

MORAL VALUES

by

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There has been nothing more significant in my growing up than the strong sense of moral values instilled in me by many people, especially my Grandmother Daisy Parlin, my mother and my father. In the 1970's, the lack of morality in the United States and the world is cause of great concern. We do well, I think, to look at the moral values of our forebears and study the correlation between their moral value systems and the quality of life they exhibited as persons.

Grandmother Daisy Parlin belonged to the old school of Protestant pietism which was governed by a loving subjection to "don'ts." Much negative criticism has been lodged at this pietism by subsequent generations of religious and non religious people. But in people like my Grandmother, these moral standards were coupled with dedication to serving one's fellow men; she accepted them in a spirit of love, and her acceptance and practice of them made her a strong person.

One of my recollections in the earliest years we spent in Grandpa's Silver Bay house was Grandmother Daisy's Sabbath taboos. When Uncle Charlie, Uncle Stew, Ed and I wanted to play cards and games like Monopoly on Sunday, we had to do it in our bedrooms, not in the living room where we usually played while the adults talked. This never upset me particularly. We simply knew that we had to play cards and Monopoly in the bedrooms on Sunday because Grandmother Daisy so strongly disapproved of these as Sunday activities. As I think back on it now, I was impressed with our Sunday Silver Bay routine on several levels. My grandparents and parents agreed that the family's first obligation was to attend church. That we all did together at the Bay. As to how we spent the rest of Sunday, the generations did not agree. I am appreciative, now, of Grandma's sensitivity to the "generation gap." She respected Grandmother Daisy and made it possible for her to be comfortable in our home by shuttling us kids off to our bedrooms on Sunday afternoons with our games. Yet she allowed us to play which meant she respected our rights to live in a more modern world where moral values about leisure time had changed.

Grandmother Daisy's Sunday morality struck me most forcefully one Sunday night when the button had popped off my pajama bottoms. I brought it to Grandmother Daisy as I was getting ready to go to bed. Grandmother took the button and held it in her hand for a long, silent minute. Then she said to me very slowly and very seriously, "Camilla, I do not sew on Sundays. I will sew this button on for you tonight, but in the future, if you need something sewn, you bring it to me on Saturday night." I was really horrified to realize that I had offended someone's moral values. I realized even as a child that I could not accept this pietism for myself. But I was enormously impressed with my first conscious recognition that people do have standards of moral conduct by which they govern their lives and by which they live. I think subconsciously I set out from that time forth to discover the moral values that governed my own life.

Many years later I was to have an interesting exchange with PopPop Smith, Dad's father, who was our minister in Englewood when Dad and I were married. PopPop, like Grandmother Daisy, belonged to the Protestant pietistic school of morals. PopPop did not approve of swimming on Sunday. (Grandmother Daisy had never objected to our swimming on Sunday at Lake George so this aspect of pietism was new to me.) In PopPop's defense I will say that I could see a difference between going down for a swim in a beautiful lake in your own backyard as opposed to going to a commercial pool or to a boardwalk beach at the shore. PopPop did not approve of any paid commercial activity on Sunday such as going to the movies and, as it turned out, swimming. PopPop let Dad and me know that he did not approve of swimming of any kind on Sunday. I really felt that this was unreasonable. For the first and only time in my life, I challenged PopPop. "What do you consider more appropriate for a Sunday activity—being out in God's beautifully created world, enjoying the closeness of family fellowship, or sitting in your living room watching baseball on television and looking at beer and cigarette commercials?" He sat in silence for a long while, and then quietly and soberly said, "I think you've won a point." We never discussed the subject again.

From my own mother I was exposed to my second conscious lesson in personal morality. One was in honesty. One was in self-discipline.

In the first area I sought to copy her. In the second I knew I could never match her.

I remember one time when I was in Junior High School, Grandma had taken me into New York City to shop. When I was growing up, all the large shops were located in New York City. None had branch stores in the suburbs.

