am today. I was not born with the personality and characteristics I have today. I was created by God, and I was shaped by the people I have encountered along the way. The people I have written about helped smooth my rough edges and polish me. Their combined work has made me what I am today. I would classify myself as an introverted optimist with a little patience and a lot of perseverance. My current business card says I'm "A work in progress Christian and writer of stories." In 2009, that is what I am. (*Still true in 2016*)

I have chosen to share my ethical will with my grandkids because I never had the opportunity to hear the philosophy of my granddads. My paternal grandfather died before I was born. As I grew up, stories about him were seldom told. Those that were told were about his passion for kids around the house and about being a good farmer. I did hear some stories about my great grandfather; mostly stories about how good he was with horses, a hard worker, and sometimes cantankerous. I seldom saw my maternal grandfather. We were only together for occasional Sunday dinners. His philosophy, and the philosophy of the times, was that children should be seen and not heard. It was a rare occasion that adult subjects were discussed with kids present, even when I was a senior in high school. I knew Grandpa Joe by his work ethic. He was a hard worker. He was forced to retire at age 70, and it broke his heart. He was frugal and could give new meaning to the word stubborn. Joe's philosophy of work hard and be frugal was all I ever really knew about him. I never really knew Joe, the man.

The death of Kim and Maxine was an added emphasis to write my ethical will. Their deaths just reinforce the old adage of "don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today." Who knows what the future will bring?

I hope this ethical will gives you a glance at my philosophy of life, my values, and helps you know a little more about Grandpa Gary, the man.

Grandpa Gary

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People Who Inspired Me

I have been blessed in my life to encounter many people who inspired me and shaped me into the person I have become. Each person left their mark, or marks, on me. My philosophy, values, and personality are the combined effort that these folks put forth as they shaped me into a better person.

Galen Fredrick Stratton, my father

Dad was known all his adult life and much of his youth as Fritz. My brother and I seldom called him dad; he was always Fritz. A lot more people knew him as Fritz instead of Galen. Dad was named Fritz after one of the characters in the Katzenjammer Kids cartoon; a popular Sunday's comic strip when dad was a youth. The Katzenjammer twins were always, always, into mischief. The twins were named Hans and Fritz. My dad and his cousin Donald Applegate were just like the twins in the cartoon strip. People began to call them Hans and Fritz. The names stuck to them for the rest of their lives. I was a teenager before I knew that Hans's given name was Donald. So that is how my dad became known as Fritz. Why dad became known as Fritz also explains his sometimes harsh discipline. Dad had no desire for me to follow in his youthful footsteps.

My father shaped my philosophy and personality prior to my marriage to Maxine. Most of it was good. A few things were not so good. Regardless, he did the best he knew how. Dad taught my brother and me how to work. He taught us that manual labor was a good thing. Dad taught us we didn't have to be the first farmers in the field in the spring or at the harvest. He taught us we needed to be among the first. Dad usually let a neighbor "test the water" first. Based on their results, Dad would decide our timing. Dad taught us that the quality of our work had to be first-class. He taught us to be proud of a job well done. There was no shortage of work requiring manual labor while growing up on a farm in the 1950s and '60s.

A well done job also had one of those not so good factors. For my dad, even a well done job could be better. He was never satisfied. The next time the job was done; it had to be better than the last time. I followed this philosophy for a long time. For a while it served me well but as I approached 50, the intensity required to apply this philosophy almost killed me. This phobia caused me to fall into the pit of workaholicism. Fortunately, at age 49, a co-worker got me into her specialized recovery program for workaholics. I will always believe that program saved my life.

Dad had bad memories of the depression; especially of people who lost their farms and people who could not find a job. His philosophy was that my brother and I would never be unemployed if we could run a pitch fork, a broom, and a shovel. Dad saw to it my brother and I had lots of practice. He wanted us to have a leg up on others so he demanded we be ambidextrous in the operation of all three of those tools. This was especially true when shoveling grain. During corn shelling, Dad would often holler at us, "You've scooped right handed long enough, get over here and scoop left handed for a while."

One of the bad things was that until junior high school, Dad was the only major influence on our lives. Our education was "The world according to Fritz." By 2009 standards, we were isolated on the farm. Communication and travel were very limited. We had a telephone, but it was used mostly for farm business. We shared a single phone line with seven other farms in the area. We had television and were lucky to live where we could receive three channels (NBC, CBS, and ABC). When I got home from school I watched TV for about an hour, and then it was time to feed the livestock and do chores. If there was a lot of work, watching TV was out of the question. After supper, we could watch TV until our 8 PM bedtime. We traveled the one mile to town about once a week with mom to get groceries and supplies. In the summer, we went to the feed store or the grain elevator during the week with Dad. A big trip was a 30 mile drive to Des Moines on Sunday for a dinner with our aunts and uncles. Dad's personality was autocratic and pretty much my way or the highway. Discussion and debate were not part of our family life. We were told how it would be. There was no discussion. Questions were permitted, but it was expected you would not ask any. Dad's attitude was that if you were listening the first time, there would be no need for questions. When my kids grew up I shied away from Scouts and other activities because I wanted them to be exposed to other men, their personalities, and their philosophies.

I still follow my dad's philosophy on time, but to a lesser degree. His philosophy was: "Better an hour early than a minute late." Over the years, Maxine mellowed me on this philosophy of timeliness. Also, when it came time for field work; Dad dictated exactly how many minutes it should take you to complete a job. If you didn't meet it, then you were loafing or inefficient. Both were cardinal sins in the "Fritz world." Another philosophy was "If you aren't in the field before daylight, you might as well go back to bed because the day is ruined." A daily philosophy was stated every day after dinner (that's the noon meal for you city folks) when dad said, "There's no rest for the wicked and the righteous don't need it, so lets go to work." My brother and I knew we had better be out of our chairs and moving toward the back door. Efficient use of time was the key component of my dad's personality. At an early age, I had a watch on my wrist. When I first started dating Maxine, it was culture shock. She kept track of time with a calendar and had no qualms about being late.

Timeliness was of great importance to my dad and rightfully so. There is an old adage that timing is everything. The adage certainly applied to farming which was very dependent upon the weather. One summer during oat harvest we accomplished something that had never been done on that farm. We harvested 40 acres of oats in one day. The weather was perfect. There was no dew so we could start early in the morning. The July days were long, and the skies were clear. It was time for a full moon. We began early in the morning and pushed ourselves all day. About 9 o'clock in the evening, as the sunset and the big orange moon rose we were finishing the last round. We were exhausted. The next day the perfect weather repeated. We moved across the highway and harvested another 40 acres of oats. We had repeated the never before harvest of 40 acres in one day. We were exhausted again, but most of the oat harvest had been stored in the bins in two days. This feat stuck with me. It was a lesson that when a situation presents itself, you must act now and take advantage of it. It may never happen again. It was a lesson I tried to apply my whole life. I was not always successful, but I have never forgotten the lesson.

Dad taught me to be proud of our name. When he bought parts for the farm equipment he always spoke his name clearly and then he spelled Stratton for the counter clerk. He taught me that our name was just as good as anyone else in the neighborhood. He taught me that money, amount of farm land owned, or possessions did not make others better than us. I didn't really understand all of this until I went to school in town. We lived in the country. We were part of a farming community. We went to a small country school with grades K through 6th. We were all pretty much the same. There were good crop years and bad crop years. That meant new clothes or mended clothes in school. But, it was the same for all kids at school. We were all in the same boat. Our exposure to the world outside the farming community was limited. Town school exposed me to a diversity of people and wealth I had not known.

Dad taught me to be self-sufficient as much as possible. On the farm, machinery needed repair, animals got out of the pens, fences needed to be mended. We had to figure out how to repair all of the stuff. We had to do it. You didn't call someone to help. You didn't run to the store, except for machinery parts. You figured out what needed to be done, and you did it. The Internet did not exist. You had to rely on your own knowledge and ability; that which had been passed down to you by other family members or neighbors. One of the great changes in society with the Internet is how much knowledge you can acquire from others. In 2009, your abilities and knowledge are no longer limited to the knowledge handed down to you by your family members.

