

THE WISDOM BEGINS:

A Letter from Father to Son

Sam Potter to His Young Son, Sam Potter, Jr.

WHO WE ARE:
Character

*So in everything, do unto others
what you would have them do to you,
for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

–Matthew 7:12

Remember the Golden Rule

A Guideline for Life

“You’re hurting my chicken. Put it down!” I was so upset I was crying.

“I will not.” She glared back.

I could see my big black chicken flapping its wings, trying to break free of Janis Sue Wynn’s viselike grip around its neck. Dad and Mom raised a few chickens in the backyard. Janis Sue Wynn had caught a big black hen around the neck, and she would not let it go.

“Janis Sue, let my chicken go or you’ll be sorry!” I bellowed.

“It’s my chicken!” she proclaimed, tightening her grip.

Now I was about as determined as any four-year-old can be. I stamped my foot and said, “I’ll fix you!”

As I raced inside the house, I already knew what I had to do. I had to get Janis Sue to drop my chicken before she strangled it. I was going to protect my chicken! I went straight to Mom’s room and found a big diaper pin that belonged to my baby brother, Sammy Junior.

Out I raced, straight for the backyard.

“Put my chicken down, Janis Sue, or I’ll stick you with this pin.”

“You better not!” she screamed. So I stuck her.

The best that can be said is that she dropped the chicken. The worst was that I was not the least bit sorry I had stuck her. She ran home, screaming at the top of her lungs and rubbing her little three-year-old arm wounded with the diaper pin.

Gratified that my property had been reclaimed safely, I went into the house. But this episode was far from over.

Maydee, Janis Sue’s mom, must have talked to my mom about what happened because Mom found out. I got a serious switching with a green peach tree limb.

Wow! If you’ve never had a switching, then you won’t understand. Nothing, but nothing, stings quite like a switching with a peach tree limb. At four, I learned a very important lesson. The peach tree got my attention focused and made me a quick study.

Mom wanted to be sure that I got a slight dose of my own medicine. Hurting someone was not acceptable behavior! Inflicting a little pain to teach a child not to inflict a different kind of pain seems harsh these days. Perhaps. But I can only attest that the discipline worked. I would not have to relearn this lesson.

As I cried, I said I was sorry I hurt Janis Sue.

Mom said, “I’m going to have to tell your dad when he comes home. You could have really injured Janis Sue with that diaper pin. Suzanne, you have to have more respect for others, even if they are doing wrong. Two wrongs don’t ever make a right.”

I didn’t remember getting into trouble like this before, and I was not looking forward to Dad being upset with me. I was only trying to save my chicken.

Later the next day, Dad came in for the weekend. I was out-

side on the big cement back porch when Dad came out and sat down beside me. Dad had an open diaper pin in his hand.

“Mom says you stuck Janis Sue with this big old safety pin yesterday. Is that true, Sissy?”

“Yes, Daddy. She was hurting my chicken.”

“I know all about the chicken, Sissy. I want you to touch the point of this pin. You need to see how sharp this is. Go real slow and just barely touch it, be very careful.”

“It’s pretty sharp,” he continued, as I shook my head and began to cry. “Don’t you think if you got stuck with that pin that it would really, really hurt?”

“Yes, sir,” I muttered, ashamed.

“You can’t hurt other people to solve a problem. Two wrongs never make a right. You must learn to use your head and come up with other solutions. If you are not sure that you can solve a problem without hurting someone, do nothing until you get good help to think through your options. Do you understand what I’m telling you?”

“Yes, Daddy, I should have gone to Mom and told her.”

“That’s right, Sissy. Even when you deal with people who act badly, always ask yourself: Would I like it if someone treated me the way I am treating them? If the answer is that you wouldn’t like it, then don’t do it! If you live by the Golden Rule, you can’t go wrong.”

The memories of many decades float together in time. In the haze, time becomes blurred, but the individual thoughts remain clear. From my earliest memories to this day, I knew that my father was a man clearly centered in an ethical structure that followed very closely the biblical rules for life.

For Dad, things were black or white. A choice was right or it was wrong. There was very little gray in his decision-making process.

Today, society seems lost in a sea of gray. The society of the '40s and '50s did not share the same ambivalence. Contemporary versions of right and wrong have become situational. Wrong choices have a thousand justifications. How difficult it must be for a child to find a moral center. Media escalates the mixed signals; good is cloaked in evil and evil is cloaked as good.

You and I live in troubled times. Too few children and too few adults have experienced unconditional love from a parent. God gave me not one but two parents who gave me unconditional love. The benefits of that are impossible to measure.

The Golden Rule was Dad's central rule of life. He made it clear that the Golden Rule was the cornerstone of character. The first and strongest lesson my father taught was the lesson of character. He taught me to give the other person the benefit of the doubt. I learned to treat others the way I wanted to be treated.

GUIDELINE FOR LIFE: The second most important commandment given by Jesus in the *New Testament* is: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:31) All the lessons of character can be found in Scripture, and the fundamental rule for living with your fellow man is the Golden Rule.

WHAT WE THINK:

Attitude

*In a full heart
there is room for everything,
and in an empty heart
there is room for nothing.*

—Antonio Porchia

Be Grateful for What You Have

Gratitude

It was my first day at Rosemont Elementary School. I was a little wide-eyed child unsure of what it would be like in a new elementary school. We had moved from Waco Street over to Montreal Avenue that meant a change from the familiar to the unfamiliar. I felt lost, unimportant, and vulnerable. I was a small fish in a sea of children. I can play the memory today as if it were a fresh video. My small and frightened third-grader eyes recorded those pictures.