We often rode on buses and subways. These were always crowded and it was a trick to shove skillfully to get into and out of these public conveyances. One time I remember we squeezed onto the 5th Avenue bus. The fare was 12¢. Grandma had asked the driver for change of a nickel but then had been pushed by the crowd to the back of the bus before she could add her 2¢ to the dime in the box. We drove down Fifth Avenue for our ten minute ride, and exited by the rear door. Imagine my embarrassment when Grandma elbowed her way through the crowd waiting to board the bus, fought her way back onto the bus, deposited her 2¢ in the box, turned around and elbowed her way back out the front door through the annoyed boarding passengers.

My own sense of embarrassment would never permit me to do such a thing, but I learned a life-long lesson that day on Fifth Avenue about scrupulous honesty.

Grandma was a woman whose life was dominated by self-control and self-discipline and determination. She was self-disciplined in her eating habits and in her personal life. When I was a teen-ager I began to gain weight, and I have remained heavy set ever since. Grandma told me that she had been stout as a teenager. I find this hard to believe. She never weighed over 135 lbs. all her married life. And she *worked* at keeping her weight there. At the most fabulous of feasts she would eat only a small amount of anything, and would pass up many calorie-filled goodies while the rest of us gorged ourselves. Grandma's mother had been a very large and very domineering woman. Grandma once told me she had determined as a girl not to be either fat or domineering. She was neither.

Grandma once told me that everyone in her family shouted. No one ever discussed anything—they yelled. Her mother and father, her brother and sisters all yelled and shouted. She was the youngest. She

realized as a small girl that she could never get what she wanted by trying to out-yell the rest of the family. Her strategy was to decide what she wanted to do, then quietly set about doing it. This quiet determination was characteristic of Grandma her entire life.

When I approached my High School years, Grandpa had become so involved with his business and church activities that he was often away from home. During those years Grandma decided to keep herself busy with interesting activities. For several years she joined a philosophically oriented dance class in New York. Later she began taking courses at Columbia University and eventually earned her Masters of Science Degree in counseling.

Grandma's self-discipline also made her an absolutely closed-mouth confidante. It was because of this that I suffered one of my most painful fears as a child. When I was in fifth or sixth grade I came to the startling and frightening conclusion that my mother was under a terrible stigma of some kind. I had figured out that anyone who came to know my mother well would suffer from terrible tragedy and sorrow. I spent many, many years in terrible fear that other people would figure this out and that Grandma would lose all her friends. I was literally in college before it dawned on me that I had turned facts and conclusions around. The truth of the matter was that since Grandma was so absolutely confidential in her relationships, all her friends came and confessed their sorrows and tragedies to her to benefit from her comfort and compassion.

Grandma's self-control allowed her to get through what was undoubtedly the most difficult Christmas of our life. The President of the United States had asked Grandpa to go on a very important mission to investigate the banking situation in Berlin, Germany, early in the 1940's. Germany was at war with England, but the United States had not yet entered into World War II. Hitler's government would only allow a select few to enter Berlin. Grandpa was one of these persons. Grandpa's reputation as an expert in the field of corporate finance was well known in many countries. The President of the United States knew that Grandpa was absolutely honest, and he knew he could trust Grandpa's report to be accurate and truthful.

As far as I know, Grandma raised no objection to Grandpa's going even though it meant a certain amount of danger for him and it meant a Christmas without him for us. Grandpa felt he had to go. It was a very grave time in world history and he felt his country needed him. That was enough of an explanation for Grandma.

Grandpa's story about his trip to Berlin and out again is a classic story. I hope he'll write it for our book. For my purpose here I only want to state the fact that for this Christmas Grandpa was gone, and Grandma, Uncle Charlie, Uncle Blackie and I had a pretty glum Christmas, even though we *tried*.

Grandma never questioned any of Grandpa's decisions about his business. One of the factors that made Grandpa's rise to fame in the business and church worlds possible was that Grandma made *no* demands on him and devoted her life to making his rise to fame and fortune possible. She never by innuendo or subtlety that I know of ever put any obstacle in his way. She *chose* to live a very lonely life in order to make it possible for him to travel extensively all over the world on his frequent business trips. As I say, she never stood in his way—except ONCE.