Dad taught me to give myself a treat once in a while. Sometimes, after a long but rewarding day, Dad would have a drink of whisky and 7-UP before he took a shower. He would pause to reflect on all that had been accomplished that day. The biggest treat happened twice a year. We would get to go out to a restaurant for supper. Those treats occurred a day or two after the crop had been planted in spring and after it had been harvested in the fall. It was a treat because we seldom went

out to eat. Fast food restaurants and quick shops had not been invented. Except for special occasions, people almost always ate meals at home.

Prior to my generation it was common to have a distinct separation of men's work and women's work. My father grew up that way and applied that separation to my growing up. I was not permitted to learn anything about cooking, laundry, or housekeeping. Raising chickens was considered women's work. Dad, my brother, and I would clean the chicken house a couple of times a year. Otherwise raising chickens, butchering chickens, and collecting eggs was Mom's job. Maxine was not raised that way. In her family everyone helped with all the jobs. She had never met anyone as inept in the kitchen and laundry as I was.

From the day I was born my lot was cast as a hired hand on the farm. At age six, Dad taught me to drive a 8N Ford tractor. Thus began my love of tractors. At age six I could steer the tractor, but my legs could not reach the pedals. I was taught to stand up to step on the clutch and brake to stop the tractor. I was young but only had one close call when I almost ran over my brother Gale. We were building fence, and I was driving the tractor pulling a wagon loaded with steel posts. Dad was pulling the posts off the wagon and driving them into the ground while I drove slowly down the fence line. I was watching Dad and not watching in front of the tractor. Gale walked in front of the tractor, and I did not see him. Dad caught a glimpse of Gale and yelled stop. Stop was my signal to stand up and put my foot on the clutch. I did and the tractor stopped several feet short of Gale. I got chewed out for not looking in front of the tractor, and Gale got chewed out for walking in front of the tractor. I always remembered the lesson to look all around when you are driving.

I spent most of my first 18 years working side by side with my dad. I learned many valuable lessons that stayed with me for life. I also learned lessons that helped me adapt and change to become my own person. I learned the lessons of work and business. After Dad, Maxine began a 43 year career of training me. She taught me about love, gentleness, forgiveness, cooking, patience, and Norwegians. I'm happy with the person they trained me to be.

Maxine Beth Horness Stratton, my wife

Maxine shaped and formed my life more than anyone else. When I retired, she reminded me I was still in training. Like God, she wasn't done with me yet. Maxine taught me patience. I don't have an excess but the patience I do have I owe to her. She kept track of time with a calendar. I kept track of time with a stop watch. Maxine had infinite patience, and over time some of it rubbed off on me.

Maxine also taught me forgiveness. I had not grown up with forgiveness. If someone wronged my father, or was thought to have wronged him, it was remembered forever. She taught me to be forgiving. She taught me to let it go and move on.

Maxine showed me unconditional love and taught me about unconditional love. Again, I did not grow up with unconditional love. Love was taken for granted. If you had a roof over your head, food in your stomach, and clothes on your back, well that was love. When I was growing up, appreciation, or praise on rare occasions, was attached to your level of work. If you worked hard, and/or produced more than anyone else, then there was appreciation. If not, then it was just another day. Maxine's love was from the heart and was given freely. Regardless of any disagreements Maxine and I had, I always kissed her after supper. I never saw my dad kiss my mom until she was in intensive care near the end of her life.

Maxine established discipline in our family without the use of severe corporal punishment. Spankings were ok but had to be given with an open hand. In my youth, discipline was applied with a belt or stick or paddle or whatever was handy. But we didn't think anything about it because that

was the way it was in every family in the neighborhood. Discipline was such a problem in grade school our fathers made paddles for the teachers and told them to use them. The teachers were happy to have the support of our fathers. They used the paddles and in one day discipline improved greatly. However, Maxine didn't grow up that way and she was appalled at the way I tried to discipline Galen. She implemented a more gentle form of discipline with open hand spanking and time outs in the corner.

Maxine taught me tolerance and acceptance. My father was not a tolerant man. Perfection was expected and anything too far off that expectation resulted in further instruction on how it should have been done (sometimes referred to as an ass chewing). Maxine was a tolerant person and coached me that I didn't have to do it perfect every time. Also, that not completing everything scheduled for today was not the end of the world (I struggled with that one, and still do). Maxine was an accepting person. If my father had been wronged, or thought he had been wronged, he never forgot it and never let it go. He also expected everyone to behave and perform as he expected them to. He did not like to accept people as they were. He was always pointing out what he thought were deficiencies in how other people worked and lived their lives. Maxine wasn't like that. She would remember it, but she could let it go. It did not grind at her for a long time. Maxine accepted people as they were. She always looked for the good in each person and didn't dwell on the little quirks each of us has. She taught me this by the way she lived her life and the way she treated other people. I am the person I am today because of the lessons she taught me and how she lived her life. After her death, her wisdom has returned to me at the most opportune times and allowed me to act appropriately. I am grateful for that.

Maxine and I were a great team. When we worked together, we could accomplish almost anything. When I grew up, a lot of things were based on individual performance. Teamwork was typically reserved for situations where more physical strength was needed. The teamwork Max and I created was both physical and mental. There were tough times as we struggled to start a family and make a life for ourselves. By working together, being patient, being flexible, and having unconditional love for each other, we succeeded.

Maxine was not a high maintenance gal. She watched her pennies and did it much better than I. She never wanted expensive clothes, and she would not let me buy them for her. She used her infinite patience to find affordable clothing. She had a knack for creating outfits from individual pieces bought in different places. Her outfits made her look like a million bucks, and they didn't cause us to break our budget. Both of us had the same thoughts about houses, cars, and clothes. They are not status symbols. Cars and pickups are for transportation. A Ford or Chevy will get you there the same as a Cadillac. We purposely bought a house we would not be married to. We did not want to spend so much money on a house that we couldn't afford anything but house payments.

Maxine taught me that the Norwegian genes of persistence and patience were virtues. It took me years to understand these as virtues. I grew up with persistence, but I had no patience. The combination of these two gave her great advantage over me. She always outlasted me until I agreed with her. She taught me that by combining these two virtues you can accomplish great things and be happy all along the way. I am what I am today because of her.

Anne, a co-worker. I adopted her as my sister

To me, Anne is an example that angels walk the earth. In my eyes, she is one of them. I may be biased because I owe my life to her. With her encouragement, I enrolled in her 13 step rehab program for workaholics and began my recovery. Without her encouragement, I firmly believe my downward spiral of workaholism would have resulted in my death. After I got into recovery, I came to understand I was fully capable of working myself to death. I was very deep into my father's

philosophy that business always came first. Many times I had seen my dad drive himself to the verge of collapse and now I was doing it to myself. Anne taught me that my health came before my work job. She taught me that taking time to enjoy and soak up the beauty of God's earth is as much a part of our my life's work as the work I got paid to do. She taught me to grab opportunities when they present themselves. Great opportunities might not be listed in my Franklin Planner. Great opportunities to experience Swiss Orange Chip ice cream and shooting stars bursting out of a dark night. I needed to stop and grab them. Maxine and I were grateful that Anne's intervention put me on the road to recovery. Anne and I progressed from co-workers to friends to best friends forever. I adopted Anne as the sister I never had. God brings people into your life to help you, and he sent Anne into mine. I am grateful. The greatest, and most important, thing Anne taught me was to slow down, pause, and take time to appreciate the beauty God has placed on this earth.

