

Symphony in G: “Grace, Generosity, and Gratitude.”

Philip H. Henderson, Keynote Speaker

Thursday, November 3, 2005
The Elks Lodge in Santa Ana California
Santa Ana Unified School District Leadership

November 3, 2005
Santa Ana Unified School District
Fall Breakfast meeting

Symphony in G "Grace, Generosity, and Gratitude."

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Good morning Superintendent Al Mijares. Good morning distinguished guests. I am honored to be with you this morning. My topic today is, "Symphony in G: Grace, Generosity, and Gratitude." My address today is a story about how I learned to fill my life with grace, generosity, and gratitude. These simple ethics transformed my life. I will tell you how to bring more grace, generosity and gratitude into your life.

First, some background information. I was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. I lived with my parents and sister in a duplex owned by my mother's aunt, who lived next door. My birth year is 1947. I grew up in the fifties and attended UCLA in the 60's. Looking back on it now, I know this period in my life was a kinder and gentler time than exists today.

My mother stayed at home until my sister and I began elementary school. We lived across the street from Denker Playground, a small city park, and next door to a Baptist church. Denker Playground was the Mecca of basketball in Los Angeles for black basketball players. It had one of the few indoor basketball courts available to blacks.

All our neighbors were Negroes, or as my mother would say, Colored People. Growing up I rarely saw anyone who was not a Negro. My family and the neighbors looked out for each other. My mother knew everyone who lived on our street. Every day a truck vendor stopped by our home selling fresh vegetables. Once a week a vendor came from San Pedro harbor selling fresh fish laid out on a bed of ice.

A Helms Bakery truck parked in front of our home everyday. The aroma of the baked goods fills my mind even now, as I think of this daily visitor. Every other day, the milkman fulfilled our dairy order based on empty bottles left on the back porch. Sometimes he left chocolate milk. Several times a week a burly man strode into the kitchen carrying a huge dripping block of ice on his back. He deposited the block in the



icebox. These were the days before electric refrigerators. I still sometimes call our refrigerator an icebox out of habit. I'm sure some of you remember iceboxes.

The highlight of each day was the arrival of the Good Humor man. He sold ice cream to the delight of children of all ages. My favorite was the orange-vanilla bar, half-orange and half-vanilla, a *Creamsicle*. We would charge out the front door to make sure we arrived before he ran out of our favorite flavor. We were not concerned about television addictions or Internet rip-off artists. There was only limited television and no computers at all. The very first computer was made in 1947, the year of my birth. I guess that makes me an original member of the computer age.

I remember watching the television stations signing off for the evening with their final broadcast at 9:00 pm. In the late fifties, doctors were paid to recommend cigarette smoking on television and many shows were live broadcasts. Television was a luxury most people did not enjoy. Electronic gadgets were few. Most products were powered by hand. Even our washing machine was partially hand driven. After the washing cycle my mother rinsed the clothes and then passed them through a hand wringer to remove excess water.

The only telephone in our duplex was in my mother's aunt's home. She had a party line. Sometimes when you picked up the telephone to make a call you would hear conversation underway with the other party who used our telephone number. Our telephone number had only five digits. Long distance calls were placed through a telephone operator who had to call us back when the connection was made. For entertainment many evenings the entire family would listen to radio programs; *The Shadow*, *The Jack Benny Show*, and *The Amos 'N Andy Show* were some of my favorites.

The Fifties were a time of recovery from the hardships suffered during World War II. President Eisenhower was rebuilding the country to reflect the changes in the world following this second worldwide conflict. I grew up hearing that World War I had been the war to end all wars. I guess the second world war was to make sure. I am one of the first of the group known as the Baby Boomers. I was born in the Queen of Angels Hospital in Hollywood, California. I have only one sibling, a younger sister who lives in Los Angeles.

Mose Henderson

My father (Mose Henderson) was the eighth child from a family with fourteen children. Mose Henderson died of prostate cancer in 1988. He was born on a small farm in Pleasureville, Kentucky. Pleasureville's total population at its peak was fewer than two-hundred residents. His family were tobacco farmers. Mose attended boarding school at Lincoln Institute¹, a high school established by Whitney Young, Sr. Whitney Young, Sr. was the father of the famous civil rights leader, Whitney Young, Jr. Soon after high school, Mose entered the military to fight in World War II. Formal education took a back seat to the war effort.



