

May 20, 2013

To My Grandchildren Noah, Caleb and Benjamin,

As I write this letter, you are only two weeks, two years and four years old - the beginning of what I hope will be a life full of passion and love. We are just getting to know one another. I am looking forward to spending many joyful times with you.

I am writing this Legacy Letter so you, and any other grandchildren that follow, can learn about our family heritage, about my life, my principles and a few lessons I learned along the way. Perhaps in the future, some of my insights can help guide you during confusing or difficult times in your lives, or at a minimum give you a chuckle.

I believe grandparents and grandchildren can have a special relationship. Grandchildren have more tolerance for our imperfections - our wrinkles and scars - than they do for their parents. We can be who we really are, and maybe that's the beauty of being a grandparent. This letter shares some of my imperfections and challenges. I hope by being open and honest, you will feel the freedom to be open and honest with me - to relax and know you can always be yourself, "warts" and all.

Family Heritage

Let me first share a little about our family heritage. My parents, your great-grandparents, were second-generation immigrants. My mother's family came from England and my father's family came from Germany. There is also some Irish and Scottish in your roots on my father's side. My father, James Marshall Brown and my mother, Neva Jean Houlton Brown, both grew up on farms in a little town called Ireton, in northwest Iowa. They were high school sweethearts.

My mother came from a family of eight children, one boy and all the rest girls. She was quite the shot on her girls' basketball team. I remember shooting baskets with her out in our driveway, which was not your traditional motherly behavior. She was competitive and I think some of the competition embedded in me actually came from her.

My mother was very friendly. She never met a stranger. Our family would say, "She could talk to a rock and find out where it came from and who it was related to." She had a big heart for others, and I believe she passed that down to your mother and your uncle as well.

Great-grandma Brown was smart besides being outgoing and athletic. She graduated from high school in 1939, and was the valedictorian, but she did not have the opportunity to go to a four-year college. Instead, she went to a business school to get an associate degree.

My father was also a good basketball and baseball player and the valedictorian, graduating a year before my mother. They were quite the powerhouse couple. He came from a family of five children.

He grew up in the 1920-30's, much of it during the depression when there was very little money. It was a time when you had to really work to eat. I still remember my father saying he often worked for a dollar a day when he was a young man pitching hay on farms. After serving as a Navy medic with the Marines during World War II, he eventually went to college and became a large-animal veterinarian.

Although my father was not known for his spontaneity, I remember on one vacation in Wyoming, he was quite spontaneous. After leaving the highway we were bouncing around in a 1958 Pontiac chasing antelope over the prairie. That memory remains alive even today.

At home, I remember, my father would get up early every morning, and read his Bible and write. I would get up very early, I think in part, because he did. Your great-grandpa Brown loved sayings, and he kept them on 3x5 note cards in his shirt pocket and in a file on his desk. Whenever any topic came up, he always had a quip. He also had a very good sense of humor.

What I learned about Life and Work

One of my father's favorite Midwestern sayings was, "If you wrestle with a pig, you both get muddy and the pig likes it." This meant there are certain battles that aren't worth fighting. When I was younger, I took on a lot more battles than I needed to. Now I'm more focused on winning the war and less on each battle. I'm a little more strategic in taking on conflict. I try to think a few steps ahead and anticipate what might be around the corner.

Your Uncle Cody sometimes says to me, "I could have wrestled with a pig today, pops, but I didn't." He recognized that certain people are disagreeable just to be disagreeable, and it doesn't work to wrestle with them because they like getting muddy instead of solving problems. Our family learned it's helpful to avoid wrestling with a pig because it's unproductive. I hope you pass great grandpa's saying on to your children someday.

When I was a boy, we would drive his truck to the various farms to tend sick animals or to deliver calves. He treated animals from million dollar farms and he treated animals from dirt shack farms, but he always treated all human being as equals. I learned from him to treat people based on their dignity rather than income, social status or ethnicity.

My father gained a sense of equality, fairness and honesty from the military. During World War II, the military was one of the more integrated institutions in our country. I had a similar experience in the United States Air Force. If you could do the job, it didn't matter if you were green, black, yellow or white.

My 21-year older sister, who passed away in a car accident when I was 18, dated interracially, which was not as common back then. One of my best friends is an African-American man who grew up in a gang in the inner city of Seattle. Color blindness is a legacy that's been passed down three generations now, and I hope it continues with your generation. We are all created from God, and people deserve to be treated with dignity no matter their race or economic standing.

My parents instilled in me the importance of always doing your best. They would tell me that if you did your best, you would never have any regrets; you would always walk away standing tall. They also believed that education was important, and encouraged me through my education. They would say just do your best, but their standard for "best," usually meant needing to earn A's in school.

