

Chapter One

Live Memorably

"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know; the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve." 1

Dr. Albert Schweitzer

"Do you recognize my voice?" the gravely voice queried. Brian sped through his yesterdays. No, the voice wasn't familiar. The man mentioned his name. The name wasn't familiar either. Finally, the man said the name of his son. Ah, yes, Brian, *did* remember. He'd taught the son a few basic guitar chords, C, G, Am, at a summer camp years before.

"Do you remember what you said to him?" the man asked. Actually Brian did. "I told him to buy a guitar but never put it in it's case. Leave it out", I told him. "I thought he'd be more likely to pick it up like when he was doing other things like watching television."

"Yes," the man said. "And my son did exactly what you said. The

guitar became his life. My son even majored in classical guitar going on to receive his Masters degree. Segovia, the greatest guitarist in the world, asked my son to be one of his last students. Segovia even came to one of my son's recitals...I am calling now to thank you." Putting down the receiver, Brian felt a smile stretch deliciously across his face. Such a simple act, such huge implications.

What about you? Would you like a call like that? Would it bring you joy to have someone call you to say that something you did changed their life? Would you like to hear that you personally opened a door to someone's destiny? I think you might.

You may become a part of a very large movement of people who are beginning to live a life that outlives themselves. A movement of people bored with self-absorption, sick of affluenza, men and women willing to invest themselves in another generation. Can you see it? Imagine ... you and an entire generation of people like you, embracing the next generation into greatness. You're still reading? Good.

You are perfect for this very thing. You were made to change lives, to open doors, to kiss people awake. I hope to convince you of it. There are people even now who are waiting for you. It's not difficult. Right now is a great time to start.

You were made for this. Have you asked yourself your purpose? Have you asked yourself why you, you very specifically, are alive?

Would a gravestone that simply said lived and died, accompanied by relevant dates, satisfy you?

A few years back some friends from back East were visiting us in Southern California. We had just built a home full of windows revealing sweeping views of the ocean and the mountains. We loved sharing the spectacular view. Blessed with friends all over the world, people found their way quickly to our door.

My Epiphany

While our friends from D.C. were with us, I had the most important epiphany of my life. I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I didn't want people standing around my grave remembering great moments of hospitality with us.

I knew emphatically that I didn't want people remembering that I wrote books that made them think, (hopefully, this one will do that). I wanted to become a memorable speaker, but that was not what I wanted people to remember most. No, no, absolutely not.

With great clarity I knew I wanted people standing around my grave saying one thing and one thing only. I wanted people, particularly *young* people, saying I had changed their lives. Anything less would mean for me, a wasted life.

I admit, it was a tall order for a small life. Living a life that outlives you... by embracing a generation into greatness sounds a tad grandiose. But it's utterly doable. I hope to show you in this little

book that all it takes is a heart willing to engage. You yourself have seen it. Simple, intentional moments can result in amazing outcomes.

“But I don’t know how to teach someone guitar.” you might say. There’s nothing about my life, anyone would find interesting. I have nothing to give.” May I gently reiterate? You, no matter who you are, can impact another generation’s future.

Did I just catch you raising your eyebrows and rolling your eyes? Look me in the eye friend. You are hardwired to bless. Your specific story, your personal heartaches and disappointments, your failures, your successes, your distinct brand of humor, your touch, everything you are, can like Brian, open a door of destiny to another generation.

Let me tell you a marvelous secret, a secret few know. Hear it and mark it well. *We cannot unlock ourselves... each of us holds a key to another.* You have in your hand a distinct and unique key. This key may not be immediately obvious to you. You might not feel it's cool steely weight or it's incredible potential. But it's your key. No one else on earth has this exact key.

A Kiss That Opened A Door

For Andor Foldes, the key was a kiss. Andor, actually remembers two kisses. His father kissed him when he was seven and thanked him for helping in the garden. Even though that kiss was over six decades earlier, Andor could remember it, as though it were

yesterday. (Note to reader; be sure to spend all your kisses). But it was another kiss that changed Andor's life forever.

At age sixteen, living in Budapest, Andor was already a skilled pianist. But due to a conflict with his piano teacher, he was at an all time low. In the midst of that very troubled year, one of the most renowned pianists of the day came to the Budapest to perform. Emil von Sauer was not only famous because of his abilities at the piano, he also enjoyed the fame of being the last surviving pupil of Franz Liszt.

Sauer requested that young Andor play for him. Andor obliged the master with some of the difficult works of Bach, Beethoven, and Schumann. When he finished, Sauer walked over to him and kissed Andor on the forehead.

“My son,” he said, “when I was your age I became a student of Liszt. He kissed me on the forehead after my first lesson, saying, ‘Take good care of this kiss -- it comes from Beethoven, who gave it me after hearing me play.’ I have waited for years to pass on this sacred heritage, but now I feel you deserve it.”

You friend, may not be a renowned pianist, but you do have a sacred heritage you can pass on to another generation. One of my sacred heritages is story. My mom surrounded me with thousands of books, many of them biography's of famous men and women. I know more stories than I could ever tell. I can pass on the kiss of other generations because I know their stories.

A Desire That Opened A Door

Do you remember the delicious feeling of being desirable to someone? I don't mean sexually desired, that's wonderful as well, but I am talking about times when you knew someone desired your company. Billions of dollars are poured yearly into making you think that you are not desirable unless you buy a certain product, look a certain way, or smell like a particular fragrance. Desirability is an exquisite gift. Let me tell you about a teacher who gave that gift to a girl named Mary.

Author John Trent, tells the Mary's poignant story. Born with a cleft palate, Mary's misshaped lip, crooked nose, and garbled speech, made her the brunt of cruel jokes.

With all the teasing, Mary grew up hating the fact that she was "different." She was convinced that no one, outside her family, could ever love her ... until she entered Mrs. Leonard's class.

Mrs. Leonard had a warm smile, a round face, and shiny brown hair. While everyone in her class liked her, Mary came to love Mrs. Leonard.

In the 1950's, it was common for teachers to give their children an annual hearing test. However, in Mary's case, in addition to her cleft palate, she was barely able to hear out of one ear. Determined not to let the other children have another "difference" to point out, she would cheat on the test each year. The "whisper test" was given by having a child walk to the classroom door, turn sideways, close one

ear with a finger, and then repeat something which the teacher whispered.

Mary turned her bad ear towards her teacher and pretended to cover her good ear. She knew that teachers would often say things like, “The sky is blue,” or “What color are your shoes?”

But not on that day. Surely, God put seven words in Mrs. Leonard’s mouth that changed Mary’s life forever. When the “Whisper test” came, Mary heard the words: *“I wish you were my little girl.”* 2

You can speak worlds into existence. I am sure there were things said to you that you, no longer how old you are this moment, still remember. Words can crater into your heart and alter your entire topography. An affirming sentence can sculpt an extraordinary future. You need no talent, charm, beauty or riches to give the gift of a sentence filled with tenderness.

I remember a sentence a teacher gave me in 6th grade. I was moving far away, and my teacher made a handmade card that said “As you move south, your friends to the north will miss you.” My childhood was filled with moving, and I rarely had friends. It never occurred to me anyone would miss me, not in a thousand years. I read that card over and over and kept it as a treasured possession.

A Sentence That Opened A Door

Consider another teacher, Dr. Howard Hendricks, and his pupil Bruce Wilkenson. Bruce handed in a paper in graduate school, and Dr. Hendricks graded it "A+". But he didn't stop there, with red ink

he wrote across the top of the paper, "An absolutely outstanding paper. I believe you have the potential to become one of our countries greatest teachers!" Bruce went on to become the author of the best selling book Prayer of Jabez. Bruce says of Dr. Hendricks; "He has an incredible passion to believe you into greatness. He never stops believing."

Professor Hendricks himself was believed into greatness by Professor Merrill C. Tenney. One day Tenney put his arms around the young Hendricks and said; "Howie, I believe in you. God has a great future for you and I want you to know I am 100% on your team."

Pushing People Into Their Future

As you live a life that outlives you, you might find yourself like Sherwood Anderson pushing and provoking people into greatness. Anderson, an author who was well know for less than a decade, pushed and prodded a stellar cast of writers into their destiny.

Anderson began by putting his arm around a brash young ambulance driver fresh from fighting WWI in Italy. For two long years, Sherwood unrepentantly bloodied and bathed the young writer's work in red ink. He pushes, prods and provokes, until the young man's words sprang to life off the page, vivid, sharp, and full of immediacy.

In 1926, the young man, claiming everything he ever learned about writing he learned from Sherwood, published his very first novel,

The Sun Also Rises. Ernest Hemingway was on his way to literary fame.

After Hemingway, Sherwood went on to provoke authors you were probably made to read in school; William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and John Steinbeck. Three of Sherwood's young men went on to earn Nobel prizes for literature, and four of them won Pulitzers.