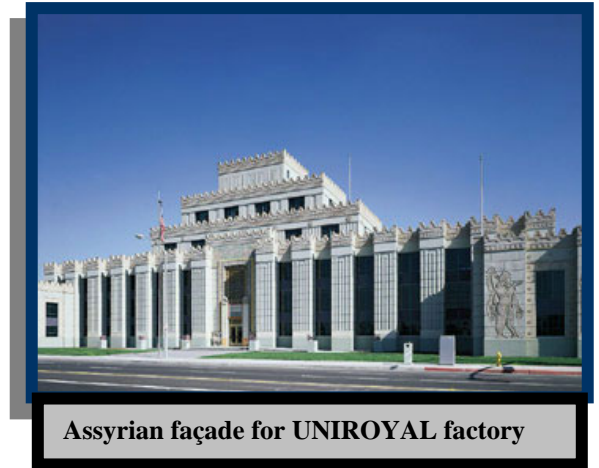
My father served in the Army during World War II. He was based on the *Ile de France*. The Ile de France was a cruise ship that was turned into a supply ship for the war effort. The ship was docked in Iran for more than two years during the war. The US Army was segregated in World War II. All the men who served with him were Negroes. This was the official policy of the US Armed Services, even during wartime. Mose Henderson was the only person from his family to serve in WWII and the only one to leave Kentucky.

Mose mustered out of the Army in 1946. The supply ship he served on was moored in the Los Angeles Harbor. He met my mother at a USO event held in San Pedro,

¹ *The Whitney M. Young, Jr., Birthplace, a **National Historic Landmark**, is located southwest of Simpsonville, Kentucky, off U.S. Route 60 on the campus of the Old Lincoln Institute, now the Whitney M. Young, Jr., Job Corps Center. The house is open to the public by request. Call the Whitney M. Young, Jr., Foundation at 502-585-4733 for an appointment.*

California. Mose and Esther married and chose to raise their family in Los Angeles, California. I was born about eleven months after my parent's marriage and my sister was born about 13 months following my birth.

After several manual labor jobs, Mose found employment at the United States Rubber Company (later renamed Uniroyal) as an automobile tire inspector. He continued to work there for the next thirty-three years until the tire manufacturer closed its doors. Many of you have seen the outside of what once was the UNIROYAL Tire Company.



This location is now home to the Citadel Outlet Center, just off the Santa Ana Freeway near downtown Los Angeles. What you see from the 5 Freeway is a façade of an Assyrian Castle. That façade existed during my father's employment. Beyond the beautiful façade was one of the dirtiest factories in Los Angeles County. It is now a fashionable regional shopping center. Mose would be very surprised to see how this property is used today.

My father did not attend college. However, he always encouraged my sister and me to get as much education as possible. He believed that work is honorable. If my job was to dig a ditch then I must dig the best ditch possible. He encouraged me to be industrious and to create from my hands. From him I learned to plant vegetable gardens, to care for plants and animals, and to honor myself by living with grace and integrity.

My legacy from Mose Henderson was to live according to moral principles. He showed me that actions were more important than words. He showed me that hard work is rewarded by the fruits of my labor. When I cleared land, planted seeds, watered, weeded, and then finally harvested vegetables I experienced the value of hard work. Our soil was typical California clay. In order to coax crops to grow I busted the sod, added compost and fish entrails and continued to keep the soil open for water and air to feed the young plants. When I harvested and then ate the green beans, carrots, potatoes, corn, and peppers the satisfaction was real.

As educators you are faced with the same difficult assignment. It is great when you have eager students who are prepared to blossom under your guidance. It is even more wondrous when you have to inspire your students to see the blessings they can achieve with a good education. You have a challenge. Some of the tools you desire are unavailable—all the more your satisfaction when you succeed despite the shortcomings. When I planted seeds not every plant produced, yet every plant was nurtured and cared for and the successes appreciated all the more.

On a farm as you continue to care for the soil in due course larger and larger crops are harvested. Likewise, as you continue to develop your schools, ultimately more and more students will develop a love for learning and succeed at the highest levels. The raw material (your students) you have is precious and capable of producing scientists, writers, musicians, artists, business leaders, inventors, spiritual leaders, poets, educators, medical leaders, and citizens with heart and spirit to build their community with grace, generosity, and gratitude. Your inspiration to teachers, students, parents, and community leaders make everything possible.