Herb, my shop teacher in high School

Herb taught me how to use hand tools and power tools for woodworking. When I was growing up dad gave my brother and I instructions but he didn't really teach us. Herb had a lot more patience than my dad and I learned a lot from him. He taught us how to look at complicated projects and accomplish them by doing them in small sections. This knowledge allowed me to build a desk when I was a freshman in high school. A desk was considered a complicated project for a freshman. I won an award for that desk as an outstanding project for a freshman. Like my dad, Herb taught us to take pride in our work. Before I graduated high school Herb was encouraging me to become a teacher. Teaching was not something I was interested in. After high school, I enrolled in an adult education class so I could build a bookcase. I wanted to build one in high school but was never able to do so. When I arrived for class, Herb looked at me and asked, "What are you doing here, this class is for adult beginners?" I told him I wanted to build that bookcase. He said, "Well you can stay and build it but you have to help me teach; there are too many people in this class." So I did, and I enjoyed it. Little did I know that years later I would spend much of my firefighter career teaching skills to firefighters. It all began with Herb's suggestion I become a teacher.

Art Stratton, my dad's brother

Uncle Art taught me that faith in God gets you through bad times and good times. In my childhood days, I couldn't understand how a soldier who lived through the horrors of World War II could still have faith in God. As I got older I came to understand that without faith in God, you couldn't get through the war. By Art's actions, he taught me that helping your community is a good thing to do. He was active in many committees and organizations in his community. Art was always working to make it a better place. Art also taught me that people come before business. My dad always had the opposite philosophy that business always came first. Art always had time for people. It didn't matter how far behind the farm work was or how pessimistic the weather forecast was, people always came first. Art also taught me about spirituality and religion by the life he lived. He always went to church on Sunday. Art was the only adult male in the family who went to church every Sunday. In my adult life, he was my role model and mentor. I have always tried to be more like him.

Grum, Rose Stratton, my paternal grandmother

I gave Grum her name. As a toddler, I could not say Grandma. When I tried to say Grandma, the word came out as Grum. The name stuck. I was the first grandchild and every grandchild after me called her Grum. Grum was widowed in 1943 at the age of 46. She became a self-sufficient working woman long before it was fashionable. She worked for Fuller Brush as a salesman and then as a regional supervisor. Grum was the spiritual backbone of the family. Her faith was strong, and her actions and life reflected that faith. The strength of her faith was mysteriously placed into each of

her grandchildren. However, it took some of us longer than others to realize that. As her grandchildren have grown older, we appreciate the life she lived and the example she set for us.

Marilynn Rose Stratton Quirk, cousin, I adopted her as a sister

I am the oldest male cousin and Sis is the oldest female cousin. We both suffered from the oldest child stigma. You know the one; since you're the oldest, you must know the answer to all the questions. Well guess what, we don't; but that never stopped our siblings from asking "What do we do now?" Sis lost her husband 11 months before Maxine died. We bonded to get through the grief, get back on our feet, and start getting on with life. As we worked to recover, we created a brother-sister bond. Marilynn's spiritual strength is equal to Grum's. Marilynn and I have been able to attend church together, attend prayer retreats together, support each other spiritually, pray for each other, and pour out our souls to each other. Without Marilynn I don't know how I would have recovered from the loss of Maxine. Our brother-sister bond is one of the great gifts God has given us. Marilynn has helped me become a kinder, gentler, and more tolerant person.

John Wayne, actor

John Wayne is my favorite actor. I have watched his movies since Dad bought our first TV in 1951. I liked his movies because the "good guys" won and right always prevailed over wrong. His movies also demonstrated that hard work and perseverance allowed a person to overcome great obstacles. In John Wayne's movies, and his private life, he expressed and stood up for what he believed in. He was a "what you see is what you get" person and I admire that in people. He demonstrated that being an actor does not excuse you from being a good citizen. Hollywood could use a lot more of John Wayne's philosophy today.

Marty, a supervisor at work

Marty was my department head when I moved from the drafting department to the design department. He gave me two raises and a promotion in my first 18 months. That was unheard of in Product Engineering. It was also a surprise to me because after 5 years in drafting I had just received my first promotion before moving to the design department. Marty was impressed with the quality and quantity of work I was producing. To him, those attributes were more important than the fact I had an AAS degree in mechanical engineering technology instead of a BS in mechanical engineering. This was my first experience that quality and quantity of work, instead of degrees hanging on the wall, actually paid off in career advancement. It was a lesson I applied for the next 31 years.

Jerome, a supervisor at work

Reorganization at work put me in Jerome's department. Jerome was the most down to earth supervisor I ever had. He always told you what he thought. You never had to guess where Jerome stood or what he expected of you. He taught me not to let ego get in the way of career advancement. During the annual merit review he asked me if I wanted a title or money. I told him I'd take the money. Jerome said, "Good, I have money but I don't have titles." He told me the previous employee, who just walked out of his office, wanted a title and turned down the money because a title didn't go with it. Jerome and I were on the same page. I said I didn't care about my title, just pay me. We got along great after that.

Jerome taught me that sloppiness in your management skills will let others take advantage of you. Budget crunches affected every department. Jerome closely watched the line by line details of his budget. He knew a few other department heads that did not do that. Sometimes when our

department was short on budget, we would charge our work to a department with a lax supervisor. Jerome only got caught once, and he chalked it up to a typo in the account number. He taught me that being meticulous in management of your projects could keep others from taking advantage of you.

Dillon, a supervisor at work

Dillon was the best supervisor I had during my thirty-six and a half year career. Dillon was my supervisor when I retired. He was the best because of two virtues, plain talk and honesty. Sometimes he shared information he wasn't required to share. He never hid the truth from me or the other people in the department. Dillon became my supervisor in 1987 when a new department was created. This was in the midst of the great agriculture recession of the '80s. I did not believe there were any honest and plain talk supervisors left at work. The scourge of political correctness had overrun the corporation. Less than honest talk was a daily experience. Our new department accomplished great things under Dillon's leadership. He was a leader, a mentor, and highly respected. He set a great example of how to be a leader, a good person, and that good guys finish first.

Lars, the worlds best tractor operator

In the latter part of my career, Lars and I worked together. We were just a couple of farm boys who were more at home operating a tractor than holding down a desk. Lars always told the truth even when it was not politically correct or was detrimental to his career. I couldn't be as bold as he was, but on occasion I had my moments. I always admired his ability to not be concerned about the consequences of honesty and lack of political correctness. Lars taught me to always evaluate the tractor from the customer's point of view and approach our test work as if I had purchased the tractor for my own use. Sometimes it was a challenge to report the conclusions of our test work. Too often we were expected to provide the preconceived conclusion a manager expected. I can't remember a time either of us did that, but there was a lot of pressure to do so. However, when reporting our findings, I used a lot more weasel words than Lars did. If the subject being evaluated was no dammed good, he just said it that way. I always admired his honesty about the results of tractor tests.

Katie, a co-worker

Katie had the reputation of being a charismatic leader. She would deny that, but she was. Katie always had a smile and was enthusiastic. In the '90s she worked in Human Resources and was leading a program called Managing Personal Growth. One of the sessions required each person to evaluate their basic values. I thought this would be easy. I had a reputation for bleeding the company color. I thought my values would all be associated with tractors. I was totally wrong. Working through the exercise required some deep thinking. When I finished with the exercise, I was surprised to see that none of my five values were associated with tractors. It was a real awakening for me and changed the focus of my life. I still adhere to the values I identified in that exercise. Tractors fell away as a value in my life. Because Katie taught that class, I paid attention, and applied the results. Hindsight tells me the Holy Spirit was probably involved with both of us during that class.

I knew Katie was a Christian. In 2000, after my daughter Kim was killed, I talked with Katie about my struggle with daily prayer. I will always be thankful that Katie encouraged me and guided me to accomplish daily prayer. I had made several attempts at daily prayer but had never been able to sustain the discipline. After Kim was killed, I really struggled with daily prayer and my prayer was very sporadic. I knew Katie had a daily prayer life so I asked her for advice. She shared her

struggles to accomplish daily prayer. She also shared how she had developed her discipline of prayer. I applied what she told me, and eventually I accomplished the discipline of daily prayer. I will always remember her for sharing her experiences and for her continuing encouragement. Never underestimate how much a small act of kindness and sharing can help someone else.

