

LEGACY LETTER

May 10, 2007

In pondering what about my past might have led to life lessons, I have created my 'top ten' list – in no particular order. I continue to learn life lessons daily from my elders as well as from the current generation of young adults. We have so much to share with one another.

'Almost' Everything I Learned about Being a Grown-up, I Learned in My Growing-up Years in Iowa City, IA

1. You can stand up for yourself but it sure helps to have others 'in your corner.'

When I started kindergarten in 1950 at Longfellow School, my teacher told me it was time to grow up and take the 'i' out of my name. Since my given name is Janie, I tried in my nicest 5-year-old way to tell her that it was part of my name. The next morning my mother, Bernice Garner, accompanied me to school and gently told my teacher about my name. I was so proud to hold my mother's hand and have her confirm what I had said the day before!!

2. The world is full of fascinating people and cultures.

My second grade teacher, Mrs. Wallace, opened a window onto the world for us when she brought her radio to school and let us listen to Queen Elizabeth's coronation. I can still remember our excitement as we gathered around the radio.

As a student at the U of I, I was fortunate to be very involved in the International House. Preparing recipes from different countries alongside the students from those countries opened many windows of understanding and taste for me.

3. Given time, practice AND (your parents' or others') patience, you can learn and improve new skills and talents.

As a committee of one, I decided to stop practicing the piano when I was in 5th or 6th grade. Did my parents give up on me? No, they gave me the gift of time and patience (and weekly fees!) knowing that I would come to my senses sooner or later. I did, in a year or so. My parents and my wonderful piano teacher, Florence Meyers, rejoiced when I once again tickled the ivories on a daily basis. Maybe Mrs. Meyers' bulldogs (I was always scared of them) did too☺

4. Doing your part helps create a beautiful melody.

'Mr. J' (Glenn Jablonski) was my chorus teacher at City High. He inspired all of us to raise our voices in song. The musicals and operettas that we performed in those days helped us transform into a myriad of characters bringing joy to our audiences. Yes, even a very tall, skinny girl could be transformed into one of the Three Little Maids in The Mikado.

5. Reading expands your world.

My children's librarian, Hazel Westgate, (unique – definitely, eccentric – perhaps, a loving guide through the world of children's literature – absolutely) greeted me with a smile every Saturday morning when my mother made it a priority to take me to the wonderful old Carnegie Library to select my books for the week. Miss Westgate helped me travel around the United States, across the world, and yes, even to imaginary lands, as I literally read around all the shelves in that hallowed Children's Room.

6. Working with a variety of people in a variety of situations builds character.

I was a 'floater' at the downtown Younkers store the summer I was 16. While the hours spent in the 'older women's Shelton Strollers' department were less than thrilling, I was in a world apart when I was assigned to be the elevator operator over the noon hour. Putting on those white gloves and sliding that door grille in place before taking the controls are special memories.

7. Remember what the little engine said!

'Can't' never did anything I was told, so my motto and the one that I passed on to my children is to always be in an "I think I can" frame of mind. I can still see that little engine's smile.

8. Transitions are hard but they always teach you something.

Mrs. Brown, my wonderful red-haired 3rd grade teacher at Horace Mann, got pregnant that year and had to leave our class. In those days, teachers were not allowed to continue teaching after they started 'showing.' As a 3rd grader, I felt betrayed and just couldn't see how I could learn from anyone else. Though I don't remember the substitute who completed the year, I do remember that we all survived, kept learning, and even had fun doing it.

9. Being responsible can help you gain respect and earn privileges.

My parents always encouraged me to be responsible. They were AND ARE both excellent models of responsibility. One of my favorite memories of what being responsible can lead to was the day I turned 16. My father took me downtown for my driver's test which consisted of a written test and driving around the Courthouse block. After I received my license, my father, Buford Garner, walked me to the family car, handed me the keys, and told me to have a good day at school – wow, did I think that was a big deal (so did my friends!).

10. There is nothing like face-to-face communication at any age, but particularly as you are growing up.

In this day of 'communicating' in so many different and immediate ways, I can think of nothing quite as effective as the family dinner table. As I was growing up, dinner time was scheduled around activities and meetings. We always shared the happenings of our day as we ate together – no topic of conversation was off-limits.

My husband and I continued that valued tradition as our children were growing up. Working around everyone's schedules, particularly during their teen-age years, was definitely a challenge but it was always a priority. When my son went away to college, he wrote home that what he missed most was talking around the table. He couldn't quite imagine not being there and he couldn't imagine the rest of us being there without him!

Believe it or not, when I was growing up, we also had to negotiate face-to-face about sharing the family car, the family bathroom AND the family phone – imagine that☺

P.S. Barbara Cooney, author/illustrator of the children's picture book, MISS RUMPHIUS, encourages each of us 'to do something to make the world more beautiful' – at work, at play, any time, any place, as a friend, as a family member, as a colleague – always considering the needs of others.

Janie Schomberg

Janie Garner Schomberg

Resident of Iowa City, 1950-1967, 2005 – Present