

## **The Testament Of A Very Ordinary Man.**

I would love to tell you how a bright light appeared all around me. Through that bright light, God, in a deep thunderous voice, spoke to me to respect family, to risk, and to encourage.

But I cannot tell you that, for it has not happened,..... yet.

But I will tell you how watershed moments occurred to me through the actions of a few very ordinary people just like all of you and me.

### **A bundle of airmail letters tied with a pink ribbon, an old haversack and a technical book, what do they have in common?**

No! No! You don't have to guess.

And "Yes"! I am going to tell you!

Each item reminds me of a singular moment that significantly changed the way I live my life.

In the 1200's, Rambam, Yes! Rambam was a well-respected philosopher living in Egypt.

*Moses Maimonides (1135-1204)* He was lovingly known as Rambam for he signed with his initials that when spoken as a word sounded like "RAMBAM" in the language of that day in Egypt. This nickname stuck throughout time. He wrote to inspire mutual support in the community. All his writings were on inspiring the villagers to give of time, talent and treasures to have all the support systems necessary for an effectively functioning village. Rambam stated very clearly in what is now commonly known as "Rambam's Ladder of Giving". "One of the most inspired gifts we can give is love; encouragement, respect and skills to make others more self-sufficient."

To illustrate the effects of inspired giving. I have three short examples that in a moment in time changed the way I live my life. Giving me a clear lesson to respect, to risk, and to encourage.

### **The Bunch of Airmail Letters**

When I grew up, we were not a huggy-kissy kind of family, I could have said we were British!

In fact, some of the family axioms I learned early were: "Sit up straight! Get your elbows off the table! Children are to be seen and not heard! No! You cannot leave the table until all the turnip on your plate is finished! Pain builds character! Come straight home from school!"

So, I developed a stiff upper lip then I covered any hint of emotion that might leak off my face with a beard and moustache. The full depth and breadth of my mother's love for me was partially hidden, but became clear in a very unexpected way.

When I returned from being away for a long time at university, my mother proudly showed me a bundle of letters she had received every week over the years from me, all bound by pink ribbons.

(Pink ribbon? Thanks Mum!)

They were all carefully sorted by date. At first, I felt embarrassed, for every week, over the same weeks, I had read the letter from my mum then thrown each one out! Wow! This revelation hit me right where it hurts.

My heart melted!

Suddenly I felt more respected! I felt more loved! It had sunk into this thick twenty-two-year-old male's head! My letters were important to my mum! I realized at that moment, I was worth more demonstrated by this simple act. I was inspired to cherish my family more

and save my children's letters, if and when I had any children's letters to save. My mother had given me the gift of respect for family. Her gift inspired me to be a better family member. And at that moment I felt like a much better man.

### **The Haversack**

I was tall, skinny and poor in 1958, traveling on five dollars a day through France with the pictured haversack on my back. It was raining when I tried to find a youth hostel just north of Paris. I could not find it. I must have looked very lost, when a tall well-dressed elderly couple walked up to me and shared their umbrellas with me as they inquired, "Excusez-moi. Pouvons-nous être de quelque assistance??" Can we be of some assistance?" I replied in my halting French, "Oui!"

At hearing my weak command of the French language, they shifted to English and invited me into their nearby apartment where they would help me to find the place I was looking for. I climbed steep steps of a nearby home and entered a lovely apartment. The couple tried to find the place I wanted by use of the phone book and street maps, but failed to find it.

They explained that they had to go out. They would not be back until very late, but to make myself comfortable, have a meal of anything I could find in the pantry, have a bath, use the library and sleep in the guest bedroom for the night. They promised that they would try to find the Youth Hostel again in the morning.

I was a little taken back and nervous about this whole arrangement but as I was cold, wet and hungry said again, using large percent of my school French vocabulary, "Oui Merci".

As they offered, I prepared a supper, had a long hot bath, read from an extensive library and slept well, with a chair wedged against my door in the guest bedroom.

I had heard stories about the French!

The next morning, we all shared a hearty breakfast and I was told that the youth hostel I was looking for had been found a few blocks away. Through the breakfast conversation, I learned that it was the RCAF 3035 Wing badge on haversack that had got me my bed and breakfast. For the man across the table now in a dressing gown was Air Commodore Ramsden of the Royal Air Force. He had seen my RCAF badge after I had come in the apartment. This apartment was his home when he was at working at the NATO Headquarters. He and I remained friends and exchanged letters until his death. The commodore took a chance with a complete stranger. What did I learn from this gift? That some risk taking, is part of all charitable acts. But if we act wisely, the rewards of wise risking are great for all parties. I was inspired to copy his example for the rest of my life. In this man's presents, I felt like a much better man who would risk more.

### **The Text Book**

A few years later, I was taking an electrical engineering course. For some reason, we were short of textbooks and no more textbooks could be located on the face of the earth. Those who had bought the textbook early sat smugly knowing they had a big advantage over those students who had to somehow manage without a textbook.

I had a book. Beside me, sat a man, probably about 15 years older than me, looking very upset. I remembered the lesson learned from the air force commodore. leaped in!

I took a big risk. That is for me, that I would not loose my book or not pass the course by not having the book for half the course! I offered to share my book with the stranger. I found that this stranger was a very senior manager of a power company. We agreed to meet at library that was close to where both of us worked. We agreed to do our studies and

assignments together and alternately we took the book to our homes weekly over that long cold winter.

Yes! We both passed the course and learned a great deal more than the other student who did not share a book. We first learned respect for each other. Then we practised encouraging each other when we stalled on a difficult problem, then a deep friendship bloomed. This man spoke with great quiet authority. He inspired me, and I am sure, he inspired many other young junior engineers to continue their education for the rest of our lives.

He taught me his axiom for success; "Success is found where three things intersected: **opportunity** with **ability** and with **hard work**." He gave me the gift of **encouragement** when the going was tough.

Each of us can be inspired to take my mother advice. "Sit up straight" to "be seen and not heard", but more importantly build up the worth of others by making what they do, important".

I encourage you all to apply the air commodore's example, "To risk offering what we have of our time, talents and treasures to those we can help." And from this simple act of lending a book, we can all be inspired to work hard when an opportunity intersects with our abilities. Again, I when we risk some of our time, talent or treasure with others we may become better people!

The ancient philosopher, Rambam's writings were right! The highest form of giving is to inspire people to make themselves more self-sufficiency.

These three stories are not unusual.

Each of you, "Think back."

Each one of you has had people make a positive difference in your life.

I hope these examples serve to inspire each one of you to give of your time, talents and treasures, to risk, and to encourage all people at every opportunity. It will make a difference in lives.

Each of the people in these three stories, through a simple act of kindness, did change my life and perhaps many other lives.

The axiom: "**Do unto others as you would have them do unto you**" still applies today.