Cliff, a consummate fire marshal

Cliff made an impression on me that was greater than any other firefighter I have ever met. Cliff was the state fire marshal for NE Iowa. He was a typical Scandinavian Lutheran who happened to be a firefighter and a fire marshal. He taught me to always be proud of being a firefighter. He taught me that firefighters don't always win or get the outcome we want. Cliff was the best teacher I ever encountered. He taught me that teaching other firefighters is a virtue and part of being a firefighter. His example was the primary reason I continued being a training officer for most of my firefighting career. He taught me the importance of fire cause determination, and how to conduct it in a patient and methodical manner. He taught me to have confidence in my training, my experience, and my expertise. He taught me not to let insurance agents with titles and suits destroy my confidence in my investigation. He taught me that during a fire cause investigation, the dullest pencil is better than the sharpest memory. He taught me that firefighters pursue arsonists with a vengeance and that we never give up. Robert De Niro's portrayal of the fire marshal in the movie "Backdraft" reminds me of Cliff. Cliff's wife died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Cliff's recovery after his wife's death was a demonstration that life goes on. His recovery served as an example to me after Maxine's death.

Johnny Unitas, Baltimore Colts quarterback

John is the greatest quarterback to ever play in the NFL. He did not come into the league with great talent and accolades. He came from playing sandlot football, but he had a determination never before seen in the league. I was a young kid when John played for the Baltimore Colts. He taught me to never give up. He taught me to make the other team beat you by never giving up. John was famous for his fourth quarter comebacks. Before there was a two minute warning, he brought the last two minutes of a football game to a new level of competition. John's philosophy was, "If I've got the ball late in the game, I will beat you." He accomplished that more than any previous quarterback. John was able to accomplish that because he and receiver Raymond Berry were willing to practice and develop their skills to a higher level than any other quarterback-receiver combination in the NFL. Those two raised the passing game to a new level. It was the beginning of the passing game as we know it today. I was privileged to see the 1958 championship game on TV. That was, and still is, the greatest football game ever played. John's determination and commitment to exceptional excellence has served as an example for my entire life.

Mr. Henderson, Technical School Instructor

Mr. Henderson taught me that skills and knowledge are more important than the title or number of diplomas. He taught me that common sense and knowledge can accomplish what others see as impossible. He demonstrated that with basic machine shop tools, some common sense, and some common knowledge you could build precision parts and machines. Mr. Henderson was an expert machinist. During WW II, his machinist skills helped build the first radar units. He built his own billows camera that had many high tech features not available in the retail market (1960s). He accomplished all that by using the same skills he had taught me. Basic tools combined with some common sense, knowledge, and a little ingenuity can yield precision results.

Vince Lombardi, Green Bay Packers football coach

Vince demonstrated how to be a hard case at work and a softie at home. Vince's veracity on the football field, practice and game, is legendary. Many books have been written about it. Some of those books also briefly mention his home life. Home life was important to Vince. When he was home, it was home life. He didn't put home life aside and focus only on football. His example is an important lesson for all of us. Besides home life, Vince had a strong spiritual life. He tried to keep this part of his life private. In reading books about Vince, I came to understand that spiritual strength and conditioning is just as important as the physical and mental strength and conditioning required for the football field. Vince is famous for his line "when the going gets tough, the tough get going." I have tried to embrace that philosophy during my life. It served me well in my firefighting career and work career. I don't give up easily. If you beat me, you have to earn it. A plaque with Vince's story of "what it takes to be number one" hangs above my desk. It hung at my desk at work. I find it refreshing to re-read it every once in a while. Vince's story is the reason I keep the banner "I Play To Win" hanging by my desk. I don't play to get a smiley face sticker; I don't play to just participate; I play to win. I don't always win but when the game starts, I play to win. If you beat me, you will earn it.

Jerry Kramer, Green Bay Packer lineman

Jerry was a lineman for Vince Lombardi. Jerry did not have great natural talent or overwhelming determination. Vince coached him to be the greatest lineman to ever play for the Packers and arguably in the NFL. It was through great coaching by Vince and sheer determination by Jerry, that Jerry became the pinnacle of talent and determination. Jerry wrote books about his experience. Jerry is an example of how an average guy can achieve great success by having a good coach and working to improve your existing talent and determination.

Postscript

I'm like Jerry, I started without great natural talent and with a little determination. The people you have read about were my "coaches" and I worked hard to improve my talent and determination.

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My Philosophies

My Values

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Faith in God

Get God in your life and keep God in your life. Faith in God will allow you to appreciate the mountain top experiences of life. Faith will also help carry you through the deep valleys of life. Read the Bible. Proverbs is one of my favorite chapters. The proverbs provide a guide for living life. The parables of the Bible are my other favorite stories. They provided me with wisdom and guidance. Learn the Ten Commandments. Also learn the two greatest commandments (Mathew

22:34-40). They are commandments, not suggestions. Remember when all else fails, faith, hope, and love prevail. Maxine's favorite Bible verse was 1 Corinthians 13:13; "and now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love". Learning about God and developing the spiritual side of your life is a lifelong journey. It is never too late to start.

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Get Your Spiritual Life in Order

Get your spiritual life in order before bad things happen. Understand that bad things happen to good people and it will happen to you and/or someone close to you. Know what you believe. Of equal importance is to know what you don't believe. Well meaning people will say things that can hurt you. If your spiritual life is in order, the hurt will be minimized or non-existent. It is important your spiritual life has a firm foundation. Remember, God forgives you so learn to forgive yourself and to forgive others.

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Daily Prayer

You need to develop a daily habit of praying to God. A habit of daily prayer requires discipline to develop and maintain. It is not an easy task, especially in today's culture of so many activities and demands on our time. My life of daily prayer was very sporadic with many "dry spells". After Kim's death, and with encouragement of friends, I went back to work on developing a daily prayer life. It took a while before I succeeded. Daily prayer is a very beneficial part of life and should be part of your life. There are many books written on prayer. Read some of them and find a prayer life that suits your individuality. Work at it and develop the habit and the joy of daily prayer.

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Have a Creed That Guides Your Life

You need to acquire a creed that will guide you in your life. The creed I use is the creed of the United States Jaycees. I joined the Hudson Jaycees in 1973, the year before Maxine, Galen, Kim, and I moved to Hudson. The creed was not unlike my beliefs and it summarized them in a few words. As a Jaycee member you were required to memorize the creed. We also recited the creed at the end of every meeting.

The Jaycee Creed:

We believe:

That faith in God gives meaning and purpose to human life

That the brotherhood of man transcends the sovereignty of nations

That economic justice can best be won by free men through free enterprise

That government should be of laws rather than of men

That earth's great treasure lies in human personality

And that service to humanity is the best work of life.

The first and last lines were the most important to me. They were the philosophies that I tried to apply to my life. Maxine also applied them to her life. Maxine belonged to the LBJ's, Ladies Behind Jaycees, and both of us believed in this creed.

There are other creeds. In the movie "The Shootist", John Wayne recited a creed that was appropriate for that time in the old west. It could also be applied to life today. His character, J.B. Books, recited this creed:

I won't be wronged.
I won't be insulted.
I won't be laid a hand on.
I don't do these things to other people,
and I require the same from them.

John Wayne also promoted what is known as the All American Creed. It was instilled in him by his father.

All American Creed

Always keep your word.
A gentleman never insults anybody intentionally
and don't go around looking for trouble,
but if you ever get in a fight, make sure you win it.

As you grow and mature, find a creed, or create one of your own, that will guide you in your life.

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Philosophy for Living Your Life

You need to establish a philosophy for living your life. I have two basic philosophies that I follow. The first is, "lead, follow, or get out of the way". I have utilized all three categories at some time in my life and you will also find that to be true. The most difficult is the "get out of the way". The older I got, the more I had to use this category. "Get out of the way" does not mean you cannot express your opinion or ideas, quite the contrary. You should do that. Sometimes your position or idea will be the small minority opinion. In this position you may need to yield to reality and get out of the way. You might be right but you may not be able to prevail. Learning when to lead, follow, or get out of the way is an acquired skill. Expect to make some mistakes along the way.

