

Reflections – May, 2007

Many weeks ago, one of my grand-daughters e-mailed me about University of Iowa's, David Gould request for senior citizen's thoughts on, "What I would have done differently if I knew then what I know now". She wanted me to write something and although I seriously considered it, just put it "on the back burner". Remembering some words my father-in-law shared with me decades ago, when I delayed typing a letter for him that he said there was "no hurry" about, "We always make time to do the things we want to do". A wise man and such a true statement.

Quite frankly, I am sure I would probably not have done anything differently. At the time, any time, that I was making decisions about anything, I was always basing those decisions on what I knew at the time. How can one ever change that? In October, I will celebrate my 73rd birthday, and I celebrate it not only on the day, but through the week and even the entire month! As the saying goes, the alternative is not good. Inside this body of over 7 decades remains a woman who seems to continue to think much as she did when she was about 27. Realistically, my body knows I can't turn a cartwheel in the yard, but my mind finds it plausible. How can I possibly have 5 children who have lived in 4 and 5 decades, 12 grandchildren, and 2 great grandsons? Where did the time go?

My life has been, and is still, full of blessings. Born in 1934, the youngest of 4 children with devoted, loving parents, my life was centered on family, church, and school. We were all encouraged to do our best at everything we did and especially to take responsibility for any action. Consequences always followed actions and each of us was held responsible personally for whatever we tried. My parents were children of immigrants from Germany and Denmark, Iowa farm children in large families, the first in each of their families to earn college degrees. Education was stressed. That was probably the only absolute expected of each of us. We grew up believing that anything was possible for us if we worked for it. Waste, in anything, was never part of our lives. Leftovers were eaten, the work in the garden brought rewards, chores were part of life, you didn't need formal lessons to learn (with the exception of swimming lessons). My mother was deathly afraid of water and therefore insisted each of us learn to swim. If you wanted to play tennis, you hit balls, if you wanted to learn to dance, you just danced, to cook, spend time in the kitchen, need something new to wear, try the sewing machine. But ALWAYS, keep learning and trying. The first time you did anything, you didn't expect to get it right, but the more you tried, the more you learned if you liked it, and if you liked it, you got better every time you did it.

I always knew, "Life wasn't fair". But, you made the most of whatever abilities you personally had. Every person had 24 hours per day. That part was fair. Material things didn't insure happiness or even contentment. Yes, they may make your life more comfortable, but there were far more important qualities to bring you the kind of peace that made your life GOOD. Near the top of that list was TRUTH. Truth about yourself, about what you say and do. Everyone makes mistakes, and I've had my share. What you learned from those mistakes, and how you dealt with the consequences, was much more important. As I think about it, I can even say that some of those mistakes I made

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were the best things that could have happened at the times. And some, I even enjoyed and later had a good laugh about.

LOVE has been important to me. I received it abundantly and it was modeled for me by family, friends, and teachers. Be it romantic, inspired by motherhood, or agape, it remains important in my life. Even when our children were young and disagreed as siblings often do, we used to insist we all say together, "We love our family" until laughter resulted. LAUGHTER is still high on my list of important qualities. It is important at times to laugh at yourself, but NEVER to laugh at the expense of others.

Trust, the ability to listen, treating others as you wish to be treated, willingness to help where needed, sharing, taking care of your own health with diet and exercise, forgiveness, hard work with fiscal responsibility and independence, withholding judgment, all are part of the deep FAITH I have had continually in my life.

Death, loss and grief are also part of life. As a widow of over 15 years, the sole survivor of my childhood family and death of more friends than I care to count, I know whereof I write. Whether the death of a sibling, parent, child, friend, or even a beloved pet, if you knew JOY because of that life, when the loss comes, the grief is part of it. Those times are when Faith, Family, and Friends can bring comfort into your life IF you allow that to happen.

Family history is important. When my first grandchild was born, I truly realized that he was not only a part of his parents and grandparents, but also a part of all those ancestors before us, even those I had never known as well. That was an amazing thing for me to understand and caused me to look more deeply into the lives of those who were part of me.

To be able to not end your life with regrets, you must live each day with what it brings and what you can bring to it. You must never be afraid to try, even if you are afraid you may fail. You just may succeed! At a recognition dinner, when our oldest was a senior in high school, the speaker told those students that their true test in life would come when they experienced the first time they didn't earn an A in a class, or when they didn't get a job following an interview. How you deal with failure or disappointment will be a mark of your character. It's always a good thing to remember that the word, average, is not a bad word.

Several years ago, I spent a year writing my "Memories". Not just events, but feelings I'd had at those times as well. It was my hope that my children, grandchildren and grandchildren would know me better because I was sharing my life with them.

What would I have done differently before with what I know now? As I noted, probably nothing. Live your life the best you can, enjoy the good, cope with the "not so good", try

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not to have too many regrets. Mend fences where you can. Tell those you love that you love them. Enjoy the simple things. Continue to keep learning no matter what your age. Remember that things are things. They may outlast people, but in your lives, it is the people that count. You won't take the things with you when you leave this world.

My "words of wisdom" are only mine for me. Every person will develop their own. You will never know how many individuals you influence in your life. Whether that influence is helpful or damaging remains to be seen. What you learn each day will probably impact how you live your tomorrows. Yesterdays may or may not remain in your memories, but for now, the only day you have is today.



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