There were two children I met that day whom I have never forgotten. One was a beautiful little girl named Billie, and the other was a handsome boy named Alan. I envied Billie from the first moment I saw her. She had curly, coal-black hair, perfectly brushed, falling to her shoulders. She was dressed in a cute blue-green dress with two perfectly matching little bows that held back her wonderful hair, which was parted down the middle. I don't understand why, but beautiful black hair has evoked a sense of envy in me from my earliest memories, and that preference continues to this day. That day

I wished that I could look pretty like Billie. I wanted the pretty little dress with the perfectly matched bows. This was my first experience with the emotion of envy. Every day from then on, Billie would arrive at school with little silk bows matching her outfit. She was picture perfect.

Within minutes of seeing Billie for the first time, my gaze moved across the crowded playground and found a handsome young boy, Alan. Unlike Billie, Alan did not look like a young child. His appearance seemed timeless. I thought he was only about nine, yet he was taller than most of the other children. He had the look of a handsome teenage boy, even though he was still a child. Alan had wavy white-blond hair and a flawless golden tan. He was beautiful. He was handsome. And he was crippled. Alan had polio. The crutches under each arm spoke to the severity of this dreaded disease.

The fact that Alan was so beautiful and handsome did not protect him from polio. Seeing Alan made polio real to me for the first time. Significantly, my mind identified the envy that I had experienced that morning. Envy, first felt with Billie and then with Alan. My mind moved from envy to gratitude for the first time.

God gave me a perfect lesson accentuated in its contrast and beauty with a handsome boy and pretty girl. Beautiful wavy white-blond hair and wonderful shiny black curls. Visual perfection! Yet, perfection is not always as perfect as it seems. I understood that my envy was not appropriate. Suddenly, I was grateful that I was safe, and that I did not have polio.

Through his sayings Dad had set me up to learn God's lessons. Somehow, Dad's lessons and God's wisdom worked as unseen partners in my mind.

My dad's voice was ringing inside my head: "Suzanne Pitty-Pot, you had better be grateful for what you have. You have more

than most!” Whether I was begging for another scoop of ice cream or a new toy, Dad and Mom were there to rein me in and remind me of my ingratitude. I was blessed to have a single scoop. Dad was quick to focus me on what he called my “good fortune.”

Children seem to possess an insatiable appetite for more. When they see something they want, they beg and plead their case. Children have no learned sense of cost and consequently can see no reason not to possess each and every thing they fancy.

We don’t possess natural gratitude as a child. A child’s mind doesn’t understand scarcity. Gratitude is learned over time. That day on the playground, I got my first real lesson in gratitude. I believe the visual pictures in my mind have been kept clear in my memory to allow me to rerun this lesson when I forget the gifts I have been given.

GRATITUDE: The source of happiness is found in a sense of gratitude. No matter what you have, there are those with less and those with more. Gratitude evolves or does not evolve depending on which of the two children we focus on—Billie wearing her blue-green bows or Alan leaning on his crutches.

How We Survive
AND Thrive:
Money

*There was a time when a fool
and his money were soon parted.
Now it happens to everybody.*

—E. C. McKenzie

A Fool and His Money Are Soon Parted

Financial Responsibility

I was in junior high, and my English assignment was to write a paper about my dad. The teacher, in an effort to stimulate thought, had given us some ideas on questions that we might want to ask our fathers for our reports.

When Dad came home Friday night for the weekend, I asked him what kind of business he was in. Dad loved to cut up and tease, so it didn't surprise me when he said, "I'm in the money business." I remember groaning, "Daddy, I'm serious." Immediately, with a big grin on his face, he said, "Well, so am I, Sissy."

"You sell leather goods, don't you? So that is your business, isn't it?" I said, struggling to get back on track.

Then Dad gave me the real answer. "No, Suzie, selling is how I get our money. But I'm in the money business."

I was confused and irritated. I didn't want to write this paper anyway, and here Dad was making it harder than it had to be.

"My job is to earn enough money so that we can have food to

eat, a roof over our heads, clean clothes to wear, and a safe place to sleep at night. My job isn't just to earn the money, but it is also to earn and save enough money so that you and Sammy Junior can go to college, something I never got to do. No, Sissy, my business is making the money and managing the money. In this day and age, making money isn't enough. You've got to learn how to keep and grow your money.

“Money is an important thing to have when times are tough. It is harder to hang onto money than it is to make money, and that in itself can be plenty of hard work. There are people waiting to take away your hard-earned money, and it is easy to get taken in. When you're in the money business, it pays to learn all you can, because a fool and his money are soon parted.”

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: Financial responsibility is not about the job or the size of the paycheck. Financial responsibility is about being in the business of building assets to provide for your family needs, current and future. Managing your money to make the most of it is one of the most important skills you can learn.



About the Author

Suzanne Short

Suzanne Short encourages women to become more financially savvy and to take control of their destinies. Suzanne's successful careers as a Realtor, stockbroker, and mortgage broker give her a broad financial background. A much-sought-after speaker, she is busy writing her next book, tentatively titled, *Wisdom Daddy Taught Me for Kids*. She and her husband reside in Irving, Texas.

Suzanne says, "If, as many Americans, you are in need of credit repair and financial coaching, please visit my web site for additional tips."

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Suzanne's Mission Statement

I, Suzanne Short, know, feel, and believe that my life's purpose is to use the gifts I was given as an engine moving forward, not just a vessel, passively containing those gifts.

I will grow to new levels of self-fulfillment so that I have the expanded abilities to help myself and others live empowering lives without fear.

I will seek and do God's will in my life and work for the financial, spiritual, emotional, and physical welfare of not only myself, but also of my loved ones, my friends, my acquaintances, and my world.

I have shared *Honey* with you; now please share *Wisdom Daddy Taught Me* with a friend.