

January 4, 2010

To Brian and Thomas Yarbrough and Nicholas Wansley:

My annual correspondence with you is now entering its second decade. We started when you were gap-toothed, giggly moppets. Now one of you is married and a father, one of you is about to graduate from college, and the third is winding up high school.

Even after 11 years of dispensing grandfatherly advice, I still don't know if you read these missives, save them or even find them relevant. I haven't asked. You haven't said. I do know that a lot of people tell me it is the most important column I write each year, and it is one they share with their own children and grandchildren. Knowing that, I soldier on.

I have suggested over the years that you love your country, obey your parents, believe in God, reject prejudice, work hard and have some fun. I don't see anything in those words that needs to be revised simply because you no longer are little boys.

German philosopher Immanuel Kant said, "Two things fill the mind with new and increasing wonder and awe - the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me." Both are God-given. The longer I live, the more I learn about our universe. And the more I learn, the more convinced I am that a God beyond our comprehension put it all together. Believe.

Moral law means God also has given us the ability to distinguish between good and evil. What we do with that ability is up to us. Just remember you are a walking sermon and will be judged by your actions, as will those who have put a lot of time and effort into getting you to this point in your life. Don't disappoint us. Don't make poor choices.

Look in the mirror each night and ask yourself, "Did I do my best today? Did I make a positive difference in the world, or did I squander a precious day that I can never get back?" We know your beloved brother and cousin, Zack, lived every day to its optimum. I can think of no better way to honor Zack's memory than to emulate him.

We talk a lot in this country about our personal freedoms. That includes the freedom to say what we choose, to act as we like and to do as we wish. We can utter obscenities, burn our flag and adopt the sexual behavior of a yard dog. That is our right, but that doesn't make it right. I am afraid you are part of a generation that does not understand that personal freedom also includes personal responsibility.

Does obscene language and desecrating our national symbols make us better people? Does promiscuous behavior in any way strengthen us as a society? Should we sniff, snort, drink or chew anything that numbs us from coping in the real world? When our personal concerns outweigh the concerns of others, we will be well on the road to destruction. Please don't let it happen on your watch.

I love you boys more than I can express. I want you to be happy and to live fulfilling lives, and I will do everything I can to see that you do. But the responsibility of how you live your life is your own. If you need a yardstick, I suggest my favorite Bible passage, Galatians 5:22-23: "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

May you know them all and may you share them with the world.

Happy New Year,
Pa