Esther Henderson

My mother (Esther Henderson) was the third of six children. She was born in Los Angeles, California in 1922. Her parents moved to California from Georgia in about 1916. Esther received a classical education at Los Angeles Polytechnic High School. One of her classmates was Helen Gurley Brown, former editor of Cosmopolitan Magazine. Esther sang in the school choir, studied Latin and ancient world history. With this education, she developed a lifelong love for music, literature, and poetry.

Esther's Christian faith dominated her life. She lived according to the principles of her religion and taught my sister and me to be decent and honest people. Esther was always ready to put aside her personal needs to help someone else. The someone else could be a family member, a friend, or a stranger—if someone needed help and she could come to his or her aid, she would not hesitate. I know that about her by observing her actions. After my father's death, Esther traveled the world as a Christian Missionary. When at home she also tended to the needs of those in her neighborhood.

My mother suffered a fatal heart attack in March, 2001. Hundreds of people attended her funeral. Many came forward to speak about her life. A Christian minister

from the Los Angeles County Jail told us that Esther had visited the jail regularly for more than eight years. He said that she came nearly every Sunday to talk to the juvenile inmates. When she missed the last Sunday without calling to tell him she would not be present, he knew something bad had happened. In his memory, no volunteer had come so regularly for so many years. Esther's work was not for glory but from grace.

Mose and Esther Henderson raised me to live with grace, generosity and gratitude. I am only fifty-eight years old. It was not that long ago that grace, generosity, and gratitude were character traits admired by men and women. Today I find a few young people who understand these character traits, but only a few. So many young people are seeking security and fortune without regard to their character. This is distressing to me. The hope for the future of humankind is for people to know grace, generosity and gratitude as fundamental to living "*the good life.*"

What is grace?

What is generosity?

What is gratitude?

Perhaps if I explain their meaning to me, you shall see that grace, generosity and gratitude can exist today in plentitude. I hope that is the case.

I define "***Grace***" as the eagerness to give full value in spite of personal fears. A graceful person has the courage to do what is right even when doing what is right is certain to cause a loss of some kind. Grace is an uncommon characteristic in America but is sorely needed. **Grace is the courage to live with ethical integrity!**

I define "***Generosity***" as eagerness to give your best in every circumstance to make the world a better place for generations to come. Generosity of spirit is most important—the spiritual world is more powerful than the material world. Giving your money is not as important as giving your time, especially when it comes to your family, and the children you serve. **Generosity is the eagerness to attend to loved ones by listening to them with empathy.**

I define “*Gratitude*” as eagerness to become the best person you can be and to learn something everyday. One demonstrates gratitude in one’s actions—words are unimportant. We show our thanks by eagerly giving back to our community, our nation, and the world. **Gratitude is inspiration to act as a gift of love.**

You may not have thought about grace, generosity, and gratitude as the keys to making your work as a leader with Santa Ana Unified School District meaningful, my assignment today is to help you find ways to integrate the *Symphony in G, Grace, Generosity, and Gratitude* into your everyday life, at home and at work.

GRACE

Let us begin with Grace. Grace is such a wonderful word. Is there someone present whose name is Grace? Please stand if your name is Grace. Thank you. I have known several people who were given the name Grace. They seemed to have grown into their names. That is the power of language. When we name something, it attempts to live up to its name. If I say he or she is a lazy boy or girl, he or she will attempt to become such a person. If I say, he or she is a blessing to the world, then that is what will transpire. I have to be careful with my words. Words are very powerful. Our world is created by our words. If my words are inspired by grace then my actions create a world where love flourishes.

When I speak of grace, I mean that character in humans that inspires each person to do what is right without having to receive a reward for doing good. The attitude of WIFM (What’s In It For Me) doesn’t cut it. I cannot imagine doing good work only because I expected to receive public acclaim and fortune for my good deed. If the only reason one does good work is to receive a reward it can be argued that such a person is poorly motivated.

“Grace is ethical behavior without expectation of a reward.”

When a person gives no thought whatsoever to his or her own condition and rushes in to do what must be done for goodness sake, that is grace in action.

When a person sacrifices his position or reputation to ensure that a good deed is done there is wisdom in such graceful work. Goodness does not rely on rewards to succeed. Only the most immoral people do good acts merely for the reward.