Someone commenting on Sherwood's life said *he was the only author of his day to reproduce his style and vision into the next generation of writers*. Sherwood's fame as an author only lasted a brief decade but the men he believed into greatness will be read for decades to come.

Doctor, sailor, candlestick maker, when it's all said and done you have two choices; try to unlock yourself, or unlock the destiny of the generation after you. We choose on a daily basis. The consequences of our choosing are extraordinary and eternal.

You might be protesting, "But my life is so busy, I don't have time to think about kissing, believing, encouraging or provoking anyone into greatness. I don't have anything to offer. I don't know how to teach guitar, or grade papers, or mentor authors. All I have is a very small life that couldn't influence anyone. I have to shout over the television to even be heard." This is a common objection, but let me gently say it again. You, yes you, are perfect to embrace a generation into greatness. Let me prove it to you.

History is full of examples of people with very ordinary lives and

professions whose actions dramatically changed the future. Ever heard of a woman named Pua? I imagine not. Pua lived many thousands of years ago in the Middle East. She served Pharaoh as a midwife to Jewish slaves. Now being a midwife doesn't sound like it has much potential to dramatically impact history does it?

Pua probably didn't get out of bed each morning and say "I think I'll change history today." Pharaoh, Pua's boss, was a little paranoid that his slaves might have more children than the Egyptians and then rise up in revolt. Pua's job was to deliver baby girls...no boys, only girls.

Boys were to be smothered at birth. But Pua decided that killing baby boys at birth was not right. So she allowed them to live. One day she and another midwife named Shiprah allowed a certain baby boy born to Aram and Jochebed to live. That baby, Moses, grew to become the greatest leader in all of Jewish history. Pua's key unlocked the future freedom of 1.5 million slaves insuring the future of the Jews.

Generativity

Brian, Saur, Mrs. Leonard, Sherwood Anderson, Professor Hendricks, Pua, are just a few of thousands of people who illustrate to the power of generativity. You probably weren't just talking about generativity the other day with your friends at Starbucks. It's six syllables and foreignness could be seriously off putting. But I hope this wonderful word becomes a word millions learn to love

and live.

Generativity is defined as *the intentional care, guidance, and establishment of the next generation*. As humans we tend to not give too much thought about the future. Our lives are busy, compacted, dense, full of unceasing demands. Option rich, we approach our days with serial exhaustion. We have little energy to think about future generations. We just want to get by.

We are often like a famous king in history. A wise man went to him and foretold a disastrous future. “Your sons and grandsons will be eunuchs in the house of the King of Babylon. All your possessions and people will be carted off”. The King hearing this disastrous news said “It’s a good word, because it won’t happen in my lifetime.”

Before your blood boils at his cluelessness, realize that is often exactly our response about the environment, about future generations, about the long term ramifications of political decisions. As long as our personal prospects are secure, we really don’t want to serious think about creating a preferred future..

We Present You

Decades ago with video camera’s new on the market, my darling husband Joey and I decided to start a new business called We Present You. The idea was to film people telling their stories to a generation who would be born after they had lived. You probably guessed how the company fared. It was an embarrassing and utter

flop. Naively, we hadn't factored in the fact that no one wants to face their impending mortality no matter how close it might be. Needless to say, we had few customers.

This very human tendency to not consider the future, explains much of why the world is what it is today. Because our ancestors felt much like we do. Live for the moment, let the future take care of itself. Just survive today. Get all you can, any way you can and let future generations deal with the aftermath

Everywhere you look you see the effects of our shortsightedness. Corrupt leaders create chaos leaving the next generation with ruined environments and desolate cities. Life crumbles to dust when generativity is not embraced. Culture disintegrates and goes feral.

The consequences are enormous. If you look at much of the evil of the world, you can often trace it back to a loss of generativity. There were very few people intentionally caring, guiding and establishing the next generation. Little thought was given to a preferred future. Children were left to grow on their own, like weeds. There was no cultivation, no watering, no nutrient rich environments, no intentionality in guidance, little encouragement, very little if any, believing and embracing a generation into greatness.

Foster Children

This truth was recently driven home to me, at a foster camp for

abandoned teenage girls. This camp served just a tiny segment of the 518,000 foster children in America. The girls were poignant, beautiful in wistfulness. Their stories stretched my mind past credulity. Were there really parents that clueless, that self-absorbed? Unfortunately there are parents who live entirely for themselves and their own addictions. One mother paid her young daughter to stay home from school, and baby-sit her younger siblings, so the mother could party all night and sleep all day. Another's mother introduced her to drugs before she was a teenager.

Can a cure be found, strong enough to heal a generation of children who have been devastated by a parent's poor choices? I believe there is, and I believe you are part of that cure. Picture an entire generation embracing a lifestyle of generativity. Imagine a generation moving from success to significance, finding and using keys to unlock destiny in others.

Research is conclusive, the strongest predictor of a child at risk succeeding, is the presence of a caring non-relative in their life.

Graveyards The Wealthiest Real Estate

It's been said that graveyards are the wealthiest real estate in the world. In them, lie symphonies never heard, books never published, art never painted, scientific solutions never discovered. Graveyards are a sad depository of things never attempted, risks not taken, visions unseen. Cemeteries hold much more than dead bodies.

They contain dead dreams, dead gifts, dead possibilities. It's real estate full of unused keys, people who died never discovering the key they held to unlock the future of others.

Graveyards should make us weep not only for the loss of loved ones, but for the unrealized future buried among them.

It doesn't have to be this way. The good news is that there is a gentle revolution underfoot of generative people. It's a global phenomena. Retirees are feeling an urge to move from success to significance. Insightful people are starting to passionately care about the future. Our generation is engaging the next, people are stepping forward. This is a revolution of action. May I recruit you?

Ponderings

1. Could I be described as generative (taking care to establish and guide the next generation), or am I self-absorbed?
2. What are some simple specific ways I could engage young people?
3. What adult influenced me most in my childhood?
4. Why does generativity matter?

¹ Albert Schweitzer Schweitzer; Albert Scweitzer, quoted in John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable qualities of a Leader* (Nashville; Nelson, 1999), 139

² John Trent, Ph.D., Vice President of Today's Family, *Men of Action*, Winter 1993, p. 5

Chapter Two

Issue Invitations

Once you've decided to embrace a generation into greatness, you'll be jaw dropped in discovering that this generation is looking for you. Me you say? Yes, you! It may be hard for you to wrap your mind around, you may find it befuddling, but I assure you it's true.

Perhaps you're thinking; "Oh Yeah? You don't know the mistakes I've made with my own children." Maybe your own biological children are rebellious, emotionally distant. Maybe they even hate you. You may be filled with deep regrets...you wish you'd been more attentive, more present, been more intentional, less preoccupied with personal fulfillment, you've gone over and over it a thousand times. Time sped by and before you knew it your children were grown and perhaps bitter. You're not expecting them to rise up and give you a world's greatest parent mug, anytime soon.

If this is your story, I'd suggest you call or write your children and tell them your regrets. Humility will open an amazing door of healing. Don't talk about their failings, talk about yours. It is one of the best gifts you can give your children. It is never too late.

No matter how great a failure you perceive yourself to be, you have the opportunity now to flip the script. Your pain can become a curriculum of compassion, an agenda for mercy. Mark it well friend, your tomorrows are not predicated on your yesterdays.

This Generation Is Not Looking For Perfection

This generation isn't looking for perfection. They've been born and bred in a media age. They've seen the mighty fall...multiple times. This generation is looking for authenticity. People who have wrestled with life and still preserve hope. People who know that evil is never ultimate. Authenticity is what catches the eye and heart of this generation.

They are looking for you. This is a well kept secret you have to know. The reason this is still a secret is they don't know how to tell you. When I was growing up in the sixties, people who were accepted by the younger generation, were cool, hip up to date, they had their finger pressed firmly on the culture's pulse. They spoke the right language, watched the right shows, they listened to the right groups and wore the right clothes.

I, on the other hand, was singularly not happening, completely un-cool. My mom had distinct ideas about modesty, so I wore peculiar

clothes. I was not only more serious than God, but because my mom was brilliant, I had a prodigious vocabulary. I was decidedly non-athletic.. (Team captains would argue vehemently over who had to take me). I wore, (this is still true) thrift store clothes. So you can imagine my utter incredulity, when I started noticing this generation wanted to hang around me. I was floored. I kept scratching my head.

Unlike the Boomer generation (those born between 1946-1964), whose mantra was :Don't trust anyone over 30"!" and "Question Authority!" This generation wistfully longs for someone older to befriend them. This generation thinks older people are wonderful. They have what I call "elder crave". They ache for people like you. They are yearning for someone, anyone, to notice them and welcome them into their world.