It was several years after the famous banking trip to Berlin. We were all eating Sunday dinner together in the dining room in Englewood. It was obvious that Grandpa was working up to an important announcement. He told us in detail about the latest case he was working on. And then he said, "I will have to be away over Christmas this year." Just as fast as a whip-lash, and with absolutely cold, iron-determined, but very quiet finality Grandma shot back, "NO YOU WON'T!" There was not another *word* spoken the rest of that meal. No one said anything. I don't think any of us, Grandpa included, had ever heard that tone of voice from Grandma before. But Grandpa got the message! I don't know how he altered his business plans, but he *was* there with us for Christmas.

That was Grandma's fierce determination.

Grandpa proved a more complex, though none the less powerful, moral mentor than my Grandmother and mother in my life. I have to confess that Grandpa's wealth was always a moral problem to me. For

one thing the biblical injunction that it was more difficult for a rich man to get to heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle bothered me. I questioned the morality of Grandpa's being wealthy but on the other hand I questioned the validity of the Scriptures judgment—for who did more good for his fellow human beings than Grandpa did? He has helped over 300 students go to college, he has defended many people without asking fees, he has been generous to a fault with relatives, friends, strangers, churches and church groups and philanthropies everywhere. He has served his community, State and national government with distinction. The house at 123 Hillside Avenue bothered me. It was simply too ostentatious for me. The fact that many of my school friends from public school absolutely refused to come to the house to play with me there added to my discomfort. On the other hand, Grandpa thought nothing of working fourteen to sixteen hours a day and obviously enjoyed doing it. He taught his Sunday School Senior High Class faithfully year after year and obviously enjoyed doing that. So I learned from him the absolute joy of immersing myself in a challenging task.

The moral problem posed by being a child of wealth continued to disturb me. One time Grandpa said that I was a snob in reverse. He challenged me that Grandmother Daisy had been a truly democratic lady. She could get along beautifully with dukes and princesses or servants and serving people. I, on the other hand, he pointed out, was unreasonably prejudiced against what I called the "country club" set. He felt I had much to learn. Grandma insisted at this point that I explain that the choice for me to go to public school rather than to private school like the boys, was my own! Again, it stands as testimony to Grandma and Grandpa that they believed in letting their children make their own decisions even if they might question their motives or wisdom.

I continued to be uncomfortable. So did Blackie. Whenever it came time for Grandpa to buy a car, both Uncle Blackie and I announced to him in a rather fresh pronouncement that if he got a plush Cadillac we wouldn't ride in it. This was when we were in school. The first car I ever bought was a 1936 Dodge which I bought for \$150.00. Grandpa told me many years later that he would have preferred to buy me a new car for safety reasons but he said nothing and only insisted on putting

four new tires on the car and taking it to his own mechanic for a thorough check-over to make sure it was as safe as possible. Uncle Blackie insisted on the plainest and cheapest car for himself when he got a car, and Grandpa said nothing to him. One year when Uncle Blackie and I were in college and graduate school respectively, Grandpa was about to purchase a new car, and he told us he was seriously considering buying a Lincoln Continental Mark II. This was about the most expensive and plush car that could be bought on the American market at the time. With great embarrassment Uncle Blackie and I looked at each other and came to a startling conclusion. For years Grandpa had allowed us to buy whatever kind of car we chose and he never raised his own private objections to our choices. Now it suddenly dawned on us that the least we could do would be to afford him the same courtesy he had afforded us. If he had allowed me to buy and ride in the cars of our choice we ought to be gracious enough to allow him to ride in the car of *his* choice. We said nothing.

It was in connection with the Mark II that we had a lot of fun that summer with Uncle Walter Oecshle.

Walter had come to the United States from Germany as recipient of a Herald Tribune* scholarship. He lived with us in Englewood and went to and graduated from Dwight Morrow High School where Dad and I had gone to school. Walter came back to the States to attend Lafayette College and our home was his home base. By this time Walter had become like another brother in our family and was seriously considering becoming a U.S. citizen (which he and Aunt Christa did after they were married.)

Walter was spending one of his college summers as a tennis instructor in an expensive children's camp at Trout Lake, only ten miles or so from Silver Bay. Walter was using the same cardboard suitcase he had brought from Germany many years ago. The lock was shot, and he had tied his suitcase with a piece of clothes line. Walter was coming to Silver Bay for a few days at the close of camp. He had called to ask if

* The Herald Tribune was one of the country's great newspapers. It finally folded after a long and bitter printer's strike. This is in itself a chapter in Americana.

someone would come get his suitcase for him. He planned to hitchhike to Silver Bay as soon as camp was out.