A story will illustrate what I mean about grace in action. Several years ago I was the keynote speaker for the *Anaheim Lamplighter's Chapter of the American Women's Business Association*². During my presentation, I asked the audience if anyone had done something she knew was right and was punished for her good work.

A retiree in her mid-70's rose and told us about an event that occurred more than 20-years earlier when she was employed in the automotive industry. She discovered a systemic flaw in the design of a replacement part and told the executives they should recall these parts, redesign the part and retrofit those who had already purchased the flawed part. This would have cost the company a pretty penny.

The executives refused to accept her solution. They told her that no one would know about their faulty part and they choose to ignore the situation. She continued to press them to do what was morally right and was fired for her continued opposition to their decision.

When she arrived home to tell her children and husband of her dismissal she knew the loss of her income stream would have a negative financial effect on her family. As she told her family the cause of her dismissal they immediately claimed her to be a hero. She demonstrated to them that her ethical principles were more than merely lip service; she walked her talk.

She told us that this lesson of grace taught her children the real meaning of ethical principles. They sucked up the loss of income because they wanted to honor her graceful actions. She told us her family was more proud of her than they had ever been for promotions or other outward successes. She announced to us that if she had this situation to do over she would make the same choices.

² The American Business Women's Association is open to men and women. For additional information about this association visit www.abwa.org.

This was an example of grace in action. Has anyone here experienced such an event? Please raise your hand if you have. Those of you, whose hands are raised, please stand and tell me your name. Thank you, you can be seated now. These people are heroes; they have learned a good lesson and taught a good lesson. These people have become wise because of their sacrifice—you can learn from them.

Grace is giving your greatest gifts freely and openly. With grace, you do not seek applause or acknowledgement merely the opportunity to serve. You only want to serve giving the most valuable gifts you have for the betterment of those in your life.

Grace alone is a grand gift, but when you add generosity to the package it makes life so much richer.

GENEROSITY

Generosity is the eagerness to attend to loved ones by listening to them with empathy. Psychiatrist M. Scott Peck, in *The Road Less Traveled*, wrote, "*the principal form that the work of love takes is attention. . .*"³ We attend to the people we love. What is attention? If you ask me to pay attention to you, you expect me to turn my consciousness to you, without interruption. You want me to be respectful, to listen, watch, and understand who you are. You may be teaching me a song, an arithmetic formula, or an ethical principle. In every case, when you desire my attention, and I give it completely, that is an act of loving.

When I "*pay attention*" to you I am listening to you with empathy. Empathic listening is the lost art of communication. Allow me to explain. Suppose I become an expert public speaker. I study my subject and have the most up to date knowledge about my specialty. I announce that I will be speaking at such and such a venue at such and such day and time. You and many other people may choose to attend to "*hear*" what I have to say. You may attend and hear everything I say. However, understanding what I say has to do with listening to me, not hearing me. Understanding what I say has to do with getting my meaning without a filter. It means listening even when you do not enjoy what I say. Sometimes the truth hurts.

³ The Road Less Traveled © 1978 by M. Scott Peck, MD see page 120

I want to illustrate this point with a story. I am a volunteer at the Orange County Fairgrounds on the Centennial Farm. The Centennial Farm has served our community for seventeen years. This is my third year as a docent on the farm. Last year, more than 80,000 schoolchildren from Orange and Los Angeles Counties visited our farm to learn where their food and fiber are developed.

At the farm I learned to drive a team of oxen. That makes me an oxen drover. Some of you have met Bill and Bob, our oxen at the farm. These animals are eleven-year old American Milking Devon cattle, the favorite breed of cattle of George Washington, statesman, president, general, and farmer. Each animal weighs 2,000 pounds and spans ten-feet from nose to tail. Each has a rack of horns more than four-feet across. These are impressive animals. They are strong—each animal can drag 6,000 pounds. They are intelligent—they appear to remember everything that has ever happened to them.



When children, along with their teachers and parents, visit the farm they stop by the oxen team to learn how these magnificent animals helped to build our agricultural industry. I give a short presentation and answer questions the children have about oxen. I do my volunteer work three days each week. I usually speak to more than 1,200 children every week.

During the course of my work as a docent oxen drover, many of the children look at me, Bill and Bob, and notice our relationship. You see, Bill, Bob and me are all in the same herd. Bill and Bob have accepted me as a fellow ox. I am not nearly as strong or intelligent as Bill and Bob; however, they have accepted me through grace as one of them.