Learn To Issue Invitations

Here's the rub; we are waiting for an invitation into their lives, and they are waiting for our invitation into ours. People who've changed history, never waited for invitations, they issued them. If you don't remember anything else in this conversation, please remember this; *Learn to issue invitations*. It doesn't have to be an invitation to some amazing event, just invite someone out for coffee or tea. Invite someone into your life with a smile, and go wherever love takes you

Recently a friend who sometimes travels with me graduated from

high school I called and said “Jesse, I don’t know what kind of graduation gift you’d like.” Jesse replied immediately; “*What I’d like is time with you. Let’s have breakfast!*” I attempted a scrumptious breakfast, as we told each other stories, and laughed our way through berries and French toast.

Issuing invitations is like handing out Valentines. It’s simply saying “Hey I see you. I’d like to be your friend. How about it?” You’ll find that issuing invitations is much simpler than you initially thought.

Learn to ask them; “So what’s your secret ambition?”

Conversations of substance are rare between the generations. Most young people only hear; “My how you’ve grown!” It can get very old. Ask about their dreams and hopes, ask if they could do anything, go anywhere, play any part, what would they love to do?

A few years back I spoke in a city called Malibu and a young woman who heard me emailed me the next day. I invited her to dinner and a few weeks later, we shared stories about our childhoods. Even though I was decades older, we found our stories were similar.

I found myself apologizing to her for the way my generation had spiritually misled hers. She sobbed as I apologized. I dimly realized I needed to hold her. As I looked at this talented gifted young woman, I realized I could have easily missed the beauty of her friendship. I could have just shown up, given a speech, and left the meeting. Thankfully my heart took note of her, and I followed

through. Since that night, we've become good friends. Andrea's taught me a lot about her generation. We've traveled to four countries together, and hope to go to many more.

Invite Young People Into Your World

Invite and welcome young people into your world. A year ago, I got an email from a Hollywood stunt man. He was appreciative of a daily email my son Joel sends to over 530 parents at a school his child attends. Wally Crowder decided to thank Joel by inviting him into his world. During Christmas break Wally offered to take Joel on the set and have lunch together. Wally understands that one of the number #1 predictors of a young person thriving in life, is that they have non relative adults in their lives who care.

I enjoy being highly intentional in inviting young people into my world. A while back I was speaking in Westlake Village. Most of my speaking is not local, so it was refreshing to have a talk close by. I invited my lovely sixteen year old friend Jess, to come with me. I wanted her to do whatever she liked before I spoke, dance, sing, talk, the choice was hers. Jess ended up dancing and people were so touched, they were predisposed to like absolutely anything I said. They thought I was brilliant, because she was so lovely.

Issue invitations every chance you get. Make it your goal to become a world-class invitation issuer. I was speaking in Indiana where I met a gorgeous young 16 year old. I hugged her a little longer than a perfunctory hug. The next day she asked if she could

sing before I spoke. I said a hesitant yes. I said yes, because I believe in making room for young people and their gifts. I was hesitant, because it occurred to me *maybe she only thinks she can sing*. Maybe she is tone deaf.

To my great relief, Holly got up and sang with a voice as gorgeous as her face. Holly was bold to ask, because she picked up from me a non-verbal cue from a slightly longer hug. I issued an invitation hug, and she stepped right in, bold and desirous to share her gift.

The Power of Simple Invitations

Don't underestimate the power of simple invitations. You don't have to be a speaker or a stuntman to give you are and what you have. Merna Muffins is a perfect example. Merna wasn't smart, articulate, or beautiful...she had no particular talent that might catch your eye. But Merna could love, and she could bake muffins. She poured what she could into our lives and loved us like there was no tomorrow.

When we'd travel across America by van doing concerts, a large bag of Merna's famous bran muffins (You see, she was practical as well as generous), went with us. We had pretty austere diets when we were on the road. Steak, my favorite meal, was rarely on our menu. I'll never forget Merna welcoming us home after a long trip, had serving up a wonderful steak barbeque. She'd spent her little widows' mite on a meal we'd never forget.

We are sometimes hesitant to issue simple invitations because we

think they'll be rejected.

Henri Nouwen says; "Perhaps it's because we think that these simple acts, which are often embedded in our ordinary mundane life rather than in the spectacular, relevant and powerful events, do not make that much of a difference in the long run when in fact the reverse is true. I know that in my life, what spoke volumes into my soul were the small consistent acts of love shown by older people. Yet, when I turn around and try to do it myself, when I don't see visible fruit immediately, I tend to want to summarily dismiss it. It really takes intention, perseverance, vision, and God's humility and love to carry out these simple, seemingly small acts of kindnesses."

It's really very simple to respond. Just make yourself available. Issue invitations. Push past your fear. Just begin. All you need to be is alive, awake, aware and willing. Find a young man or woman...right now, is the perfect time to start.

Ponderings

1. Describe an unexpected invitation and how it made you feel.
2. How has my parenting experience affected my view of embracing non-related young people?
3. In what way could you invite someone into your world?
4. When you think of issuing invitations, what is your greatest fear?

Chapter Three

Love Deep

Two hundred young inner city Baltimore boys were interviewed by a sociology class. The students were instructed to interview each young man, and create an evaluation of their future potential. In all two hundred cases the students concluded, ‘he hasn’t got a chance in the world.’ Twenty-five years later another sociology professor stumbled across the study. He decided to assign his students a follow-up study, to trace what happened to each boy.

The new study uncovered something remarkable. Of the initial two hundred boys, twenty had moved away or died. Of the remaining men, 176 had become more than moderately successful lawyers, doctors, and businessmen. These findings so astounded the professor that he broadened the study to try to determine the

secret of these men's success. Interviewing them, he asked each one, "How do you account for your success?" In every instance, the men would answer "There was this teacher..." They all referred to the same teacher. Fortunately, she was still alive, and living in the area. The professor called upon her. He asked the old but alert woman what magic formula she had discovered to equip these boys to overcome the slums and become successful men. The teacher's face beamed, "It's really very simple. I loved those boys."

This Baltimore teacher lived a life that outlived her own. She knew the key to embracing a generation into greatness was love. My strong hope is that everyone reading her story will believe and love the next generation into greatness. You do not need special talents or skills. All you need is intentionality. Multiple studies have proved that the deciding characteristic in changing the life of high risk children is someone who cares.

Someone once said, "When it's all said and done, all we ever wanted was to know we were truly loved and cared for by someone."

Imagine A World Void of Love

Can you imagine a world where every trace of love is suddenly and completely erased? Love songs on radio, love stories in books and movies, young love, mother love, love of beauty, the spontaneous love of children, the fierce love of God...all completely eradicated from our memories and culture. Would there really be any reason

at all to keep living? Could anyone contemplate thriving in such a wasteland? All we've ever really wanted was to know we were truly loved by someone. Love, or the hope of eventual love, keeps us alive, keeps us breathing. We were hardwired to be loved and to love.

Clumsy Love

The curious thing is how bad we are at loving. Someone once described Panda Bears as ridiculously clumsy and inept at making love. Of course they were talking about Panda's lack of skill at procreation. While humans may be more artful in physical love, yet we like Panda's, are ridiculously clumsy and inept at love overall.

Part of our clumsiness is that we don't always speak someone else's love language. Dr. Gary Chapman, author of a deeply significant book, *The Five Love Languages*, believes all of us interpret love in one of basically five languages. He lists them as physical touch, acts of kindness, gift-giving, affirming words, and quality time. (If you don't have Dr. Chapman's book, I strongly suggest you skip lunch today and go buy it). Fifty months on the best seller list, Dr. Chapman's book has helped millions of people express their love in ways that can be received.

Speak Their Love Language Not Yours

Unfortunately we often express love in a foreign language to one we love and we're puzzled when they don't understand. My love

language is affirming words in writing. When close friends who know me want to bless me they rarely get me gifts, because they know that for me something written means more to me than all the gifts in the world. (I have received very meaningful gifts from my friends like a kayak, and a trip to Yosemite, but for the most part gifts do not spell love to me).

But words ... words from the heart I treasure. Sometimes a short note, email or letter can empower, amazingly renewing lapsed courage. Sometimes a letter can change history. We have many examples through time.

William Wilberforce was deeply discouraged. After years of provoking Britain's Parliament about the need to abolish slavery, he felt he could not go on. But then a letter arrived. It was written by a dear old friend. The friend had written it with trembling hands from his death bed. The letter said;

“Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be fore you, who can be against you? Are all of them stronger than God? Oh be not weary of well doing! Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery shall vanish away before it.”

Wilberforce's resolve returned with the encouraging letter. The writer, John Wesley died six days later, but Wilberforce fought for forty-five more years and in 1833, three days before his own death,

Wilberforce saw slavery abolished in Britain. Words are a powerful love language.

