



**David Gould
The University of Iowa, Coordinator
Interdepartmental Studies Program
Faculty/Leisure Studies Program
219 McBride Hall
Iowa City, Iowa 52242**

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Dear David,

Attached is a letter written to my mother for her 80th birthday celebration in 2000. My sister, Shirley, was 58 years old when she composed this gem! My plan was to create and send in my own Legacy Letter but then I remembered I had the ones written to my mom several years ago. I could not come up with better life lessons...so why re-invent the wheel! My stories would be different but the end result would be the same. I called my sister to ask her permission to submit her letter gift. She was delighted and truly surprised I had kept the original.

I am the oldest of the trio of sisters. Shirley went on to become an Iowa Teacher of the Year, an Australian exchange teacher, a world-wide traveler, a high school Assistant Principal, an educational consultant, a quilter, gardener and above all a great Mom herself and now a grandmother. She has applied these "Lessons Learned" in all she does. Oh, and by the way that mortgage is paid off since that letter was written.

Please contact her if you have questions: Shirley Fouts, 31 Wakefield Court, Iowa City IA 52240 – 354-4985.

Sincerely yours,

**Jan Erickson
73 Modern Way
Iowa City IA 52240**

The Lessons Learned

Now that I am retired after a successful career, I can reflect back about the lessons I have learned from you, Mom that made my life what it was and is.

Lesson #1: Do your best. The person who ultimately benefits will be me. Of course, Janet, Mary and I saw that axiom at work in your modeling of beautiful crochet work (which we all enjoy in our homes today), careful detail to painting the straight line near the ceiling, dedication to your many jobs at home and at work, and the trip planning so events and places could be fully enjoyed. I don't think any of us tackle a job without thinking we should do a "good" job.

Lesson #2: Be self-sufficient. In the age of changing culture when young women would not be only stay-at-home moms, you stressed the fact that we needed to be able to take care of ourselves. Over time that self-sufficiency has allowed all three of your daughters to maintain independent life-styles. This is probably the reason you allowed me to cut the legs on an old chair, so I could set up a "sewing center" in the basement where I was able to make most of my clothes when I was in high school, including my prom dress. This self-sufficiency also gave me the "guts" to travel half a world away with a 3-year-old and stay for a year to live and teach in Australia, still one of my life's biggest adventures!

Lesson #3: Be experimental. I am not embarrassed by failures; instead I just learn and go on. This lesson was most vividly learned when you explained why my oatmeal cookies turned out so hard and dry. Do you remember the recipe for "rolled oats"? Never after that did I take a rolling pin to oatmeal and roll it into a fine powder!!! All of this has translated into maintaining a home---which means I also was confident enough to do most the decorating and repairs myself.

Lesson #4: Take time to explore. While living in Waterloo, your three daughters knew the downtown well. You encouraged us to spend the day doing what we enjoyed. Saturday's are special memories because every Saturday on our way to town we would pass by the funeral home to see Oscar, the black custodian, who was often outside as we ventured on to the library. From there we went to Osco's to buy a "Rainbow Tablet" or to the Karmelkorn shop to get a treat to take into the movie. Of course, there were always visits to Niesners and Gamble's that allowed us to identify all those trinkets we would like to have. We shopped conscientiously, because we knew we had a 25-cent allowance that had to stretch to pay for a movie ticket, a treat, AND a trinket. You told us not to cross the track if a train blocked out path though we were tempted to do so on those occasions when the train "parked" for hours on the track that crossed our route home. And in Cedar Heights we knew the woods as our extended back yard. Every day except rainy days we were outside exploring the "rabbit paths", the "elephant trail", the flora, the fauna, and the pastures of sweet hay and clover. Of course, you always expressed your appreciation when we would bring the jack-in-the-pulpit, or violets, or dandelions home for displaying in quilted-pattern jelly jars, or the wild gooseberries for a soon-to-be pie, or the wild strawberries to sprinkle on our breakfast cereal. (However, I also remember the lesser appreciation you expressed for my collection of granddaddy long-legs that I turned loose in the house on East 7th Street!)

Lesson #5: Be frugal. While we had little money as we were growing up, I cannot recall the feeling of "being poor". I believe this is in part because you always bought the best you could afford and made it last a long time. Even today, Janet, Mary and I tend to

buy the "good stuff" and learned not to throw our money away on poorly made goods that in the end is not being frugal. What else can explain why my car still looks and runs great and it is fourteen years old; or living room furniture that still looks new after 22 years; and I see no reason to replace a dining room set just because I have already had it for 33 years! It is still sturdy and functional!

Lesson #6: Be all you can be. I can't thank you enough for providing me the means to go to college. Though I saved a huge grand total of \$800 for my college fund (which was to pay for clothes, entertainment, miscellaneous food, incidentals) by working seven days a week between an 85 cents per hour jobs at the Country Club and Hy-Vee and 50 cents per hour babysitting jobs, you and Dad paid my tuition, room/board, and books. I understood the sacrifice it was for you both and, therefore, I chose to go to school for three summers earning a degree in three years, which was more cost effective than taking summers off and attending a fourth academic year. (See "Lesson 5".) That dream to go to college when most of the Burlington graduates (girls, especially) did not go to college, gave me an edge that allowed me to have a "career", not just a series of "jobs". Incidentally, that \$800 covered those non-tuition/room/board/books costs for three years! Again see Lesson #5.

Lesson #7: Create memories. I remember smelling the freshly washed clothes on the clothes line, the 7-Up (pop was very rare in our household) when I was sick, the cinnamon rolls or chocolate chip cookies that were baked and ready to eat just as all your daughters hit the back door after returned from school, and the Cattle Congress with the punched pillows, butterfly-wing jewelry, funnel cakes, and glass beads. There were the trips to the Dubuque house, playing "gitty-up horse" with the robe rope in the car (much to Dad's dismay), walks to the corner grocery for "chocolate pop", brushing teeth with baking soda, playing with the shells in the stone wall, and the necessary outhouse. (I even remember the outhouse at Aunt Ella's that did not improve after placing a bottle of AirWick inside!) We loved both of our Dukes who were our four-legged companions for every outing, even though owning a dog once meant having car upholstery scratched to shreds. So you and Dad helped us to form lasting memories that are now cherished memories.

Lesson 8: Be fiscally responsible. You taught me money management through many actions, such as, allowing me to charge a purchase on your Schramm's (local department store) charge card only with the understanding that I would pay in full when the bill came. You also told all of your daughters that we should save our money first, then make our purchase. I remember year after year opening a Christmas Club account at the local bank to save for purchasing Christmas presents. Thus, you taught us that saving for our goals was the key to financial success and that debt is not a wise or good thing. You helped me from time to time by loaning me money when I needed it and then showed me how to track the principle and interest payments in the little notebooks until I had you fully repaid. As a result, learning fiscal responsibility has enabled me to live debt free for most of my adult life (the mortgage payment was one exception) and now allows me to live comfortably and securely in retirement.

Mom, thanks for all the lessons, which I recall were taught *without* a single lecture!

I love you, Mom.

Shirley