Often I see a spark in the eyes of the children that tell me they know that I am more than a man driving a team of oxen. They know that Bill and Bob and I have mutual trust, respect, and caring for each other. When I notice that a child knows about our relationship, that is my reward for the work I do as a docent. No amount of money can match this connection. Sharing these moments with the children is empathic listening.

Generosity is being at peace with being a good person. Some people want to be noticed for the good work they do. These people want awards and prizes; they want buildings and streets named after them. We cannot enjoy immortality—only God is immortal. Generosity is knowing that our good work is its own reward. Generosity is being at peace with the knowledge that what we did was meaningful and good and not needing anything else.

We use very little of our time listening with empathy to the most important people in our lives. Rarely do we listen with empathy to our spouse, our children, or our coworkers. We are unable to give to these important people what is relatively easy for us to give to the students we serve. *"Your role as principal or senior administrator requires you to listen to students with empathy. If you cannot, then you are unable to serve them. You must be able to understand what is on the minds of the children under your care, especially when you disagree with them."*

Just so there will be no misunderstanding, I will define empathic listening. There are three steps to empathic listening. First, the sole purpose of the listener is to understand the thoughts and feelings of the speaker without regard to the listener's feelings about what the speaker said. Second, the speaker must know that he has been understood. Finally, the listener must know that the speaker knows he was understood. Each step is vital for empathic listening to have occurred. When all three steps have occurred you have been an empathic listener. This is very hard work to do.

Imagine a situation where a student has cheated on an examination. The student is sent to you for counseling. This is a perfect opportunity for empathic listening. The student already knows that he has broken a serious rule and knows there are consequences to his actions. What purpose is served to tell the student what he already knows? Instead, this is a time to listen empathically to the student to understand how he came to do this cheating and what he plans to do now that he was been caught.

The student needs to be disciplined for his actions. However, our primary purpose at the school is to teach him. What can this student learn from this "lesson" other than "don't get caught?" Our purpose as an empathic listener is to learn what

lesson the student learned and where is he headed next. If all he learned is to find a more successful cheating system, then we have failed as educators. If you are a person inspired by generosity, you will find a way to give the student the learning he needs. You will begin by listening to him with empathy.

Listening with empathy to a “problem student” is a perfect example of generosity in action. There are so many thoughts racing through our minds when we meet such a student. We want to set them straight. We want to protect those he cheated. We want to protect the integrity of our educational system. Moreover, we want this student to learn a useful lesson; so that the next time he is faced with an opportunity to cheat that, he is more inclined to behave in a responsible way.

Showing caring and love for this wayward person is an act of generosity. We can punish the child for his transgression; however, if we do not leave him with hope, then we have not properly served him. There are myriad ways to give the student the lesson he deserves. When you are inspired by generosity you will find a way that suits the situation.

Generosity is the eagerness to attend to loved ones by listening to them with empathy. When your life is full of grace and generosity you begin to feel grateful for every part of your life. Your gratitude produces wisdom and your wisdom creates love in your work. First comes grace, living with integrity. Next comes generosity—connection with others through listening empathically. Gratitude is the integration of grace and generosity.

GRATITUDE

Gratitude is the result of choosing to act with grace and generosity. When you are full of gratitude, you become wise enough to choose to respond with ethical clarity. I am grateful to know that I can choose to live according to my ethical principles and by doing so, leave the world a better place for all who live on Earth.

My favorite holiday is Thanksgiving. I celebrate Thanksgiving every day, often several times each day. My heart is full of gratitude for the sacrifices and hard work of the many courageous and creative people who manifested the world I enjoy every day. I speak not merely of my family but all men and women who have come before me in peace. There is no limit to the gratitude I feel this moment.

When I join you in peace and love, my heart is full of gratitude. Still, my most wondrous moments of gratitude occur when I suffer a terrible setback. Five years ago I lost a close friend to cancer. Dr. Chuck was only 54. I was grateful for having known him for 28-years. I am grateful that I can carry some of his vitality into the future. I am grateful that I could help him pass from the living. When I suffer a financial setback or fall ill to vertigo attacks, I feel grateful for the ability to come back strong and fortified. Finding gratitude even in the darkest moments is evidence of wisdom.