The Love Language of Quality Time

One of my young friends, love language is quality time. When she comes to town we try to clear our schedules, take walks on the harbor, and tell stories from our lives. People whose love language is quality time just enjoy being with you. They could just sit on the front porch and watch ice cubes melt in the glass. You don't have to be regaling them with amazing stories, or pouring out Solomonic wisdom. They just want to be with you. My friends Dan and Jamie, have a house full young people who just love to hang out with them. Some nights they like to all just sit together on the couch and watch movies. Dan and Jamie have learned well the art of welcome. Their door is always open, and there is always a large pot of soup on the stove. Their house is a refuge in a conflicted confusing world.

The Love Language of Acts of Kindness

Sometimes we can inaccurately assume we know someone's love language. After twelve years of thinking our son Joel's love language was touch and words, I discovered to my shock that it's actually food. (Joel feels loved when you cook for him, even if he doesn't like the food). Eventually I realized that Joel had not added a sixth language, it was still one of the five, acts of kindness spell love to Joel.

For this generation cooking often means caring. In Africa there is a proverb that until you hear the lips eating food, you cannot hear the lips cry. Once I asked one of my young friends to invite her friends to our house for dinner. Although our budget was slim, I barbequed thick steaks and fourteen young people ate like there was no tomorrow. They felt deeply loved and cared for by just simply throwing steaks on a grill. My friend Marcia was making banana bread and a young man exclaimed “you’re making banana bread? You mean it’s something you could make?”

Hospitality of heart and life are a missing art, and when this generation sniffs the slightest aroma of either, they’re immediately engaged.

Acts of service of kindness are not limited to food. My husband Joey leaves a trail of fixed things all over the house. If it’s broken, he quietly fixes it. No fanfare, no trumpets. Often I’ve come home from speaking in another town, and walking into a room, to find a fireplace mantle gracing our library, or a room full of shutters. Joey is positively verbose in his quiet acts of service. (I know some of you reading are jealous...you should be).

The Love Language of Touch

In a litigious society touch has become associated with perversion...while there is many legitimate reasons why this so, it’s a great loss that prevents innocent touch...touch that says; “I know you’re here, I care about what’s happening in your life.” I

remember as a young child someone I deeply respected just putting their arm around my shoulder. It meant so much to me. Her gesture tacitly said to me “I am standing in solidarity with you, I realize you have an innate dignity as a fellow human being. You are not despised, nor distained.” Here I am almost forty years later still remembering her arm around my shoulder.

Some people go for a week or more untouched. Studies have shown the physical benefits of touch. There are emotional, spiritual, dimensions as well. When physical touch is someone’s love language, we need to find appropriate and non sexual ways of speaking.

The Love Language of Gifts

For those who’s love language is gifts, the gifts do not need to be expensive or rare, they just represent an attentiveness to what someone might love. My friend Lionel was always on the alert looking for gifts that would surprise and delight his friends. When we were building our house, Lionel created an exact model, so we could see the final product. For a friend who loved comics, Lionel spent weeks designing a complete comic book with the friend being the hero of the story.

There are many postures of embracing this generation into greatness. Words, quality time, acts of kindness, touch, gifts. My young friend Munju say;

“It’s not complicated...be initiators...be intentional; carry out simple

acts in each person's love language. After reading this chapter I was like, "I can do this, Everyone can do this." But then I had a question, "Why isn't everyone doing this?"

Love Endures

Love is a marathon runner who no matter how tired, exhausted, no matter the weather doesn't stop till the finish line. There are many people who run while the weather is pleasant. There are others willing to run if there is honor and acclaim attached to the race. But love, true love never fails. Love doesn't stop when it gets inconvenient. Love pays up front and demands no guarantees. You will probably at some point find yourself out of love.

Recently I faced the sprint like nature of my capacity for love. After some really sweet times of investing my life in a young friend they fell off the map. No calls, no evidence they were still alive. It was as if they'd died. I was confused. I made a determination that even if I never saw them again, I would commit to love them for the rest of my life. I missed them terribly. Eventually they reappeared and we traveled together, and then they disappeared again. (I am starting to realize this might be a cyclical pattern). Recently we spent some time together and I was pained at how many tests my heart failed in loving well.

If you commit to love a young person into greatness there will be times when you feel you're doing all the reaching out, you're doing all the hard rowing. You are. Many young people are clueless that

continual withdrawals of love without any deposits can lead to relational bankruptcy. Self-absorbed, immature, their emotional debit cards only go one way. It takes great maturity on our part to commit to keep loving.

Embracing a generation into greatness may be simple but it will not be easy. While your love may be hearty and pretty determined, at some point it will run thin and be easily exhausted. It's at these times it's important to realize that true love prevails, it endures, love never fails.

When you've come to the end of your loving, (and you will), other friends committed to embracing a generation into greatness can come along side and encourage you. Embracing a generation into greatness is no job for lone rangers. It takes a community.

Simple But Not Easy

Love involves so much more than great feelings. True love costs. It's expensive. Love is hard, difficult, complex, daunting. True love will sometimes take every ounce of your strength. If you have children of your own, you already know this. I have a stellar friend who is an emergency room physician. Dr. Cheryl used to get up several times each night to her screaming child who suffers from a severe case of eczema. She and her husband Dennis often had to change the bloody sheets of her child's bed more than once. She had to explain to the neighbors the heart piercing screams of their lovely Hannah in the night.

Parents of children with illness, spouses with ill mates, all know the high cost of love. The very thing we most desire, is the thing that costs us the most.

I am privileged to love awesome young emerging leaders. They are delightful to be with and Joey and I love having them in our hearts and home. But embracing a generation into greatness sometimes means embracing someone at the very worst possible time in their lives. For us as a family that has meant embracing Skye.

Loving When It's Not Convenient

Skye's 5 month old little boy died in her arms in the garage where she was living when she was 17. While many 17 year olds were about to graduate from high school and were planning on going to college, Sky had been on hard drugs for 5 years. She was street wise to the core, and was knifing every air chamber of her lifeboat. We loved her, we prayed, we advocated for her, we reached out, we agonized. Skye kept getting worse. Life was taking it's toll on Skye. It was certainly taking a toll on our family.

Skye's story took a dramatic turn. After years of heartache, Skye starting taking responsibility for her decisions. She got off drugs. She married a wonderful man. She now has two beautiful children. She owns a business, and is the hardest worker I've ever known. She is irrepressible. No matter how hard the situation she finds a way through. I deeply respect Skye's can do attitude. She never knew her dad, her mother was never her guardian, and her

grandmother who loved her died when she was young. She has taught us many things, and we have more to learn from her. One of the most important lessons Skye taught us is that love sets boundaries.

Other people's drama and heartache cannot become yours. I have seen people embrace every need they ever encountered, and it destroyed their own capacity for love and a sane household. If your family is getting the leftovers of your love, you are without question, out of order.

If boundaries do not come easily to you there are some excellent books full of wisdom on the subject. When you set your heart to intentionally embrace a generation into greatness, you are going to need clear boundaries, because this generation often has no boundaries. If you become consumed with their needs you'll not be doing them any favors. You'll just create unhealthy dependencies that will postpone their maturity.

Love One

Maybe all this talk about the cost of love is exhausting you. Maybe love is just too expensive. Perhaps the idea of embracing a generation into greatness seems overwhelming. Just trying to wrap your mind around the concept leaves you wanting a latte. Here's a little secret that might help; love one. Just one. Love the next young person presented to you.

Yesterday I was writing this little book to you in a coffee bar. I was

just about to pack up my computer, when in walked a young man I'd met a couple of times in the past. I invited him over to my table and we briefly talked. He offered to critique this book, and walked me to my car a few blocks away. I invited him to dinner with my family and gave him one of my earlier books. The whole exchange was probably less than 30 minutes. But I felt so enriched by the moment. Love the one, the next young person you see. Right now is not to soon to start.

Ponderings

1. What is the costliest love you've ever experienced?
2. What memory do you have of feeling authentically loved when you were young?
3. Of the five love languages, physical touch, acts of kindness, affirming words, gift giving and presence, which is your personal love language?
4. What's one way today you could find out the love language of someone close to you?
5. What have you done in the past when you felt out of love?
6. What are some good boundaries you've set in seeking to love others?

Chapter Four

Be Intentional

Johnny Lingo understood the power of intentionality. Johnny lived on the island of Nurabandi, near the island of Kiniwata in the South Pacific. The people of Kiniwata all spoke highly of him. Yet when they spoke they smiled, and the smiles were slightly mocking. Patricia McGerr in the early sixties kept a notebook of flora, fauna and tribal customs she encountered as she sailed through the islands. The one unforgettable entry in her notebook was about Johnny Lingo and his eight cow wife.