Uncle Charlie, Aunt Joan and I decided to play a trick on Walter. We decided to dress Dad up to look like a New York play boy and send him to get Walter's suitcase in Grandpa's Mark II Lincoln Continental. Dad was to tell Walter's campers that Walter was really a very rich kid with a Jaguar and several other sports cars of his own, that it was really so generous of Walter to be working with these children for a summer.

We dressed Dad in an outlandish costume. We found an old touring cap that had belonged to Grandfather Charles Parlin; we found an old pair of brown rubber sandals that had been Aunt Dorothy's beach shoes. We took Joan's Parisian silk scarf and tied it around his neck as a cravat, and we found an old walking stick in the back of a closet somewhere. Dark glasses and the Mark II completed the disguise.

Dad set off to get Walter's suitcase. Walter was flabbergasted when he saw Dad. He was too astounded by the terrible get-up to say a word. Dad carried off his speech about Walter the "rich kid" without batting an eye or cracking a smile. He patted Walter patronizingly on the shoulder within hearing of several camp kids and counselors and told Walter he didn't know why he hadn't brought his own Jaguar, threw the cardboard suitcase tied with clothesline into the back of the Mark II and drove off.

Walter said he was stuck. No matter what he said, the kids didn't believe him. So after awhile, he gave up trying to explain. It must give Walter great satisfaction now to drive into Silver Bay with his Mercedes-Benz 280!

At any rate, by the time I got to High School I realized that I was most happy when I was absorbed in a difficult and challenging intellectual pursuit. School work was a joy to me. Yet it was also clear, and became increasingly clear to me, that the moral problems to which I was seeking answers were basically religious problems. Protestant pietism exemplified by Grandmother Daisy did not satisfy me. Grandma had a firm and vital religious conviction which obviously was a strong and motivating factor in her life. But she never talked much about her convictions, and I regret now that I never pressed her to find

out what she did believe. She did tell me once that her mother always felt that Wellesley College had taken religion away from her. But I know that the intellectualized religion she had been exposed to in college had emancipated her from the pietism of her parents which was not compatible to her. But she never explained her religious position to me, and I was never able to benefit from her religious insights.

Grandpa's work ethic, so satisfying and fulfilling to him, was not a satisfactory answer for me. I went to college to major in philosophy, and knew that it would become necessary for me to continue in a theological education to try to reach some answer to the moral questions that were becoming more and more important in my life. Dad and I were married while we were at Union Theological Seminary and we spent three years there together.

It would be very neat if I could end this chapter with a succinct statement of my moral and religious position. But life isn't that "neat" and well-ordered. In 1970, the entire religious community is still reverberating to the revolution taking place as a result of the Vatican II Council in the Roman Catholic Church. The churches, both Protestant and Catholic, are in a serious era of transition, and all of us who hold convictions are being challenged to re-evaluate my re-think *all* of our positions. I would have said that I considered myself a liberal Protestant, but I'm not even sure, now, what that means.

Even so, I cherish the heritage I have received from my parents and grandparents. The strong foundation that they have given me to build upon stands me in good stead in facing these uncertain and challenging times. I am absolutely certain that a person must stand by his sense of personal values, whatever they are, and not compromise on his most fundamental convictions. I am absolutely certain that personal honesty is an essential quality in establishing a sense of inner well-being. I know that joy in hard work is a blessing available to us all especially in this time of frustration, change and uncertainty.

One of the most heartening aspects of the student culture of the 1970s is the reassertion of the importance of values. College students are eagerly studying religious thought (Western and Eastern) and are reexamining value systems of all kinds. I find myself eagerly entering

into this re-examination and new confirmation of values. I hope you children will find meaning in life through a system of values of some kind. They will obviously be moral concepts that are as different from my generation as Grandma's values were from her generation. I hope you will feel the support of generations of family who have lived by moral values in whatever difficult decisions that face you in life as I have felt from my parents and grandparents in facing the decisions of my life.