

## Always Be a Gentleman!

*To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object.*

Henry David Thoreau

Walden

Robbie received an e-mail from Captain Lewis reading:

“Robbie, I’m sorry that I cannot make a trip to see you this month as I had planned. Please forgive me. We just picked up a project that is going to require me to be in the office almost non-stop for about two weeks. I had been meaning to share this letter that I received from Mr. Turnbull on the occasion of my high school graduation. I found it very useful at the time and I have read it many times since. I’ll call you in a few weeks.”

Robbie responded, “No problem. THANKS,” and eagerly opened the attachment:

June 22, 1962

Dear Jim,

Today you reach a significant milestone in your life, your graduation from high school. I thought I'd take a minute to share a few thoughts with you as you prepare to take a new path in your life.

First of all, I hope that you realize how much I have enjoyed our relationship over the last four years. I hope that your growth as custodian of Red Hawk's stick has been as great and rewarding as mine.

I cannot begin to share the countless lessons I have learned from Red Hawk and the stick. You will surely benefit from the stick as I did, but you will also benefit from your own explorations and experiences, and from a number of people that you will meet along the way.

Your choice of college presents a unique challenge that will affect everything you do in your life from here forward. I commend and thank you for "picking up where Jack Turnbull left off." Your tribute to Jack

and our family, not to mention our country, is truly humbling.

Though I was never a military officer, perhaps I can offer some of Jack's insight for your consideration. Jack was always first and foremost concerned for his men. He always made sure that their needs were met before he considered anything for himself. That included his junior officers—not just his enlisted men. Next to that, Jack placed a high priority on physical strength and courage. He never let anyone in the chain-of-command outwork him physically.

Jack expected a lot from his men. He got their best efforts because he was fair with them. They appreciated his skill, knowledge, ability, and work ethic, but he gained their respect because he genuinely cared about them and worked hard for them.

When the men let Jack, themselves, or the crew down, he made sure to identify the deficiency, but he did it in a positive manner. He always found

ways for the men to remedy and improve the situation. As you assume your positions of leadership in the fleet in a few years, I hope that Jack's example might be of some use to you.

At this point in my life, I have sometimes looked back to see what I have learned. Though I feel I have learned a great deal, I often tell my children that I am still not much closer to knowing what I would like to know—or even what I need to know. I think a lot about the ways of the world, and what might be called the “Laws of Nature.”

So let me “think on paper” a little and share some of those reflections, with the hope that you accept these musings not as absolute truth, but rather as a starting point from which to begin thinking about issues, taking your own journey, and if you are lucky, arriving at your own conclusions. So, with fifty-nine years behind me, here are a few thoughts:

I can never read enough!

I have come to believe that patience is the greatest of all virtues.

I have become infinitely more appreciative of the intrinsic, aesthetic value of art, music, poetry, theater, dance, and literature over the years.

I have come to believe that actions are worth far more than words—and its corollary that the best form of leadership is example.

I have learned that substance is worth a lot more than style, that function is worth a lot more than form, and that good friends are worth a lot more than money.

I have learned the value of taking advantage of one's opportunities.

I have become much more sensitive to the precarious balance of nature. I try not to consume or waste any more than I absolutely have to.

I have endeavored to study history so that I might learn more about the human condition. I have found that life has always been a struggle and always will be.

I think since Jack's death I have tried not to take anything for granted—my health, my wife, my children, my job. As you know, within a few weeks of each other just a few years ago, my mother passed away, and my son graduated from West Point. Both events brought into even sharper focus the fragility and uncertainty of our lives. I have developed a tremendous appreciation for life. I feel fortunate to have had such positive support from my family and friends all these years, but especially to have my children as healthy as they are. I don't know what the future holds for my son Bruce, now a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army. All I can do is hope that he works hard and that he will answer the calls put to him. As his father, though, I have to admit that I secretly pray that he will not be called as Jack was.

I have become painfully aware that Thomas Paine's maxim, "Those who expect to reap the blessings of liberty must undergo the fatigues of supporting it," is so true. My mother,

in particular, bore that burden during World War II. As our son wears the uniform of the United States, my wife and I go to sleep every night bearing those very same “fatigues” of supporting our country’s freedom. Your parents will, as well.

I regret to inform you that your will, courage, honor, integrity, fidelity, strength, resilience, and intellect will be challenged beyond what they have been at this point, and at times more than you will want. My only advice in this area is to work hard, and remember that maintaining your honor in difficult times can never be bad. Perhaps Shakespeare’s missive, “This above all, to thine own self be true,” might guide you through particularly trying circumstances.

I have intentionally selected *Profiles in Courage* for your graduation gift. It seems an appropriate gift for a future leader. Please enjoy it.

So, Jim, congratulations on your graduation and best of luck as you engage a whole new world of

challenges at the United States Naval Academy. I look forward to following your already-brilliant career on the lacrosse field. I hope to attend many games. You can count on me to be your biggest fan (except when you play Johns Hopkins!).

As always, please let me know if there is anything I can do to assist you. I know that Red Hawk will provide you a great deal of insight and wisdom.

Let me leave you with a saying that my father used to drill into Jack and me, "ABAG!" —Always Be a Gentleman!

Godspeed,

Doug

Once again, Robbie was overwhelmed by this heartfelt letter and shared it with his parents.