The second philosophy was given to me by William Hewitt. He was CEO of the company I went to work for in 1965. He was the last of the family members to head the company. He was also the last CEO to have a genuine interest in the lives of the employees. The philosophy that he shared and tried to instill in us was, "Remember to live while you're making a living". Maxine and I tried to do that. We chose to live in a modest house so our lives could be something greater than making house payments. We saved money for vacations and short getaways. We found time, however short it might have been, to enjoy each other and our kids. This philosophy was one of the key factors in 40 years of a happy marriage.

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Philosophy for Your Actions

In addition to your philosophy for living your life, you need a philosophy for your actions. My philosophy is “Improvise, adapt, overcome”. Although these exact words were not used until later in life, this basic philosophy was part of me my whole life. The beginning of this philosophy was in the work that my father taught me on the farm. Its beginning was in actions, not words. I acquired the word combination of improvise, adapt, and overcome from the movie “Heartbreak Ridge” with Clint Eastwood. I use the knowledge that I have acquired from other people. As President Woodrow Wilson once stated, “I not only use all the brains I have but all I can borrow.”

I also used the philosophy of improvise, adapt, and overcome for my education. I enjoyed and excelled at math and science. When I decided in Jr. High school to pursue courses in math and science, my parents told me I was on my own, they couldn’t help me. Neither of them liked, or were good at, math and science. Dad felt formal schooling past 8th grade was a waste. His philosophy was, “learn a manual skill and go to work.” It was necessary for me to figure out how to learn these subjects on my own. I used other students, teachers, and science clubs as part of my education. I established good study habits and I worked hard. I remembered the saying that “average is just as close to the bottom as to the top.” I tried and succeeded in getting grades above average. High school math and science was my first educational experience with improvise, adapt, and overcome.

When I became a firefighter the philosophy of “improvise, adapt, and overcome” became a way of life. We seldom had enough equipment or people for a fire, car accident, hazardous material spill, or storm coverage. We had to figure out how to do the best we could with what we had in the situation we were in. Often I had very little time to implement this philosophy. You need to have your philosophy well defined and make it part of you. In times of crisis you will be able to act instead of standing around wondering what to do. The ability to act could be the difference between success and failure or live and death.

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Slogans That Reflect Grandpa Gary

- Lead, follow, or get out of the way
- Our job is to improvise, adapt, and overcome
- Remember to live while your making a living
- The only thing in this life, that you regret, are the risks you didn’t take. (from Grumpy Old Men movie)
- Give where you are fed (contributions to church and religious organizations)
- Better an hour early than a minute late (Fritz Stratton rule)
- Average is as close to the bottom as to the top
- When you’re through learning you’re through
- Remember, at our age, someday is here (Gary to Marilyn when she turned 50)
- We’re not getting any younger
- You can’t learn any younger (Fritz Stratton’s philosophy when you said you didn’t know how to do something)
- Better to be 0-20 than 0-0 (paraphrase of from various sports figures)

- God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called
- When you lose, don't lose the lesson
- Never lay in bed at night asking yourself questions you can't answer (Scandinavian Proverb)
- Everything comes to he who hustles while he waits (Thomas Edison quote)
- Luck is preparation meeting opportunity

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Your Most Important Values

Take some time to discover and list the five most important values in your life. Stay true to those values.

I discovered mine in 1995 when I took a course at work called Managing Personal Growth. The course was taught at work by Katie. I was totally surprised when I discovered my most important values had nothing to do with my company or tractors. I was just so busy with life that I had never taken time to reflect on my values. Don't you do that. Early in your life think about your values, make a list, prioritize, pick the top five or six and stay true to them.

My five values are as follows:

Value: Self Respect

Definition: Doing things I don't have to apologize for. Doing the very best I know how.

Things to enhance:

- More balance between work, family, play
- Decrease the number of hobbies

Things to maintain:

- Work >40 hours (40 hrs is average, be above average, but don't become a workaholic)
- Get results
- Help others
- Try/learn new technology

Value: Order

Definition: Life is orderly and on time, being organized and efficient

Things to enhance:

- Tapes on 7 habits of highly effective people

Things to Maintain:

- Franklin planner
- Timeliness

Value: Economic Security

Definition: Increase income at a rate above the rate of inflation

Things to enhance:

- 401K
- Books on investing
- Reduce impulse spending

Things to maintain:

- Current job

Value: Inner Harmony

Definition: Being satisfied with where I'm at, what I'm doing, and who I'm with.

Things to enhance:

- Accept less than perfect
- Mail birthday cards to family members
- Self esteem tapes for me, Max, and kids

Things to maintain:

- Spiritual growth
- Willing to learn new things

Value: Helpfulness

Definition: Helping and teaching others to grow technically

Things to enhance:

- Teaching people outside Technical Services
- Create simple examples for novices to follow

Things to maintain:

- Helping others in Technical Services
- Teaching firefighting

Outside of work, helpfulness included helping and teaching firefighters the skills they needed in emergencies. In 2009 I would add helping others grow in their spirituality and in all aspects of their lives.

Part of the exercise in discovering my values was to write a response to the question

"If I had my life to live over". In July of 1995 I wrote the following:

I'd take more risks—Grumpy Old Men quote—"The only thing in this life that you regret are the risks you didn't take." I'd spend more time enjoying mother nature and God's creation. I'd marry the same woman. I would somehow learn to be more accepting of "it's good enough." I would ask more questions more often when I was young. I would still work in some form of agriculture that helps feed the world. I would become less competitive and learn to play for fun and not always to win. I would cry more often.

In 2009 I would not make major changes to this paragraph.

So my children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, take some time to discover your values, write them down, and be true to them.

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I Want To List

Keep a list of "I want to items." Use the list as a map on your journey of life. Keep lists of: Things I

want to Do; Places I want to Go; Skills I Want to Learn; and Relationships I want to Create / Enhance. When you get older, the list can be transformed into a “bucket list.” Things you want to do before you kick the bucket (die). I have I want to lists and a bucket list. While I am alive the bucket list will be my secret.

Here are my recommendations for places to visit:

- North Shore of Lake Superior (Duluth to Canadian Boarder) first week of October
- Yosemite National Park in mid-May
- Sequoia National Park in May or June
- Drive the road from Wickenburg to Congress to Kirkland Junction to Skull Valley to Prescott, AZ
- Sedona, AZ
- Oak Creek Canyon near Sedona, AZ
- Drive Route 89A over Mingus Mountains from Prescott, AZ to Jerome, AZ
- Drive Interstate 17 from Phoenix to Flagstaff, AZ
- Great River Road in Iowa and Minnesota
- Northwoods of Wisconsin last week of September-first week of October
- Grand Canyon
- Wineries around Paso Robles, CA
- Harbor area of Monterey, CA
- Drive Pacific Coast Highway from Morrow Bay to Monterey

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Apologies and Responsibility

Apologize when necessary and say it with sincerity and compassion. John Wayne, as Captain York in the movie “Fort Apache” was wrong in saying “Never apologize, it’s a sign of weakness.” In the 2009 TV series NCIS, Jethro Gibbs commonly uses that reprimand. He is also wrong.

Apologizing is a sign of maturity and strength. Never forget that.

Accept responsibility, say it was your fault, even if sometimes it wasn’t yours to accept. An apology may come with accepting the responsibility. Taking responsibility, saying it was my fault, disarms an opponent or adversary. Knowing when to accept responsibility when it wasn’t really your fault requires experience and sometimes finesse. It is a skill to learn and acquire. It is a skill that can pay big dividends.

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Honesty

Be honest. Do not lie. Understand that honesty is different than politically correct. But also understand that the blunt truth can hurt people. Be sensitive. Sometimes a lot of sincerity and compassion is required to tell someone the truth.

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Making Decisions

Understand that making decisions is a required skill in life. **Always** consider the consequences of your decisions. Understand that you will seldom have all the information you want to make a decision. Understand that not making a decision is often the worst thing you can do. Also, don't make a decision too early. In making a decision, the old adage that "timing is everything" is a truism. The basic philosophy for making decisions is:

Don't make a decision until you have to but when you have to, make a decision.

