

# GRIST

Diocese of New Ulm      Social Concerns Office      April, 2008

## IV. Listen

On the wet grass of the back yard my father and my mother have spread quilts. We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and I too am lying there. First we were sitting up, then one of us lay down, and then we all lay down, on our stomachs, or on our sides, or on our backs, and they have kept on talking. They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet, of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all. The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of great sweetness, and they seem very near. All my people are larger bodies than mine, quiet, with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of the night. May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away.

*James Agee*

One does not love a place the less for having suffered in it.

*Jane Austen*

The family is a good institution because it is uncongenial. The men and women who, for good reasons and bad, revolt against the family, are, for good reasons and bad, revolting against mankind. Aunt Elizabeth is unreasonable, like mankind. Papa is excitable, like mankind. Our younger brother is mischievous, like mankind. Grandpapa is stupid, like mankind; he is old, like the world... Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes – our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant

oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking around.

*G. K. Chesterton*

When the boys were younger I would have to teach them how to behave. Of course, there is always disobedience, and I never wanted to crush my young ones. They will never learn if they don't have a chance to go wrong; my wife and I both would say that, especially when we were tempted to go after one of the boys too much. But there is a line one draws, and it is just as well to make it clear; beyond this point – well, there will have to be punishment. I would not use my hands; I have never thought of hitting anyone. I would call them to me, and hold both their hands and look at them. They would lower their eyes, a signal to me that they knew they had done wrong. Then I would tell them what they had to do. I wasn't harsh. And I always had my father's example to call upon. I will never forget my father's eyes. I will never forget his large hands, and how they would move toward me when he wanted me to know how serious he was. I remember he would be stern with me, then reach out and hold my upper arm and shake it a little; then I knew that I was forgiven and still loved.

*Robert Coles (quoting a Native American grandfather)*

My mother and I were never bound together by guilt or embarrassment, or even by duty. Love sheltered everything. We expected it to be reliable, and it was. We were always careful to say it – “I love you” – as if a time might come, unexpectedly, when she would want to hear that, or I would, or that each of us would want to hear ourselves say it to the other, only for some reason it wouldn't be possible, and our loss would be great – confusion. Not knowing. Life lessened. My mother and I look alike. Full, high forehead. The same chin, nose. There are pictures to show that. In myself I see her, even hear her laugh. In her life there was no

particular brilliance, no celebrity. No heroics. No crowning achievement to swell the heart. There were bad ones enough: a childhood that did not bear strict remembering; a husband she loved forever and lost; a life to follow that did not require comment. But somehow she made possible for me my truest affections. And I have known that moment with her we would all like to know, the moment of saying, "Yes. That it what it is." An act of knowing that certifies love. I have known that. I have known any number of such moments with her, known them even at the instant they occurred. And now. And, I assume, I will know them forever.

*Richard Ford*

Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. I should have called it something you somehow haven't to deserve.

*Robert Frost*

The roots of the word "obedience" imply not submission, but deep listening.

*John Garvey*

The best is to consider that we have a home somewhere, and only then does one really love the world.

*Hugo of St. Victor*

Home is the only place where you can go out and in. There are places you can go into, and places you can go out of, but the one place, if you do but find it, where you may go out and in both, is home.

*George MacDonald*

Parents give their children two kinds of love: accepting love and transforming love. Accepting love affirms the being of the child, whereas transforming love seeks the well-being of the child. While each aspect corrects the excesses of the other, parents find it difficult to maintain an equilibrium between the two sides of love. Accepting love, without transforming love, slides into indulgence and finally neglect. Transforming love, without accepting love, badgers and finally rejects.

*William F. May*

The men of old wanting to clarify and diffuse throughout the empire that light which comes from looking straight into the heart and then acting, first set up good government in their own

states; wanting good government in their own states, they first established order in their families; wanting good order in their families, they first rectified their hearts. *Mencius*

I have never seen any effect in rods but to make children's minds more base, or more maliciously headstrong.

*Montaigne*

The first idea that the child must acquire, in order to be actively disciplined, is that of the difference between good and evil, and the task of the educator lies in seeing that the child does not confound good with immobility, and evil with activity.

*Maria Montessori*

I am shameless in the way I love my father. Thinking back on him now, many years after his death, I remember his white aprons. My father was a grocer. Here is what my father taught me: the moon at crescent is God's fingernail; when your shelves look empty, stack your canned goods toward the front; keep your feet off other people's furniture; don't lean your belly on the scale weighing out produce, or the Devil will tip it his way when your time comes; take anybody's check; go nowhere in a hurry; sing; take your hat off inside churches and in the rain, if the spirit moves you; don't wax the cucumbers; don't sleep late on Sundays; start each week with gratitude and six clean aprons. Had you known him, I'd like to think you would have bought your groceries from John Wiggins. He always had a pleasant word. He could tell you how to plan a meal for 20 people, give you produce wholesale, trim your cut of meat before he weighed it. Profit wasn't Daddy's motive. Life was. Life defeated him. He taught me how to pack a grocery bag when I worked there weekends: canned goods on the bottom, perishables on top. Someone puts tomatoes on the bottom of the bag these days, I repack it. I was taught respect of certain order. One sees one's father's face, as one grows older, in the most peculiar places. I see Daddy in each bud. I see his stance on corners. I, myself, wear a grocer's apron when I cook. My mother always said there was no cleaning that damned blood from those white aprons. My daddy left a stain: I miss him.

*Marianne Wiggins*