One of Patricia's entries describes the islander's mocking yet respectful view of Johnny.

"Johnny Lingo can help you get anything" advised Shenkin.

"Johnny Lingo!" A boy nearby hooted.

Patricia asked to be let in on the joke. "What so funny about Johnny Lingo?"

Shenkin smirked. "Johnny's famous. He's the smartest, the strongest young man in the islands, he's also, for his age, the

richest."

"So if Johnny's all that, why are all of you laughing?"

"Five months ago, at fall festival, Johnny came to Kiniwata and found himself a wife. He paid her father eight cows!"

Patricia knew a little of the customs, enough to be impressed. If you were in the market for a wife, two or three cows usually would do. If your heart was set on a particularly gorgeous wife, you might end up paying four or five cows. But eight cows? It was unheard of...pure lunacy. No one had ever paid so much. Johnny's wife Sarita, was shy, stooped shouldered, not likely to win any beauty contests. The common thought around the island was that Jonny's father in law had tricked him. But that wasn't the case at all.

Patricia McGeer sailed over to Nurabandi to meet Johnny Lingo. She wanted some fish and some pearls and she particularly wanted to lay eyes on Johnny Lingo's eight cow wife. Expecting to see a timid woman afraid of her own shadow, Patricia was surprised to meet a woman full of grace and charm, a perfectly glorious creature.

"You think eight cows were too many?" Johnny asked. A smile slid over his lips.

"Do you ever think," he asked, "what it must mean to a woman to know that her husband has settled on the lowest price for which she can be bought? And then later, when the women talk, they

boast of what their husbands paid for them. One says four cows, another maybe six. How does she feel, the woman who was sold for one or two?" This could not happen to my Sarita."

"Then you did this just to make your wife happy?"

"I wanted Sarita to be happy, yes. But I wanted more than that. You say she is different This is true. Many things can change a woman. Things that happen inside, things that happen outside. But the thing that matters most is what she thinks about herself. In Kiniwata, Sarita believed she was worth nothing. Now she knows she is worth more than any other woman in the islands." "Then you wanted -"

"I wanted to marry Sarita. I loved her and no other woman."

"But —" I was close to understanding.

"But," he finished softly, "I wanted an eight-cow wife."

Johnny, you see, paid eight cows on purpose. *Johnny knew the power of intentionality.*

Unfortunately we live in a one cow culture. Whatever the minimum requires, is often good enough for us. Imagine the difference if we intentionally sought to have eight cow friendships, eight cow spouses, eight cow families.

We don't expect extravagance. We take life as it comes, and don't expect too much. That's just how it happened we say. But people who know the power of intentionality, seize not what is, but what could be. They never settle for normal expectations. Intentionality is at war with normality. If you want to live a life that outlives you, learn to loathe the mediocre.

Normal Does Not Have To Be Your Normal

You've probably seen the movie. Many thousands of years ago, there was a slave couple in Egypt who had a baby boy. You met them in the first chapter. Boys born to slaves in that day, were not allowed to live, only girls. But Amram and *Jochebed refused to believe the prevailing fate of children in their time, would be the prevailing fate of their child.* They hid their baby boy for 3 months, and then fashioned a little covered boat and put him in the Nile.

Pharaoh's daughter found him, and the baby was raised in the courts of Pharaoh and grew up to be the deliverer of the Jews. I love Amram and Jochebed! May their tribe increase! May you dear reader become a part of their tribe.

I challenge you to refuse to believe the prevailing fate of youth in our time, will be the prevailing fate of the youth you can influence.

I was waiting for a plane when I took out a small postcard and spontaneously wrote atop of it;

Mothering Goals for Joel from Age 12-16.

I wrote in tiny handwriting; I want him to go to Africa, I want him to see the worst blight of American inner cities, and the jaw-dropping beauty of our premiere National Parks. I want him to have a heart for the poor, a heart for justice. I wrote on and on. I want him to play an instrument, get into Oaks Christian High School (one of the best schools in Southern California), read through the Bible once, I

want him to go to Europe. I wrote in tinier and tinier font as my intentionality overflowed. Then I promptly lost the postcard.

I found it years later forlorn and upside down on the floor of our garage. Joel was now 16. I was amused as I picked it up, barely remembering what it would say. To my amazement almost everything I'd written, Joel had experienced. He'd gone to Uganda when he was 13, he was enrolled at Oaks. He played guitar and some piano. He'd read through the Bible twice. He'd spent a summer in Spain. He had a growing heart for Justice and the poor.

Did almost all the scribbling on my postcard just *happen* to come to pass? Was it fate? Joel's karma? No, no, no. Joel's experience was the result of intentionality. Even though I'd lost the postcard, I'd never lost those desires in my heart. So there were musical instruments around the house for him to pick up.

Joel sat multiple times at dinner in Israel and California with a dear friend who does child sex trafficking prosecution around the world. He'd accompanied me when I'd spoken on Justice. As a family we'd applied to Oaks for tuition assistance, and Joel was accepted. He wrote close friends asking if they'd help him get to Spain. Action fueled our intentionality. I knew I only had 18 short years with my son, and I wanted to him to enter the wild seas of life with his ship freighted with experience, treasure and wisdom. I was not going to launch his boat whatever flotsam and jetsam that floated by. Not on my watch.

The worst enemy of intentionality is ignorance of what is possible. Would an airline let Joel travel to Uganda at 13? I had to search it out. Would the Oaks allow him to attend? I needed to apply. Would Joel have an aptitude for music? I didn't know, but needed to provide a nutrient rich environment of music for him.

Why are so many things the way they are? Because no one has been intentional about changing them. Why is the present so similar to the past? Because there are few dreamers who will take the time to dream a preferred future and be intentional about seeing that dream realized.

Nourish A Vision Of A Preferred Future

Last night I told Joel, "Sweetheart, I just realized I've been imaging everything possible that could go wrong once you leave the house. Instead of concentrating on everything that could go right. From now on, I am going to nourish a vision of a preferred future for you. I am going to picture you, making great decisions, surrounding by stellar lifelong friendships, and when the time is right, a wife who will bring you lifetime joy. I am going to cultivate a vision of you, finding your destiny, bringing justice and compassion to many. I am so sorry I've been so consumed with all that could go wrong. I've felt the clock ticking. I know I only have a year left with you. I've wanted your ship completely freighted with everything you'll need of character, discipline, and vision. My vision has been driven by fear, not joy. Please forgive me."

A friend of mine once said; “A lot of prayer is simply trying to get God to worry with you.” I realized that that was what I’d been doing with Joel; trying to get God to worry with me.

Nourish intentionality in your life. Let your heart engage purposely in embracing a generation into greatness. Be an eight cow person who is willing to invest beyond the expected.

Ponderings

1. So what is possible for the youth you will embrace into greatness?
2. What are the normal expectations that may need to be turned on their head?
3. Are there some counter cultural expectations you might want to embrace?
4. Where can you apply today the power of intentionality?

Chapter Five

Be Present

When Albert Einstein's wife died, his sister Maja moved into his house. For 14 years Maja freed the world's greatest scientist to do vital research while she occupied herself with household chores. Maja attended to the daily necessities of life while Albert pondered the universe. In 1950, Maja had a stroke and went into a coma. Giving no sign of comprehension, or recognition of his voice, Albert devotedly read Plato to Maja two hours each day.

People may have thought it was a colossal waste of time for such a brilliant man. Albert, however was brilliant enough to know the power of being present.

My friend Lynne knows that power as well. She serves as a court appointed special advocate. Acting as the eyes and ears of the court, CASA's as they are called, agree to spend one hour a week with children in foster care. When Lynne's assigned child moved hundreds of miles away, she still went to see her. Lynne like

Einstein, understands; when it comes to embracing a generation into greatness, ninety percent of it is just being fully present.

Dr. Anne Kelly, a Southern California oncologist is wonderfully present with her patients. Recently diagnosed with multiple myeloma, my elderly dad, Chris, is fairly deaf. He only hears clearly if someone is facing him, looking him directly in the face. Dr. Kelly gets face to face with Chris. She intentionally makes sure he can read her lips. She is very intentionally in the moment. Unfortunately, Dr. Kelly is rare in medicine. I have been with my dad in doctor's office's where they have treated him like a moron. .

Once a great teacher encouraged an inquirer to see. The young man said; "What am I suppose to be seeing?" The wise teacher replied; "To truly see, you must be truly here. You are mostly someplace else." To embrace a generation into greatness requires that we see what is before us, that we are truly present in a moment, that we resist the tendency to be mostly someplace else.

If we understood the value of the person in front of us, being present in the moment might be easier.