Gather information to make a decision. Making decisions is just like a word problem in high school math. Most people conceive decision making to be a lot more complicated than it needs to be. Do the following steps:

- Understand what decision needs to be made
- Evaluate the information you know
- Determine the information you need to make the decision
- Identify the information you have that you don't need
- Identify the information you need but don't have
- Determine how to acquire the information you need and don't have
- When it's time to make a decision, make it using the best information that is available at that time.

Decisions should always be made based on intelligence and fact. Never make a decision based solely on emotion. The less emotion involved in a decision, the better.

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Learning is a Life Long Job

Understand that learning and acquiring new knowledge is a life long job. Graduation from high school, college, turning 21, or getting married is not the end of learning. Eventually, learning and knowledge turns into wisdom. Opportunities for acquiring new knowledge are everywhere. I acquired a piece of wisdom from the Chuckles candy pack. The saying was, "When you're through learning, you're through." That bit of wisdom has served me well on my journey of life. My generation has seen the greatest change in technology of any generation on earth. I have been in a constant learning mode all my life. I grew up before calculators, let alone computers. I learned to navigate by the sun and stars instead of GPS (yes in those "old days" you could actually see the stars at night). So remember, "When you're through learning, you're through" and also remember that "average is just as close to the bottom as to the top."

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A Story to Live By

I discovered the following story by Ann Wells in the mid-nineties. As you journey through life, pay attention to its message.

A Story to Live By

My brother-in-law opened the bottom drawer of my sister's bureau and lifted out a tissue-wrapped package. "This", he said, "is not a slip. This is lingerie." He discarded the tissue and handed me the slip. It was exquisite; silk, handmade and trimmed with a cobweb of lace. The price tag with an astronomical figure on it was still attached. "Jan bought this the first time we went to New York, at least 8 or 9 years ago. She never wore it. She was saving it for a special occasion. Well, I guess this is the occasion." He took the slip from me and put it on the bed with the other clothes we were taking to the mortician, then he slammed the drawer shut and turned to me.

"Don't ever save anything for a special occasion. Every day you're alive is a special occasion."

I remembered those words through the funeral and the days that followed when I helped him and my niece attend to all the sad chores that follow an unexpected death. I thought about them on the plane returning to California from the Midwestern town where my sister's family lives. I thought about all the things that she hadn't seen or heard or done. I thought about the things she had done without realizing that they were special.

I'm still thinking about his words, and they've changed my life.

I'm reading more and dusting less. I'm sitting on the deck and admiring the view without fussing about the weeds in the garden. I'm spending more time with my family and friends and less time in committee meetings. Whenever possible, life should be a pattern of experience to savor, not endure. I'm trying to recognize these moments now and cherish them.

I'm not "saving" anything; we use our good china and crystal for every special event- such as losing a pound, getting the sink unstopped, the first camellia blossom. I wear my good blazer to the market if I feel like it. My theory is if I look prosperous, I can shell out \$28.49 for one small bag of groceries without winching. I'm not saving my good perfume for special parties; clerks in hardware stores and tellers in banks have noses that function as well as my party-going friends.

"Someday" and "one of these days" are losing their grip on my vocabulary. If it's worth seeing or hearing or doing, I want to see and hear and do it now. I'm not sure what my sister would have done had she known that she wouldn't be here for the tomorrow we all take for granted. I think she would have called family members and a few close friends. She might have called a few former friends to apologize and mend fences for past squabbles. I like to think she would have gone out for a Chinese dinner, her favorite food. I'm guessing, I'll never know.

It's those little things left undone that would make me angry if I knew that my hours were limited. Angry because I put off seeing good friends whom I was going to get in touch with—someday. Angry because I hadn't written certain letters that I intended to write-one of these days. Angry and sorry that I didn't tell my husband and daughter often enough how much I truly love them. I'm trying very hard not to put off, hold back, or save anything that would add laughter and luster to our lives.

And every morning I open my eyes, I tell myself that it is special. Every day, every minute, every breath truly is...a gift from God.

by Ann Wells: Los Angeles Times: April 14, 1985

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The Sense of a Goose

In the early 1990s, Maxine and I were trained to be members of a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing team. We helped other firefighters, and emergency services people, deal with the mental and emotional trauma from “bad calls.” During that time we heard a powerful story called, “Do We Have as Much Sense as a Goose? It is a story that applies to all mankind. You need to remember this story as you journey through life.

Do We Have as Much Sense as a Goose?

Next Fall when you see geese heading south for the winter, flying along in a “V” formation, you might be interested in knowing what science has discovered about why they fly that way.

It has been learned that as each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in a “V” formation, the whole flock adds at least 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. (People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier, because they are traveling on the thrust of one another).

Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone, and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front. (If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those who are headed the same way we are going).

When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies the point. (It pays to take turns doing the hard jobs-with people or geese flying south.) Geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed. (What do we say when we honk from behind?) Finally (now I want you to get this) when a goose gets sick, or is wounded by gunshot and falls out, two geese fall out of the formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it is either able to fly or until it is dead, and then they launch out on their own or with another formation to catch up with their group. (If we have as much sense as a goose we will stand by each other like that.)

Author Unknown

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Birds of A Feather

There is an old saying, “Birds of a feather flock together” and it is a truism. To be successful, surround yourself with successful people. Sometimes the “surround yourself” has to be accomplished at a distance and that is ok. Observe people from a distance when you can’t get near them. One of the ways I have improved my public speaking is by watching others and learning from them. When I attend a conference or church, I listen to the speech or sermon but I also pay attention to how it is delivered. I also use this means to improve my writing skills. I read nonfiction books and stories for enjoyment and also to learn about the authors writing techniques. I’m surrounded by successful authors. “Surround” yourself with a flock of people that will help make you successful.

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Marriage

Marriage is a bond between a man, a woman, and God. Like a three stranded rope, it takes all three to achieve maximum strength and endurance. You must approach marriage as a once in a lifetime bond with your spouse. You must learn to live together. After the lust wanes that can be harder than it sounds. You must also learn to give each other time and freedom for individual interests and pursuits. Marriage is a give and take relationship, and there is a lot more give than there is take. The give and take applies to both husband and wife. It is not one sided.

At some point, all marriages have problems. Disagreements and arguments are part of marriage. When you argue, be sure you argue about ideas, actions, behavior. It is unacceptable to attack the other person, call them names, or belittle them. Confine the argument to ideas, actions, or behavior. Don't make it personal.

Approach marriage with the goal of helping the other person be all they can be. You must have faith, patience, and endurance to work out the problems. Every couple should read "Men are From Mars, Women From Venus." After Maxine and I read that book, we understood each other much better and our marriage improved greatly.

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High Quality Tools

Buy the highest quality tools you can afford. Bargain tools are not a bargain. It is better to wait longer and save up some more money to buy a quality tool.

Understand that having the right tool for the job is the difference between success and sadly saying, "I guess that'll havta do." Having the right tool for the job is also safer. The right tool for the job, a clamp instead of my hand, would have prevented me from cutting off my thumb. Take care of your tools. Clean and lubricate them. Keep your tools organized; a place for everything and everything in its place.

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Community Service

Make community service part of your life. You need to give some of your time and talent to your community. That is how American's improve their communities. There are many volunteer opportunities to serve your community. Seek out those opportunities.

At some point in my 36 years in Hudson I have been a member of the Hudson Jaycees, the Hudson City Council, and the Hudson Fire Department. The Jaycees were a community service organization for guys between the ages of 18 and 35. We installed playground equipment in the city park, we conducted community clean up days, we built a sidewalk in the city park, we conducted fund raisers for the less fortunate, we sold Christmas Trees, we ran a sledding hill; we did all kinds of things to improve our community. As a city councilman I helped conduct the business of the city. I learned

about city government and city politics. As a firefighter and EMT I did all kinds of stuff to help people that found themselves in bad situations. Maxine and I also trained to be part of a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) group. We helped firefighters, and other emergency services folks, deal with the mental trauma of “bad calls.” My work with the CISD team was one of the most rewarding experiences I have had in life.