I believe education is important because it allows you to find your passion. In particular, studying the classics, such as Socrates, John Calvin, and C. S. Lewis, can help you find your passion because they are people with big thoughts. After reading the classics, you are more likely to be reflective since it is clear there is "nothing new under the sun". People have always wondered about life's big questions.

I still recall my parents telling me, they didn't care what I did for a living, as long as it was something I really like to do. I think many people try to be something that somebody else thinks they ought to be, and that's a huge mistake. Please remember, when your job is your passion, it's never really a job. For most of the time, when I've taken a new position, I had a passion for what the challenges were and what the opportunities were. I also had the ability to say no. In the professional side of life I think that's important. You don't have to say yes to every job opportunity that comes your way.

So how do you discover your passion? I think it helps to do different kinds of work. My first job was to help my father in his veterinarian practice. I would hold and carry equipment, and encourage good behavior from quite a few large animals, such as cattle or horses. I was often on the backside of those animals trying to get them to move in some direction. Perhaps, most jobs can feel like you are pushing from behind at times.

I was also a paperboy, a filling station attendant, a gardener, a roofer, a cook at McDonald's, and a delivery man at a laundry. One of the more interesting jobs was when I was an undergraduate. I was the "greeter" at a funeral home. I lived rent-free in the basement of this funeral home and received \$25 stipend each month. Occasionally, when they couldn't find a soloist, the owner would hire me for the lofty sum of \$25 and I would sing *Rock of Ages*. It doubled my monthly stipend by singing just one song.

At the time, I was dating "Gramee". I often gave her flowers and she thought I was a lot nicer than I was because the flowers were actually leftovers from funerals. She couldn't figure out why she kept getting irises, but eventually she figured out the secret. So a

good piece of advice is don't take the flowers from a funeral home and give them to your girlfriend.

The Air Force provided some interesting work, especially for a Papa like me who loves to fly. I was a flight surgeon with a B 52 bomb wing, KC135 tanker squadron, and also the Minute Man III-Missile Wing. As a flight surgeon, I flew in pretty fast aircraft, including a Boeing 707 (KC135) that is used for aerial refueling. I often lowered the fuel boom on the aerial refueling plane down into another airplane. This was of course while we were above 20,000 feet in altitude and doing about 250 knots airspeed. My air force work experiences were fun, but serious business too. I worked in an era where we actually had airplanes loaded with nuclear weapons and ready to go on the alert pad; our mission demanded that we could get eight B52s and eight KC135s off the ground in less than 10 minutes from the order to launch

I wish I could say I had a life-long passion to become a doctor. In fact, it was my strong competitive nature that prompted me in this direction. Prior to my older sister's death she was engaged to a medical student who also ran in AAU track meets, as did I. I was a pretty fast high hurdler and decent long-jumper in those days and often finished ahead of him. The illogical thinking I used during this time was "he was in medical school; I was faster, so perhaps I should go to medical school". That may be a slight oversimplification and yet was part of my thinking. It's the passion I discovered while I was a doctor that has kept me glued to this field. I enjoy medicine. I enjoy anesthesiology, and I enjoy the leadership that I've been able to embrace over my career. I feel very blessed.

I didn't get into medical school the first round of application because my undergraduate school sent the wrong transcript to the admissions committee and they turned me down based on the wrong individual's grades, but "Gramee" married me anyway during this time. I drove a forklift for a year and reapplied, and began medical school the next year. I have been in medicine ever since.

I was a flight surgeon in the Air Force and additionally did my internship in the USAF. Your mother was born in St. Louis Park during my third year of medical school at the University of Minnesota and Uncle Cody was born while I was an intern in California. "Gramee" lovingly calls the internship and residency years as the lost years since I was never home, and she was very busy with two little babies.

After my stint in the Air Force, I accepted a job at Virginia Mason Medical Center in Seattle, which jump-started my academic career and interest in regional anesthesia and pain medicine. At 37, I became chairman of the department, but I was a little young to be good chairman. I had great ideas, but I wasn't as effective as I could have been because I didn't fully understand having a good idea isn't enough. You had to listen to other people and engage them to help guide the needed change. Since Seattle, I chaired

different medical institutions and grew professionally. So that's a short version of the various jobs I've held.

The one piece of advice I tell my young mentees is if your boss asks you to do something, most of the time the right answer is yes, unless he/she asks you to do something unethical. It's important to solve problems. I've learned that solving problems is the currency of success. I also learned that it's okay to make bad decisions as long as you learn from them. Ironically, one of the worst jobs I accepted turned out to be a huge learning experience. The truism about careers and leadership is you can learn from everybody. Sometimes you learn what to do, and sometimes you learn what not to do.