Over two decades ago, I taught maximum security kids in Juvenile Hall. Many of my students had murdered people or committed other crimes that made them too great a risk to send to the normal on-site school. After a year of close observation of teenagers who were gang members of the Crips, Bloods and Skinheads, I came to the conclusion that more than drugs, more than poverty, more than

poor housing, the absence of dedicated, devoted adults in their lives was the greatest contributor to their devastated lives.

A Non-Relative Adult Makes All The Difference

I am not simply talking about parents, (and I mean no minimizing of their strategic role), but non-relative adults who will set aside their own busyness, to be fully present to the young people they encounter. People who are awake, listening, picking up subtle clues, people who give others the dignity of full on attention, even if it's brief and transitory.

For some, this present-ness will mean finding a place in the myriad of volunteer possibilities like Big Brothers, Big Sisters, for others who have no discretionary time to volunteer, being present may mean just focusing in the moment on whatever young person comes across your daily path.

A short time ago I was privileged to film a young Mother Teresa named Heidi Baker. Heidi works in Mozambique and cares for thousands of children. One of many impressive things you notice quickly about Heidi, is how present she is in the moment. Someone said the distinguishing characteristic of most great people are that they are fully present in the moment. By that standard, and many others, Heidi is truly great. She wins your heart in no time flat with her authenticity and smile. Heidi lavishes her life embracing a generation into greatness in garbage dumps, slums and war ravished streets.

There Are No Ordinary People

C.S. Lewis says it best. “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never met a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

Embracing a generation into greatness means prizing the fact that there are no mere mortals, no ordinary people. We must seize moments with others and imbue those moments with the dignity due an everlasting splendor.

Just A Loving Glance

Sometimes just several minutes of someone being fully in the moment can linger for a lifetime. I remember an occasion of great discouragement several years into my married life. My husband

Joey was in the military, and we were stationed for several years in New England. I had transferred into a college that was offering a new major; music theory and composition. I was a junior and the school was having a hard time deciding what I needed to take in order to graduate. I was friendless, experiencing extreme culture shock as we had just come from Micronesia into one of the worst snow storms New England had recorded in fifty years.

At this enormous low point of my life, I remember a beautiful young woman tapping me on the shoulder in a conducting class, looking me straight in the eye. She simply asked how I was, but for me it was like the whole universe was looking at me fondly through her eyes. I don't even remember her name. The whole encounter was probably less than 2 minutes, but here I am sitting in Starbucks 30 years later, telling you.

It would be terrific if you read all these stories and immediately called up a great organization and volunteered your time. But some of you don't have any more hours in a day. It takes all you have just to keep all the plates in your life spinning. If that's your story, let me encourage you, a lifestyle of being fully present, in your regular routine carries extraordinary possibilities for empowering someone to take courage and persevere.

Ask Questions And Listen Attentively

Make it a habit to never meet a young person without asking something significant about their lives and then listening with

complete attention. Lock your eyes and heart on their face. Avoid the perfectly human tendency to gloss over introductions. You are meeting someone of incomparable worth. Take them in, hear their story. A question I often ask, is “So what is your dream?” They’ll be pleasantly shocked you’re actually interested. You’ll be surprised at the depth of response.

I was twelve when a songwriter hero of mine, stopped and noticed me. I was standing in a crowd around her, not knowing what to say, and she parted the crowd, and told everyone I would be a great writer someday. (You get to decide in the next few chapters if she got that part right). Audrey Meier went on to write me little notes occasionally. She didn’t spend enormous amounts of time with me. But she impacted my world because she treated me with uncommon dignity.

Although there was probably 40 years between us, Audrey acted as if I was her peer. After I married, she met Joey and I occasionally for lunch in Santa Monica and we’d feast on cheese blintzes. She regaled me with her mistakes, her joys, her temptations. Audrey overflowed with life. She was a refreshing blend of earthiness and spirituality.

Audrey was immensely talented, funny, embracing. She was like all great people completely in the moment. What I remember most was that I was a real person to her. While many people were clamoring for her attention, she turned instead and embraced me. Audrey’s embrace modeled for me the power of generativity.

Audrey died some time ago, but she lives forever embedded in my story. She taught me how to be present, how to notice, how to not miss the moment. I feel immense gratitude toward her.

Beware The Barrenness of Busyness

Someone once said beware the barrenness of busyness. In the West it seems the greater the technological advances the more soul barren we become. I believe this cultural defect, is one thing our Asian and indigenous friends can help us overcome.

Joey and I were caught with some friends in a flash flood in Manila. I remember how completely at home everyone acted in the face of this audacious interruption to our very important schedules. We sat around a little store and ate a big fish and told each other funny stories. The whole world stopped and no one in the room felt anxious. We, who as one Asian remarked, wear our god on our wrists, were sad when the waters finally subsided, and we went back to our ever so strategic schedule.

Embracing a generation into greatness requires a learned attentiveness. It's an art we can spend a lifetime developing. To truly see, we need to truly be, in the moment.

Ponderings

1. In what ways does busyness in your life create a barrenness of soul?

2. How you ever felt the deliciousness of someone being fully present and attentive to you?
3. Where in your daily routine can you be more present to the young in your life?
4. Have you ever asked someone their dream? What did they say?

Chapter Six

Tell Stories

“And what they have stammered ever since are fragments of your ancient name.”

Rilke, Love Poems from God, translated by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy

Donald Miller, the author of *Blue Like Jazz*, once asked a crowd at a book signing to tell him lines from their favorite movies. The crowd was initially hesitant to answer, till they understood Miller was serious. Their answers fairly tumbled out. You could feel them living the story lines. Then Miller asked everyone to recite a portion of the Nicene Creed. There was a palpable silence.

It's no secret, we exit the womb, loving stories. No matter our culture, heritage, tribe or occupation, we are to the bone story lovers. We are hopeless in the face of a great story. I read almost exclusively nonfiction, yet I find myself often scanning the page, speed reading through the text, looking for the story. I've been

collecting stories forever.

Unfortunately most of us through education and life's disappointments forget the power of story. We forget what Hollywood knows so well. Story is embedded inside us as eternity in our hearts.

Sometimes when I speak to adult audiences I start by reading a children's story. It invariably transforms the whole audience into starry eyed three year olds. Truth finds it's home in no time flat in a story.

Story Silencers

What hinders us from telling our stories to the next generation? We think we have no stories...(what story?), even if we realize we have a few, we think our stories belong in Yawnsville. We've all met people who tell the same story over and over again.

One of my dearest friend's elderly father tells the same four stories. In one of the stories he recounts the miracle of his two daughter's birth because he had such a low sperm count. It's the famous sperm story and we all smile graciously living with way too much information.

But the stories of struggle, of hard times, of failure, of wisdom learned the hard way, give the next generation courage to endure, courage to pursue greatness.

I walked into the pantry of an extraordinary friend, and found

everything alphabetized. I was impressed and dismayed. If you walk into my pantry, everything is placed randomly, haphazardly, with a few things like tea or pastas groups together. Everything else needs a global positioning system. So it is with most of our stories. We haven't placed them in easily retrievable places. When we need them, they're often hard to find. I have half a century of stories in the cupboards and pantry of my mind, like preserved jam long forgotten.

A Series of Story Starters

What was it about your childhood that prepared you for your future? Your story here does not need to be positive to be impacting. I moved many, many times as a child. That part of my story while not ideal, built into me an enduring resilience, a capacity for adapting, and a love for the wild diversity of people and cultures.

As a speaker, I find myself privileged to enjoy many different audiences. My childhood stories have served me well, in doing what I do now. Had I lived in the same house, in the same city, going to the same school, with total predictability, I might be less adaptive.

What was hard for you in the past, but in retrospect made you better prepared for today? This generation loves to hear how people overcame challenges. For me, because my mom had very definite ideas about modesty I dressed strangely as a child. As you

can imagine, this led to a lot of ridicule on the playground, and it did little to help attract friends. As hard as it was to be the laughingstock of the entire school, my outcaste status prepared me to swim upstream, to be countercultural in good ways, to never take friendship for granted. The greatest surprise of my life as an adult is that I've been gifted with stellar friends around the world. I feel immense gratitude for them because I basically had a friendless childhood.

What were the moments when it seemed God kissed you? Do you remember a time of feeling wholly delicious? I remember in third grade riding my new bike down a street in Ojai feeling as free as the wind. I wanted that moment to last forever. Since I was born forty, and more serious than God, moments of being carefree for me, were few and far between. Riding that bike, was a moment of unfettered joy.

What did you once believe as a child that you realized later was a lie? I used to think that people who were beautiful were favored by the universe. My crooked teeth and less than gorgeous face was proof to me that I would never be someone people desired. But life has taught me that beauty rarely trumps character. It's been a sweet discovery.

What have been your biggest disappointments? I spent my whole life planning and scheming to live in the less developed world, making a positive difference. One month after we were married, Joey and I moved to Micronesia. A few years later, we were living

my dream.