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Luck is Preparation Meeting Opportunity

This is one of the truisms of life. Often in life we have the opportunity to learn new things or acquire new skills. We may not understand why or when we will need to know the information. Don't let that be a deterrent to you. Grab every opportunity you have to learn and acquire new skills. Somewhere in the future, an opportunity will present itself and you will be prepared. Others will tell you that you are lucky, but you will know better.

Early in my firefighting career I had the opportunity to learn how to control a fire that could cause an LP tank to explode. I signed up for the training because it looked interesting. It was also dangerous and scary but I like it. I doubted I would ever need that training. I liked the thrill of the class so I signed up a couple of more times. I learned how to be the firefighter, and I learned how to be the line commander. Well, Murphy's law prevailed. One cold winter night a hog confinement building caught on fire. A thousand gallon LP tank was next to the down wind side of the building. The fire was severely impinging on the tank, and an explosion was a high probability. I knew what to do and assembled an attack crew. Only two of us on the five man crew had been trained. I took the attack command position. We attacked the tank just as I had been trained. We protected the tank and shut off the discharge valve. Others said we were lucky. I knew better. On that bitter cold night, preparation had met opportunity. Luck had nothing to do with it.

I had many similar experiences as a test engineer at work. The expected situation didn't occur, and an alternative action was required. I adapted and made the situation successful. A lot of people thought I was lucky. I knew better. I was prepared when opportunity presented itself.

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Remember: Nobody Wins All The Time

When you lose, don't lose the lesson. Too often the focus of sports or life is on winning. We are told we win because we prepared correctly; we understood the opponent or problem; we put forth maximum effort; and we did the right thing at the right time.

Regardless of how good you are, someone will be better. You don't learn to like losing, but you don't let a loss overpower you and confuse your thinking. Learning to recover from a loss is an important aspect of life. It is a skill to learn, hone, and apply when needed.

Some of the most important lessons you learn in life are those lessons from a loss. Heal from the loss and look back on the loss for the lessons that were taught, and apply the lessons to improve yourself. It is not important how many times you get knocked down, or lose; it is important that you get back up and apply what you have learned. Remember the successful warrior survives to fight

another day.

Learn from mistakes, especially mistakes of others, most of us won't live long enough to make all the mistakes ourselves.

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Risk vs Benefit

Or

Choose Your Battles Carefully

In the fire service this philosophy became known as "Everybody Goes Home." In "normal" life, think of it as everybody remains friends. In the past this philosophy was also known as "It's more important to win the war than to win every battle." As you approach various aspects of your life, always evaluate the risk vs. benefit. It's not worth making a friend into an enemy over some minor point. Intelligent firefighters don't put their lives at risk to save property. If someone's life is at stake, firefighters take appropriate risks to try to save that life.

Sometimes it is necessary to know when to change direction and cut your losses. Sometimes the fire is very advanced when you arrive on scene. Efforts beyond your capability, and high risk to the firefighters, would be required to put a stop on that fire. Sometimes it is necessary to let the building go and save all the adjoining buildings. Sometimes success is confining the fire to the building of origin. Sometimes life is like that. Making a risk vs benefit decision is an acquired skill. Being conscientious about evaluating the risk vs. benefit in all challenges is a key to learning this skill. So make intelligent decisions of risk vs. benefit. Remember the goal is everybody goes home and everybody remains friends.

When hurrying and not thinking, not evaluating risk and consequences, bad things can happen. It only takes once. Disaster can happen instantly. I cut my thumb off in the drill press because I was in a hurry and disregarded the risk I took.

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Right-Wrong vs Legal-Illegal

Understand that right and wrong is not always the same as legal and illegal. As an example, the Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech. It is legal for us to say almost anything about anybody. It is not always right to say anything about a person. Sometimes silence is the right thing. Sometimes a little finesse of the vocabulary is required. You could verbally accuse a person of being rude and crude. But, you could also say "No one has ever accused him of being polite."

It is also legal to catch and keep a certain number of fish. It is also legal to keep the big ones and hang them on the wall. But, it is right to practice catch and release to preserve our natural resources. When you are faced with a situation involving right vs. legal, choose right.

There are times in life when you may face a situation where being right could also be illegal. In these cases, it is important to do a risk vs. benefit analysis. Always think before you act. **THINK BEFORE YOU ACT.** Evaluate the consequences of your decisions. Actions based on haste or

emotion often end with the statement “I wish I hadn’t done that.” Be smarter than that.

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Persistent but not Stubborn

Be persistent but don’t be stubborn. Stubborn people keep doing the same thing over and over and get the same results. Persistent people adapt the lessons learned and stay at it until the desired result is achieved. President Calvin Coolidge gave a great quote that best summarizes persistence.

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

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Manage Your Debt

Maxine and I did not put ourselves deep into debt. We borrowed money for cars and for a house. When credit cards became available, we managed credit carefully. We always had a budget. Credit card payments came out of our monthly savings budget. If we wanted something and the money wasn’t there, we didn’t get it. We **never** used our entire savings budget to pay credit cards.

A practical philosophy about cars and houses is critical to financial success. Maxine and I shared the same philosophy. Cars are mechanical devices to transport you from one place to the other. Cars are not status symbols. A Ford or Chevy gets you from point A to point B the same as cars costing twice as much. The purpose of a house is for shelter. It is not the purpose of a house to be a status symbol. We made a conscious decision to not buy a house that was so expensive that we could do nothing else in life but make house payments. When our car was paid for, we put the monthly payment into savings to create a down payment for the next car.

By the time Galen and Kim were in high school the only payments we had were for the car and the house. Managing our debt allowed Maxine and me to accomplish our goal of putting all four of our kids through college without them or us being deep in debt. We accomplished that goal with none of us being in debt. Plus, Maxine achieved her life long goal of going to college and getting her RN degree. From 1985 through 2003 at least one person was in college and often two people were in college. At the end, no one was in debt. Maxine and I did lots of things in life, and we were happy. We were never rich, but we were never deep in debt.

Manage your debt.

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Pay Yourself First

Learning to save money was a challenge when Maxine and I were first married. I was paid \$465 per month before taxes. Our rent was \$75 per month, and our car payment was \$75 per month. Groceries were \$75-\$100 per month. There wasn't much extra money. A friend suggested buying US Savings Bonds through payroll deduction. At the time, the late '60s, you could not cash a savings bond for 6 months after the purchase date. It was an "out of sight out of mind" savings program.

A twenty-five-dollar Series E Savings Bond cost \$18.75 and matured in about 7 years. I deducted \$10 from each of my twice a month paychecks and we purchased one bond a month. We kept some of those bonds for more than 30 years until they quit drawing interest. They were our emergency savings. Today, you can use your 401K to pay yourself. You can still purchase savings bonds. You can develop the discipline to have a credit union, or a bank, savings account and not spend it.

Paying yourself first is one of the keys to having savings for emergencies and a nest egg for the future.

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Leaders are Made, not Born

Take advantage of every opportunity to learn how to be a leader. I obtained my training and education via the local Jaycee chapter in Hudson. The U.S. Jaycees offered many courses and opportunities to learn leadership. I took advantage of every course offered. I applied what I learned when I was a city councilman and then mayor pro-tem in Hudson. I also applied my acquired skills to my job. Acquiring leadership skills was one of the key factors in my successful career at work and the Hudson Fire Department.

The United States is short on leaders, but we have an overabundance of managers. Never confuse the two. Leaders and managers are not the same. Choose to become a leader. Managers follow well-defined paths to achieve the expected result. Managers constrain subordinates to follow the defined path. Leaders forge new paths and create new processes to achieve results greater than expected. Leaders inspire their subordinates to grow and rise to new levels of personal and technical achievement. Leaders use the well-defined path as a guide. They encourage their subordinates to explore and redefine the path to achieve greater results.

In life, you sometimes have a choice to work for a leader or a manager. When you have that choice, choose the leader, and learn from him or her.

