

Legacy Letter

TO: David Gould, The University of Iowa Leisure Studies Programm

FROM: Louis De Grazia, PhD

I have been asked by Julie Seal from the Senior Center to submit a legacy letter to the project sponsored by your program. It is a privilege to do so and I hope it meets the expectations of the project.

Some Information about me:

Retired Professor of Religion and Theology

Taught at The Oberlin Graduate School of Theology (1965-67) and
Nebraska Wesleyan University (1967-1995)

Retired Pastor with United Methodist and United Church of Christ

Wife: Betty De Grazia, deceased 1991; music teacher

Children: Jordan Michael De Grazia, Chiropractor (Iowa City)

Elizabeth MacLachlan, Opera Singer (Toronto, ON)

Sandor G. De Grazia, Massage Therapist (New York)

I. Profession and Career

My undergraduate degree is in Math and Physics from the University of Michigan, after which I attended Seminary and Graduate school in theology, earning an M. Div, MA and PhD in Systematic and Contemporary Theology.

It was not important what the undergraduate degree was. It was only important that I did well in whatever discipline I chose. It was the discipline of learning and study which was determinative, not the area of study. Every course of study, every class, is important in one's pursuit of a vocation and career. The study of the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, for example, was as important in the study of Theology as it was in the study of Physics. Pursue knowledge, any and every aspect of it.

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Success in one's career has little to do with financial achievement. To love one's work is the single most important measure of success.

II. Children

When teaching courses in Human Sexuality, students (both male and female) would often say they did not want to have children. They gave various reasons, some seemingly legitimate, such as selfishness, not wanting to add to the world population, not wanting to bring children into such a cruel world, financial reasons, some of the same reasons I might have offered. My wife, someone I would have treasured for all time, died relatively early in life. Our three children all exhibit much of her wonderful aura. Being with my children is a way of giving immortality to my wife, being with them is a way of being with her. When I am with them, life with my wife continues. I wish I would have said to those students who wanted a spouse but not children that one does not know long one has with a partner and children are a way of fulfilling and extending that life together.

My wife and I had different methods of nurturing children. She was there at every turn, admonishing, inspiring, cherishing, encouraging, suggesting. I felt that parents should not interfere with a child's development and should simply be there when asked or needed, but to give independence and freedom to the children to develop on their own and in their own time. Either method on its own would have serious flaws. The combination, however, was quite successful. But perhaps the most important aspect was to let them know they were loved no matter what. Being at every event in which they participated, whether it be a musical event, a sports event or academic event is a way of telling them that they are revered, whatever role they played and whether they came in first or last.

III. Marriage

Finding one's life partner seems to take longer in contemporary society than it did 60 years ago or so. And keeping one's life partner for life in these times is rare. As Yeats has written, "Things fall apart, the center does not hold." Love is difficult to sustain, since its meaning seems to change with generations. Partners seem to split easily today, saying they simply do not love their spouse or partner anymore or that their partner has changed and is not the same person they used to be. Commitment is a word which has pretty much lost its meaning in marriage today. I happen to think that love is never lost. To be sure, marriage is covered with a lot of baggage over the years and loaded with extraneous stuff, but when one sifts through all the junk we have piled on marriage, what we came to love in the first place is still there. We will love our partner more on one day than the next, more one month than the next, more one year than the next, but it will never go away. If we say on Tuesday that we don't love our partner anymore, we say the opposite on Wednesday. The intensity of love comes and it goes, but that which brought us to love in the first place never leaves.

The most important thing in marriage is a word which seems far too simple....and that is the word respect. Respect for one's partner will allow marriage to survive. It is the single most significant aspect of a lasting relationship. We should look for and cherish and articulate the qualities in our partner that we respect. And never cease to say it to them and about them in public.

IV. The Role of Love in Human Relationships

Love is the magic of human life. It is the most human of all emotions. It is the single most important aspect of our earthly sojourn. It cannot be bought or sold.

Sadly, it is simply true that there is not enough love in the world. The condemnation of homosexuality, racism, sexism, rampant war and conflict have deep-seated causes, but it is not too superficial to say that one of the causes of all these ills is that there is not enough love in the world. And we seem to perpetuate this lack with justification of our widespread judgments against others.

Love is often rejected as too sentimental and superficial. What results, however, is deep division between people in our own culture as well as in other nations and people. Perhaps love is sentimental, but it is a risk worth taking. We should risk sentiment and love.

Also unfortunate is the fact that we do not express love enough in words and deeds. Of great importance to me is an article written some years ago by Mike Royko, a columnist for the Chicago Tribune, called "Say it Now." He wrote about the death of his wife and confessed that he did not tell her enough how much he loved her....until it was too late, which prompted him to admonish his readers to "say it now." Do not wait to tell your children, spouse, those we care about that we love them. Do not wait until you feel better about them or about yourself or until you are in a better place.....waiting to say we love them may be too late. Waiting is always too late. So say it now and say it often.

V. Sexuality

Our sexuality may be the most misunderstood aspect of our human life. Many factors have contributed to this problem, not the least of which is the role of the Church and Christian Theology in Western Culture. I will not adduce the voices in the Christian tradition which have made sexuality so problematic. Suffice it to say that they are among its major voices.

Perhaps the problem has to do with the Christian concept of Sin and Fall. One of the major notions is that the concept of the Fall meant a fall into sexuality.

In my view sexuality is one of the great human gifts. Our sexuality is a gift we all possess, which can be offered to another. To offer our sexuality means the offering of self, including body, mind and soul. Sexuality is not simply "sex." What goes in the name of "sex" today is the objectification of sexuality, the reduction of self to a thing.

In sexuality the other person is known. One can know another person more deeply than in any other way through sexuality. There is a communication of self in sexuality that happens in no other way.

VI. Death

The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, said that "when we are born, we are old enough to die." The meaning of this is too obvious in one sense and not so obvious in its deeper sense. Death is what makes us unique, since it is the only thing which we cannot share with another. And, as the existentialists would say, "no one can die for us." We need to embrace the real and present possibility of our not being in order to find our authentic self. Nothing will bring us to our uniqueness as much as the realization of our own finitude. How would we act and speak in every situation if we realized that moment would never come again, if it were the last thing we did or said. And the fact is that every moment may be our final moment. To take this reality into our life at every moment is our life is not at all a morbid thought, but it gives our life an authentic character. And since death is the only thing we cannot share with another, this "running forward toward our own death," as Heidegger put it, is the most significant character of our authenticity. Death is not merely when our physical body expires; it is living in an inauthentic manner.

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