We were the first white people one tribe in the mountains of the Philippines had ever seen. I rode a tiny horse only slightly larger than a large dog, across the same river 23 times to get to this remote village. We were received with joy. The village was chicken rich when we arrived, and chicken less when we left. The chickens traveled back with us, part of muscle, bone and sinew. The tribe happily gave us rich hospitality. I'll never forget the first night sitting in the middle of a dried river bottom all of us picking up rocks and banging out interesting rhythms. It was one of those purely delicious moments you never forget.

But then one fateful day, Joey felt like we needed to move back to America. I was dashed. I lived for many years in America as if I was waiting at a bus terminal, waiting for the next bus to take me back into Asia. That was twenty seven years ago. Twenty seven years of being a fish in a desert, feeling utterly out of place.

What have you done with your life when it didn't turn out like you'd expected? These hard stories are important to tell as you embrace a generation into greatness.

What are your stories of despair? I have known despair, feeling like my dreams would never come to pass. Shakespeare isn't a likely encourager, but realizing his plays usually had five acts helps me. Sometimes in the midst of my life's second, and third act, I've have to remind myself it's not the end of my story.

This generation comes out of the womb with a great baloney detection kit. They love authenticity. They love hearing stories where we expose our Achilles heel, where we tell our weakness, our fear. The times when we looked good but trembled inside. Don't let pride edit your stories. Tell them raw and true.

Are you still thinking you don't have stories? I know you have a treasure trove of them. Ellie Wiesel said that God made man because He loves stories. Ellie got it right. When you tell your story you create expectancy, and courage to those who listen.

My counsel to you friend is start telling your stories to the next generation. Don't wait till you think your story deserves blockbuster status. Tell the little things. Now is the perfect time. Take your story out of hiding. You'll find eager ears and hungry hearts, waiting for the telling.

Ponderings

1. What is one specific fear that keeps me from telling my story?
2. What kinds of stories inspire me?
3. In light of the questions in this chapter, what is one of one of the more remarkable stories from my life?
4. Who is there in my life that I could embrace into greatness by just telling a personal story?

Chapter Seven

Speak Truth

Santa Barbara was home to a cult that roamed the streets barefoot with an army blanket over their right shoulders. They believed for salvation they had to walk 10,000 miles barefoot. They lived out of garbage dumpsters. I was sitting in a parking lot with a friend, when I noticed one of their buses.

A young man seeing us, invited us into the bus for conversation, asking us to leave all our leather behind. We were ushered to the back where the women were, and I silently listened to the man up front who was apparently their leader. The men in the bus were hanging on every word, as if this young man was a prophet.

I listened for about ten minutes when I was shocked to hear myself

say; “On what authority do you lead these people?” The women in the back of the bus quietly gasped. The men swung their necks back to look at me. The leader had a little vein on the right side of his temple pop out. He sputtered, taken off guard; “I am that I am.” “Oh no, you’re not! I confidently replied. “In fact, I’ll prove it.”

I had no idea what I was about to say, as I hadn’t planned on saying anything I’d said from the beginning. I was waiting with everyone else to hear just how I planned on proving this man a charlatan. “I’ll tell you what.” I said trolling for time to think of something. “You call down the worst thing you can think of, and I’ll prove you’re a charlatan, and you’re deceiving the people on this bus, because nothing is going to happen to me.”

My heart was pounding out of my chest.” I am that I am, spit out his words, “Get off this bus, now! I don’t want my people to see your cremated carcass!”

I slowly started walking off the bus “I’ll be glad to get off, because this is your bus. But let me assure everyone here, that as soon as I leave, you will roar off, because you know you are powerless, you know you are deceiving these people, and nothing is going to happen to me.”

The bus roared off as soon as I’d stepped onto the pavement.

Of course the risk in my story was not challenging the leader, it was initially getting on the bus, seeking a conversation to people I didn’t know. I have no idea what happened to the people in that

cult. But perhaps that day there was someone there, who started to question, started to wonder, started to slowly make their way out of a deceptive belief.

I've sat in an electric chair in the world's largest prison, and lived to tell it. Joey and I have been the first white people one tribe had ever seen. But that day on the cult bus, may have been one of the bravest moments of my life.

I relish encouraging people, saying affirming things. But sometimes the most encouraging thing you can do is tell the truth. If I am about to speak and I have broccoli in my teeth, or a zipper unzipped, or a back collar bias sticking out, (this actually happened to me at a breakfast where I was dining with members of the royal family of Jordan), I want to know.

The Truth Is Often The Only Hope of Cure

A doctor diagnosing malignancy, telling the truth, is often your only hope for cure. This generation appreciates truth, when they know you really love them. Learn to love so well that when you have to say hard things, it's heard. I've seen people who feel their entire role in life is to set people straight. I am not talking about that kind of person. People know when you have their best interests at heart.

I have a dear friend who for years has been asking me. "Where am I missing it? Tell me my blind spots." It took me three or four years of her asking before I had the courage to reply. My friend is extraordinarily wise, a gifted and talented leader who many people

look to for courage and guidance. I finally summoned my courage; “Well...you let your children treat you like trash. It harms them, and it insures their relationships will fail in the future.” My friend who is not only wise but humble, thanked me.

People remember not only feeling loved, but having the truth told to them. Norman Vincent Peale tells the story of a teacher who took him aside once and said; “Norman how long are you going to go through life like a mouse? When are you going to get rid of your inferiority complex and live like a man? Norman was terribly hurt at the time, but he came to realize that the teacher was right. He was living like a mouse, and he needed to address it.

Truth is life-changing. Consider a man named Merrill who told the truth to a man called Zig. Merrill said "You know, Zig, I've been watching you for two and a half years and I've never seen such a waste. You have a lot of ability; you could be a great one...Zig, there is no doubt in my mind if you really went to work...you could go all the way to the top." Zig Zigler took Merrill's words to heart and went on to encourage millions with his humor, his books, and his unique passion for excellence.

Learn to welcome truth in your own life, and then learn to speak it lovingly to others. Living a life that outlives you means being a truth teller. No little white lies allowed.

Ponderings;

1. Do you remember a time when truth impacted your life

producing change?

2. Do you seek out truth telling friends?
3. When's the last time you've said something true but difficult to a friend?
4. Is there a truth that expressed might help someone you know?

Chapter Eight

Prize Age

We heard a shrill voice wailing plaintively; “I want my Cheeto’s!” as my friend Kathy and I were hunting for coffee. The insistent high pitched voice was accompanied by loud wacks on a snack dispenser. The voice sounded like a child, but it belonged to a tiny African American woman in a wheel chair. She was ancient yet bristling with life, possessing an ardent desire for her Cheeto’s stuck in the machine. She was a startling contrast to the other residents in this skilled nursing facility.

Kathy and I delivered her stuck Cheetos, placing them in her

grateful hands. Next to the snack dispenser was a grand piano, and Kathy said; “Fawn, I’ve never hear you play the piano, why don’t you sit down and play something for me?” Never one to respond to that specific request, to my amazement, I immediately sat down and started to play.

Our little Cheeto lady’s face blazed like a perigee sun. “Oh!” she squeaked, an octave higher than normal, “It’s been sooooo long.” “You know,” she conspiratorially whispered; “I was a famous actress once. I starred in 10 movies and I sang with Lena Horne.” She lowered her voice further, “God took away my voice because I was a floozy.” Then she launched into a song, her face radiating joy.

Kathy and I were transfixed at the invasion of wonder that descended into the room. Heaven swept in on the wings of this little lady’s joy. It was a once in a lifetime moment. God bent down and kissed us all.

I admit getting someone a snack, and playing the piano doesn’t sound like much. Sometimes though, something simple, can unexpectedly open a door of joy. Sometimes heaven opens to us when we least expect it, right in the middle of our ordinary lives, right in the middle of wanting nothing more than coffee, we get bliss.

Heaven intersected the mundane that day and infused it with splendor.

Of course it's not always that way. One Christmas we invited some ladies from a homeless shelter to spend Christmas with us. Some friends of mine had given a Christmas party at their facility 3 weeks before. I had met one of the elderly ladies who was coming. I raved to my family. "You are going to love this woman. "She grateful for the very air she breathes. You have never met a homeless person so full of gratitude." I enthused.

I worked on dinner with great care anticipating the extraordinary day we would enjoy together. I set the table elegantly, remembering a marvelous talk I'd heard about the power of eating together. The talk I'd heard said that one of causes of decline of the Roman Empire was the decline of the sanctity of the home. The speaker made a great case statistically about the power of eating together at the family table. She had reinforced for me my conviction of the importance of creating sacred space where hospitality was offered with joy.