Philosophies and Spiritual Life

In March of 2012, my doctors told me that almost all of my organs shut down, my immune system was dysfunctional, and my mortality prognosis approached 100 percent. I never thought I'd know the time of my death, but the Hepatitis C chemotherapy created a life threatening illness called Epstein Barr virus sepsis. I spent almost all of that March unconscious and delusional in our intensive care unit at the Cleveland Clinic. My hepatitis C was a result of being infected with the virus during my years in the USAF.

During the month, I sank into in a coma; I also encountered a near death experience. It's hard not to have that impact you. I thought it was so odd that, as a physician, I would be able to watch myself die. I listened in on conversations from my hospital bed, and some of the events going on around me, but my eyes were closed and I was mute to the world.

I felt close to Christ. I had no fear. There was a peaceful white light, but I did not have the sense of being down some tunnel or floating above my body like you're heard others say about their near death experiences. After I woke up, my wife told me that for about a 24-hour period during the middle of my ICU month all I could say was "Glorify God".

What I want to share with you about this experience is that the scriptures teach us there is life after death when you place your faith in your creator, Jesus Christ. Death doesn't have to be feared. I jokingly say, I was on the Lord's "catch and release program" and he decided to throw me back. There aren't very many opportunities for people to get to see part way across the chiasm- between life and death, but I did, and it made me even more convinced that our mission in life is to worship our Creator.

We are all spiritual beings. My favorite book in the Bible is Ecclesiastics. In Ecclesiastics there is a saying, "There is nothing new under the sun." It is a humbling statement that Solomon made, with many applications. I think there really aren't any new ideas in the world. There are takeoffs on some fundamental truths about people.

Everybody pulls on his/her pants one leg at a time in the morning. Growing up in a small-town in Nebraska I somehow had the idea that big cities were full of really smart people and elite universities were also full of really smart people. I discovered, there aren't too many people that are magnitudes smarter than everybody else. It comes down to character. I think character matters, and cleverness is overrated and common sense underrated.

I believe it's okay to disagree. It's not okay to be disagreeable. It is okay to embrace conflict as long as when you disagree there is respectful discussion, and you differentiate between the idea and the person you disagree with. It's important to tolerate the individual because of their God given dignity; tolerance does not mean that you need to agree with the person's concept.

One of my favorite books is called Tactics by the author Koukel. It's a wonderful book about the power of asking questions. For example, if somebody is really in your face with an issue, you might turn to that individual and say, "How did you come to that opinion or decision?" in an effort to disarm them.

I think that we live in a world where man isn't perfect, and he isn't superior. He is sinful. We have to try to be under the heavens or under God's authority rather than under the sun, which is under man's authority.

If truth lives in man, then the man with the biggest gun wins the argument. If truth lives outside man, then we have to look for the truth giver. I have tried to search for the truth giver and be honest during my life.

There was a time in my life when I was spiritually empty. I had everything a man could want. I had a beautiful wife. I had beautiful talented children. I had enough money. I had a prestigious job, but I felt empty. The Lord put several special people in my path, who became my trusted mentors and friends. They were people who helped me to decide to make the ultimate sacrifice and accept Christ as my savior.

Since then, accepting Christ as my personal savior has been a more important part of my life than my work, than anything. It saved our marriage and it saved me. It allowed me to go overseas and teach in Kenya, Thailand and Malaysia, and grow other circles of cherished friends. I met people such as Chuck Colson and Dr. Billy Graham, who helped deepen my understanding of Christian faith and theology.

I'm a small-town guy from Nebraska who's had undeserved opportunities, and I've tried to make the most of those opportunities. Christ is at the center of my life and my family; He is the most important variable. I think Christ helped me recover from my critical illness a year ago that drew the family together in ways that I couldn't have even dreamed before that. So it's a wonderful, wonderful walk that I've had.

Marriage and Family

My wife has been a trusted friend. There aren't many ideas that she and I don't run past each other. I often state "I married above my station". She's followed me around for 41 years. We're moving to Wisconsin in retirement because it is my turn to follow her; she loves winter! I hope my wife and I both have been willing to stand for principles that we thought were important, no matter what the consequences to us.

Your uncle, your mom and your dad are strong willed and ethical. I hope these traits come through to you. They all have passion for what they do, and an excellence in what they do. They're serving others. I think that's what life is about. Life is designed to give; it's not meant to take. If you give, you get much more back in return.

I want you to know that you are in my prayers every day. I pray that you grow up to know the Lord and the Lord grants you wisdom. I pray that you have passion for something that you enjoy. I pray you learn to love and create a loving family of your own someday.

I loved the Lord and did my best. It doesn't mean I did it right all the time, but I did my best. He has blessed me in ways that I could have never imagined. You are three of my biggest blessings. I hope you know that I will always love you, and I am here whenever you need me.