Instead of pining for what I do not receive or feeling jealous of the success of others, I am grateful for the goodness that I can bring into the world each moment; should I choose to use my time and strength for that purpose. My gratitude is fulfilling and omnipresent.

Gratitude is a wondrous experience. When you live in gratitude, your everyday wants of material wealth are minimized. With gratitude as your inspiration, you seek only the opportunity to serve the needs of others. Fulfillment comes from being able to serve others. Gratitude for each blade of grass, gratitude for the honeybee that alights on the rose bush next door. Gratitude for my very being and the loving relationships with my family and friends.

I am grateful for the clarity to know my way in the dark. There is darkness even during the daytime hours. Darkness is the fear we experience because we do not know what is right every moment. When good people disagree on what is best and what must become, there is hesitation and fear. Gratitude gets one past even such a moment as that. We have many such moments when we are surrounded by darkness in the day. To choose the proper action requires inspiration from grace, generosity, and gratitude.

In such a moment, I wait for peace, for evidence of grace, to show me the way away from hatred, fear, anger, and neglect. I wait for evidence of generosity, so I can step aside and continue to spread goodness everywhere I go. I do not prevail at every battle. When I know I will not prevail, I never give up. I move the engagement to a higher level. I am grateful that I know right from wrong. I possess the courage to do what is right whatever the cost to me personally. This is gratitude.

In your work you face daily challenges of this sort. Your impact on the lives of the children entrusted to your care inevitably forces you to face dilemmas that challenge your creativity or biases. Gratitude is the gift that will heal your pain.

Some Concluding Thoughts

If you know my intended legacy you will know my purpose in life. When I am no longer here I want people to speak and think of me as a person "*whose good actions brought more love and peace to everyone he met.*" To live in such a way, to earn that legacy, I know that every moment I must behave appropriately in honor of my mission.

I cannot stop to calculate what I will get for myself for doing what is right. My motto is "*Always take time to do a good deed, you never know if you will have another opportunity.*"

Do you have Grace, Generosity and Gratitude in your life? If you would like more than you have, all you need do is look inside your deepest feeling of humanity and choose to do what brings goodness to thrive in your family, workplace, and community.

If you were to purchase a red sports car, you would begin to notice all the red sports cars you see. You would notice that your neighbor has one, and red sports cars would pop up everywhere. I used to own a *red Camaro Z-28* and this is what happened to me. I began to see red sports cars everywhere. When I sold the Camaro and purchased a Nissan Maxima, the same thing happened. Suddenly, everywhere I traveled, I saw Maxima's. I didn't realize there were so many.

The same thing can happen with the Symphony in G. If you attune your mind to live with grace, generosity, and gratitude, you will see endless opportunities to live in the Symphony in G.

Following a path inspired by grace, generosity, and gratitude is a challenge. If you look at your personal successes you will find numerous examples where the grace, generosity, and gratitude shown by those who love you, inspired you to your success. When you look closely you will also notice opportunities for you to act inspired by grace, generosity, and gratitude.

Take a moment to think about your most recent act of grace. It could be a moment in your family life or possibly a moment within the context of your work. Perhaps a moment with a parent or teacher, or with a child who looked to you for guidance and wisdom. How did you perform? How did you feel? Isn't this the kind of experience you wish you would do at every such opportunity? Imagine the seed that you planted by your act of grace. You took the path of a lover, true to his or her loved one. Your act of grace made the world a better place and gave meaning to your life.

What if you had not been present to show your gratitude and offer the act of grace? What if you were present but chose not to act from grace and instead acted out of fear? How will the world be healed, except from grace? How will your legacy be fulfilled, if you fear too much to act inspired by grace? Your choice is an affirmation of your humanity. Grace is a human act? Grace is your opportunity to be the best person you can be. When you act with grace the entire universe smiles!

Symphony in G is not what you think. Symphony in G is not what you believe. The Symphony in G is not even what your intentions are. Symphony in G is only about how you choose to live your life, moment-by-moment.

Living with Grace, Generosity, and Gratitude is what you do! Your actions determine your legacy. While I would like to live a long life and continue my work, if I were to die this day, my legacy is what I would want it to be. If you desire to leave a legacy of wisdom, you can. You must find the courage to live gracefully, with generosity of spirit, and grateful every moment for life's blessings. If this is your intention and belief, then today is the best day to begin.

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