When my elderly-grateful-for-the-air-she-breathes-new-friend arrived, my expectations were at an all time high. It wasn't long though before I dimly realized that this was not the same woman I had met. Perhaps she'd forgotten her medication, I don't really know. All I know was I was blindsided. She was madder than a wet hen, bristling with hostility, emotionally vomiting anger all over our house. We kept smiling, valiantly trying to be gracious. Our Christmas that year was memorable for all the wrong reasons.

Even though the day was laughably disastrous, our son Joel, got to

experience a Christmas that was other centered. A Christmas much like the very first Christmas where the gift was lovingly offered, and angrily distained.

In a culture that worships youth, beauty, vitality, embracing the elderly, can be challenging. For Westerners it's counter-intuitive. We tend to save our love for what is young, what is beautiful, what is athletic. We warehouse everything else. Embracing back is an art that again like learning to be fully present will take all our lives to learn well.

What would happen if we didn't segregate everyone according to age, sending the kids off to amusement parks, the elderly to museums, and the rest of us to unending self-improvement classes? No matter your age, it is wisdom to embrace those older than yourself. Invited them into your life, into your days, into possibly even your heart.

Mamma Hug

My young friend Kelsey found the joy of embracing an older woman in her life. Kelsey had looked for a mentor, but when it didn't happen right away, she gave up. Then when she wasn't looking, all of a sudden there appeared a lady appropriately named Mamma Hug. Mamma Hug had raised 3 grown children and 56 foster children, along with countless others. Mama Hug certainly didn't need another person to tuck under her wing, but suddenly Kelsey and Mama Hug found themselves merging their stories.

Kelsey had grace to embrace the unfamiliar. Fiercely independent, she was initially hesitant. Kelsey told me, “I was afraid of inviting someone else into my life at such a deep and personal level. In general I believe a major hindrance for my generation is fear. Many of us have been hurt and disappointed by people in authority who are older. So when we begin to embrace them, we have to battle the fear of being hurt again, fear of rejection, fear of disappointment.

Kelsey goes on to say; “Mamma Hug feels that true mentoring can best happen as we experience life together, as questions arise in the course of life. I realize now there are many things you learn in school, but that you can only truly understand by seeing it live. I have the unique privilege of learning from a woman who has a heart to teach and nurture the next generation.

I asked Kelsey what advice she’d give her generation about older people. “As youth, I think it’s very important for us to honor those who’ve gone before us. We need to recognize that their lives and their prayers have paved the way for us. We need an attitude of gratitude about all that they have done to make a way for us and our generation. We need to humble ourselves and admit that we don’t know everything. We can learn from those who are older, wiser and more experienced.

Matthias Kuhn, better known as Kuno, a young Swiss says’ “I believe we need to hold each others’ hands. To the younger generation I say, If we do not return to the hearts of our fathers

and mothers, there may be a few more stories and a few more books about us at the end of our lives, but we will not see all that we desire. We desperately need to return to a place of dependence. Let me no longer seek that which serves me and my generation, and how to become more radical, but how my generation can seek to honor our fathers and mothers. I wish us courage.”

Ponderings

1. In what ways do older people scare me?
2. What are some ways I could be more attentive to the elderly?
3. Do I believe that there any other Kelsey’s or Matthias’s in the world, who are wanting to honor and befriend me?
4. If a Kelsey approached me desiring a relationship, how would I respond?

Chapter Nine

Take Risks

*If no one ever took risks, Michelangelo would have painted the Sistine floor. -
Neil Simon, playwright*

You miss 100% of the shots you never take. - Wyane Gretzke

John Blanchard found the beauty of making a risky move in the face of the unexpected. Writer, Max Lucado tells John's poignant story. John, checking out a book from a Florida library, found his eyes and soul riveted by penciled notes and observations in the margin. Written by an obviously insightful and lucid mind, John embarked on a mission to find the previous reader. Inscribed in the front of the book was a name, Miss Hollis Maynell.

After a diligent search, John discovered Miss Maynell lived in New York City. Introducing himself in a letter, John invited her to write. The next day he left to for Europe. World War II was desecrating the lives of millions. John began to live for her letters.

For thirteen months they wrote to each other, revealing the contours of their thinking and dreams. John wondered what she looked like and requested a photograph. Miss Maynell refused. She felt that if the relationship truly was destiny what she looked like wouldn't matter.

Surviving the carnage of WWII, John arranged their first meeting - 7:00 PM at the Grand Central Station in New York. "You'll recognize me," she wrote, "by the red rose I'll be wearing on my lapel." At 7:00 p.m. John wearing his soldier's uniform, searched the faces of young women at the station, looking for a rose in a lapel.

A gorgeous young woman, every man's dream, walked toward him. Wearing a pale green suit, she swept past him. "Going my way, sailor?" she whispered a wry smile on her face. John was irresistibly drawn toward her, forgetting for a moment the fact that she wore no rose. Then he saw Hollis Maynell. She was right behind the girl of his dreams.

The woman looked bookish, her graying hair tucked under a frayed hat. She was amply proportioned, her legs thick, her ankles exceeding her shoes. A woman well past 40, she had graying hair

tucked under a frayed hat. The woman was unmistakably wearing a prominent rose on her lapel.

The girl in the green suit walked quickly away. John was conflicted. He wanted with all his heart to follow the fragrant dreamy young girl, yet, he knew he should honor the woman who had so buoyed his heart through the last year. And there she stood. Her eyes were warm and inviting, and her face was lined with courage. John moved quickly. He held the small worn blue leather copy of the book that was to reveal his identity.

John disappointedly tossed overboard his hopes for love right then, holding out the book. "I'm Lieutenant John Blanchard, and you must be Miss Maynell. I am so glad you could meet me; may I take you to dinner?"

The older woman's face brightened with a smile. "I don't know what this is about, son," she answered, "but the young lady in the green suit who just went by, she begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said if you were to ask me out to dinner, I should go and tell you that she is waiting for you in the big restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of test!"

Occasionally embedded in great risks are great treasure. John Blanchard found the love of his life, by taking a risk in the face of a disappointment.

When you take risks to love a generation into greatness, you might

find yourself approaching someone who doesn't fit your vision of loveliness. Like John you might end up reaching out initially to someone who doesn't fit your expectations. Perhaps their culture is foreign to you. Their clothing, music, body art, politics, may stretch you. Pursue them anyway. I promise you, life has a way of turning the tables. You might find yourself in a relationship of delight and joy.

We're all afraid of rejection. It's a scary thing to approach someone especially someone young. There's almost an unwritten law about the generations staying to themselves. No one expects, especially the young, for you to make contact.

Let People Say Their Own No's

But here's a lifetime secret that will help your very human, Walter Middy fears. *Let people say their own no's.* It's such an important secret, I want to whisper it to you again, *let people say their own no's.* We are so busy inwardly saying other people's no, we never give them a chance to say yes.

Recently a friend and I spent a couple of days at the beach after a particularly stressful speaking schedule. My friend is wise and deep, and we were discussing vision. I had a vision to do some monthly learning parties at my house, and I'd even picked out the couple I'd like to co-host with us. "Have you asked them?" Lynn inquired. "No, I am too afraid they'll say no, and there really is no one else I'd like to do it with." My friend was a busy lawyer, and his family kept a

full and significant schedule. I'd been trying to work up the courage to ask them for a couple of years. You might laugh at such a silly thing. But your fears are no less real. What if you reach out to embrace someone into greatness and they don't reach back? What if you're left in an embarrassing and awkward place?

I tell audiences all the time. Exploit your age. I love being fifty and being able to call everyone "Honey." I love locking my eyes on a young sales clerk and saying "God bless you, sweetheart." I love being able to ask hard questions like "So how are you doing with the billions of dollars of sexual temptation my generation is throwing unmercifully at you?"

Do It Afraid

Here is another secret; *do it afraid*. You may never feel completely confident initiating a friendship, embracing a generation into greatness. Do it afraid. What's the worst that can happen?

Yesterday I took a risk and tapped a young lady on the shoulder. "Hi, Ashton, my name is Fawn, and I never got a chance to tell you what a phenomenal job you did in Fiddler on the Roof." I expected this beautiful young lady to respond with bored politeness, but to my surprise she lit up. It was months after the production, she'd probably forgotten she even had a significant role, and here was someone complimenting her.

Take risks, smile often, initiate conversations. What's the worse that can happen? My husband years ago had a best friend who loved to

say; “What can they do...take away your birthday?”

Ponderings

1. What is the biggest risk I’ve ever taken?
2. What risk in my life resulted in unexpected joy?
3. In what ways have I become risk adverse?
4. What risk could I take today in embracing a generation into greatness?

Thank you for reading the shortest book I’ve ever written. I’d love to hear your stories about how you are embracing the next generation. You can reach me at fawn.parish@gmail.com.

1. Max Lucado, *Stories from the Heart* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Books, 1996), pp. 123-125

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