Books also offer an opportunity to study leadership. Rudy Giuliani's book "Leadership" is the best book on leadership I have ever read. Wess Roberts wrote two outstanding books on leadership; "Leadership Secrets of Attila the Hun" and "Victory Secrets of Attila the Hun."

Reading biographies is a good way to study leadership. I have read books about: George Patton, Winston Churchill, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Charles Goodyear, Douglas McArthur, John Deere, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, William Hewitt, Jim Bridger, Buffalo Bill Cody, and Kit Carson.

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The People Connection

Understand that people come into your life to help you and teach you. Some will teach you how to be a better person. Some will be an example of how not to live your life.

Some will stay briefly; some will stay a long time. Some you can't remember; some you'll never forget. All of this is a gift from God. Appreciate it.

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They're Not Wrong, Only Different

The world is made up of several types of personalities and leadership styles. Study the personality types and leadership styles and understand them. People who are not like you are not bad, stupid, weird, or wrong. They are just different. God creates all types of people, each with a different set of gifts and skills. The world would be a very boring place if everybody were the same. So study and understand the types and styles of people around you. Success in life depends on getting along with those that are "different" from you.

There will times in life when you will encounter people that you can't stand; people who are so different it is difficult to be respectful to them. In this situation, there is a **cardinal rule** you must remember. You must respect the position, or office, even when you can't respect the person. Whether that person is your boss, the president of your company, or the president of the United States, you must respect the position or the office they hold. Although he may be the worst president we have ever had, even Barack Hussein Obama deserves the respect of being called Mr. President.

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You're Not Good at Everything

Learning what you are not good at is just as important as learning what you are good at. Do not fret over what you are not good at. I worked in a filling station when I got out of high school. I discovered I was not good at waiting on and dealing with the general public. I liked and was good at mechanical things so I went to Tech School. It has never bothered me that I can't sing, not even in the shower. Just focus on what you are good at. That's why I worked in engineering and not marketing. That's why I was a firefighter instead of a member of the church choir. So use the gifts God gave you and don't worry about the gifts you didn't get. Failure to use the gifts God gave you is a sin.

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What is Success?

Never use money as a measure of success. Success in athletics or your job is fleeting. Success in relationships is forever. The story of what makes a successful person hung on my desk at work.

Who is a Successful Person?

A person who lives well, laughs often, and loves all mankind;
Who gains respect of intelligent men and women and the love of little children;
Who fills one's niche, does ones work well, and makes the corner of the earth
where God has placed him or her a better place than it was before;
One who feels the flow of beauty in all life and never fails to voice praise for it;
Who always sees the best in other people, and lets them know it;
One whose life is an inspiration to all. This is a successful person.

The most successful person I have known is Grandma Maxine.

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Pay Attention to CLMs (career limiting move)

Every job comes with corporate politics, political correctness, and a lot of do and do not warnings. Violation of some of these can severely limit your career. In the corporate world, it is often easier to obtain forgiveness than it is permission. But with CLM's, it is often impossible to obtain forgiveness. In your career, seek out the list of CLM's, know what they are, know the repercussions, and avoid committing a CLM.

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Be Patient with Career Changes

The story of the Stratton's and patience could be a book. For us, there is no middle ground. When a Stratton is born, you got the patience gene or you didn't get it. If you got it, you have infinite patience. If you didn't get it you don't have any patience and must work hard to acquire just a little patience. I don't have the patience gene, but Maxine did, and she helped me be patient when it counted.

Be patient with career changes or major changes in job assignments. When changes occur, allow yourself 3 years to be good at the new job and 5 years to be an expert. Be flexible when evaluating your desired career moves. I knew a guy at work who was working to obtain a promotion. He set a 3 year time frame and wrote the date in his Franklin Planner. When the date arrived, he had not obtained the promotion. With no patience, and no thinking, he quit the company. The paper work for his promotion was in process, but business conditions required it to be effective six months after the date he set.

Remember, patience and persistence can get you a long way in the journey of life.

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Be a Good Samaritan

In the journey of life, periodically do something good for someone you don't know. Before we were married, Maxine was a waitress in a hotel in Ames, Iowa. Her minimum wages and tips purchased the furniture and appliances for our first home. Sometimes when I have received great service from a waitress, I have left tips from \$20 to \$50 for a \$20 meal. You could do that in memory of Grandma Maxine. The world is full of opportunities to be a good Samaritan, be one.

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Memorize Bible Verses

Pick and memorize a few verses from the Bible that will sustain you in the worst and best of situations. Know some verses you can turn to when in need or when giving thanks. Some of mine are:

Romans 8: 38-39 1 Peter 3: 8-12
Luke 11: 9-10 2 Peter 1: 5-8
Romans 12: 6-8 Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8
1 Corinthians 9: 22-23 Ecclesiastes 3
1 Corinthians 12: 1-11 Proverbs
Ephesians 2: 8-9 Psalm 121
Colossians 1 15-20 (Essence of Christian Faith)
Titus 3: 4-7 Psalm 127-1-2
Hebrews 13: 1-8 James 1: 19-20

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Know Yourself

Spend some time with these twenty questions and get to know yourself. I discovered these questions when I was recovering from the death of Maxine. They are very thought provoking questions requiring deep thought and reflection. Write out the questions and write out the answers. Just thinking about them is not good enough, you must write down your answers. Use them in your journey of life to understand yourself and guide your journey.

1. Who is the most important person in your life, and why?
2. What is the one dream for your life you most look forward to achieving?
3. Who has the capacity to make you angrier than anyone else in your life, and what in particular does he or she do to make you angry?
4. Who has the capacity to make you feel loved more than anyone else in your life, and what in particular does he or she do to cause you to feel so lovable?
5. What is it like being you? More precisely, how do you feel about yourself- physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually?

6. When do you feel inspired? Who and what contribute to your sense of inspiration?
How does it feel when you are inspired?
7. What is the most important thing in the world to you?
8. If you had one day to live, how would you want to spend it? 9. When do you feel most afraid?
10. If you could accomplish only one thing during the rest of your life, what would it be?
11. What bores you? What always bores you, and what never bores you?
12. How important is money to you? How much time do you spend thinking about it, and what income level do you aspire to?
13. What is the role of God in your life? Do you believe there is a God, and if so, what is God like in relation to you?
14. In order, what are your three strongest interests?
15. Who is your biggest enemy, and precisely how and why did this person become your enemy?
16. How important is food to you? Do you think about it often, and do you feel disciplined in your management of food intake.
17. Does the idea of being married to the same person for the rest of your life sound appealing to you—or not so appealing? What is there about it that you would like or not like?
18. Do you think of yourself as an emotionally healthy person? In what ways are you especially healthy, and in what ways could you use improvement?
19. What is the role of conflict in your life? Do you argue or fight very much with the people closest to you? How does it usually turn out for you?
20. What specifically would you like your closest friend to say about you at your funeral?

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Respect for Your Ancestors

Respect the sacrifices made by your ancestors so you could have what you have to- day. The background of the Stratton family is farming. Previous generations started with nothing and built a better life. My grandparents persevered through World War I; my parents and grandparents through the Great Depression, World War II, the Korean War, the Iowa drought of 1956; Maxine and I persevered the Viet Nam war, the double digit inflation of the 70's, and the great farm recession of the '80s, and the overall recession of the '90s. Maxine and I had to borrow money for groceries the first month we were married. Each generation started with little but had the same goal of providing education and skills to their kids to help them realize their dreams.

I don't know any couple in the Stratton family that started life with much money. Many of us started with almost nothing. Each couple started life together with hope, faith, love, ambition, hard work, intelligent decisions, a tight budget, a fear of being in debt, and a desire to succeed. We started

with the philosophies and values our parents and grandparents instilled in us. They were the foundation we built upon and they served us well. May they continue to serve you. Appreciate and respect your heritage.

Quotations from our Ancestors

Glen Stratton (my grandpa): "It isn't what you have, it's what you do with what you have that counts."

Fritz Stratton (my father): "You can't learn any younger."

Art Stratton (my uncle): "We are family."

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