

Allan and Christine Green
5604 Dairyland Road
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Saturday, June 24, 2000

To the Grandchildren of George and Ruth Green

Dear sons, daughters, nieces, and nephews,

Every once in a while I assemble a few coherent thoughts and note the occasion by telling myself "you ought to write this down for your kids". And, most times that's as far as it gets. But as we, your parents, get older, we need to treasure those moments of lucidity - who knows how many more we will have? Continuity within a family requires more than the passing of genes (which we've done very nicely, I think). It requires memories, long talks, time together, celebrations, stories, and love, all of which we have shared in abundance, but I have been powerfully reminded in recent months that this remarkable family of which you are an irreplaceable part is not an accident. You, your loved ones, and yes, we your parents are the hopes, the faith, and the vision of your Grandpa and Grandma Green come to life more beautifully and amazingly than ever they could have believed, but believe it they did, and lived it, and taught us as we have tried to teach you, and you are all wonderful. Your Grandpa frequently mentions this, but doesn't seem to connect the fact that his [remarkable] family has something to do with the fact that he and Grandma are themselves quite remarkable. That's what this letter is about: some remarkable people who happen to be your Grandpa and Grandma. They are remarkable, of course, just for living and surviving these 87 years, for having raised four children, for having faced life and now, death, with optimism and faith. But I believe your grandparents are truly remarkable, and it has directly affected us, their children, and you, their grandchildren, in irrevocable ways. Here are some of my reasons.

First, they understood inclusive 60 years ago. Think about it. We have a beautiful family in its diversity and today we tend to assume our society's moral and legal, if not emotional commitment to both racial and gender equality. But in 1938, in the US at least, this was not the case. It was certainly not the case in Grandpa's family. I remember, and perhaps Sherrill does as well, Aunt Ella's and grandpa (Ralph) Green's ethnic slurs and blatant prejudice, which was not uncommon for their generation. And, from what I understand, compared to *their* parents, Ralph and Ella's attitudes might be described as progressive. This is what your Grandpa Green lived with when he was growing up. I don't know as much about Grandma's background. Our maternal grandmother Harriet Sitzenstatter lived with us and about the only evidence I can remember one way or the other is that I know that the visits of our fresh-air children made her uncomfortable, but then, I made her uncomfortable, so perhaps it had no ethnic connection. Neither of Grandma's brothers, Gordon or Eric ever exhibited Grandma's social conscience, that's for sure. But, given that neither of your grandparents had any reason to be radically different from their generation by virtue of an enlightened upbringing, how did they start their marriage and their family committed to receiving every human being as an equal? And then living it out to this day? For example, which one of you thinks it is acceptable to be rude to, or even patronize, a waiter, or a salesperson, or the housekeeper in the hotel, to say nothing of more egregious prejudice? Not one, I think, and you can trace that attitude back to your grandparents, where your parents learned it. But what was their model? I asked Dad recently about this. He thought for a moment, and then said, "I don't know - it just seemed right". So, there we have it. It was "just right" that Mom and Dad befriended all persons regardless of race or creed - like the Japanese-American Ozone family back when there was still a lot of distrust of the Japanese, "just right" that they would welcome their son-in-law and his lovely daughters with delight and pride, "just right" that they welcomed adopted

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grandchildren from various backgrounds and love them unconditionally, "just right" that they proudly introduce *all* their visiting great-grandchildren to their neighbors at Plantation Village. Even for today this is remarkable. In 1938, the US Civil Rights movement was still 25 years in the future. Grandpa and Grandma figured it out themselves.

Second, they understood "self-determination" 60 years ago. Again, today we take it for granted that everyone gets a chance to "be all that he or she can be" and to decide that for himself or herself. Today the media lampoons the over-controlling father and the society-climbing mother who can't rest until their daughter makes the social register (e.g. *American Beauty*), but it only works because we, your parents, grew up when that was the norm. We certainly had friends who were going to be lawyers because Dad was a lawyer, who were "expected" to assume the family business, who "had to" go to Princeton or wherever because that was Dad's alma mater. In our generation, mothers worried a lot about when their daughters would find husbands. It was accepted that women could go on to college, but it was expected to lead to marriage. In short, children were expected to fulfill their parents expectations, not their own. That was our generation. Grandpa was raised in a family where his aunts never married because no one met the standards of his grandmother, Phoebe. His father was virtually disinherited because he didn't follow in the family business. Grandma had perhaps an even more difficult challenge: the two people that loved her most, her father and older brother Allan, died before she was 18. But despite that, in 1931 at the height of the depression, Grandma and Grandpa decided that they would get a college degree. Somehow they did. And then, somehow they came up with the idea that loving your children means supporting them, encouraging them, disciplining them, and then - freeing them. Not only were we all free to make our own decisions about education, career, marriage, religion, life, how we raise our children, where we live, etc., with their endorsement, we were free to *fail* - and still have their support and love. I know. I have called home in the midst of bitter failure to hear Grandpa say, "I can be there in the morning". No recriminations, or I-told-you-so's, or "How could you be so stupid?" Just, "I can be there in the morning". And I know that you, in your times of confusion and discouragement and failure, have heard the same from us. We learned from our parents to rejoice when you rejoice, to sorrow when you sorrow. We learned that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. We learned that love never, ever fails. All Grandpa and Grandma ever wanted for their family is that we find joy and satisfaction in our lives, whatever path that might take. I trust you will pass on this precious legacy to your loved ones.

Third, they still love each other. In May, Grandpa and Grandma celebrated 62 years of marriage, quite an accomplishment in itself, but it pales in comparison with the substance of that marriage: never a separation, never any hints of incompatibility or unhappiness on either part, constant commitment and affirmation of their partner, and the wisdom to make each other the most important person in their lives, above parents and aunts, above children, above careers, above everything. Adultery, abuse, sarcasm, tantrums, alcoholism, divorce - these were things we had to learn about later in life. They have never been part of Grandpa and Grandma's marriage. But wait - there's more! Where in the world did they learn this? Grandma was raised by an unhappy, critical mother. (We know - she lived with us. Ask your Mom or Dad what she was like). Grandma loved her father desperately, but he worked long hours managing a hotel and he died when she was 18. Grandpa was the only child of our Grandfather Ralph, a man who gets mixed ratings as a

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Grandfather, but unanimous low ratings as a husband and father. We never knew our Grandmother, Katherine, who by all accounts was a treasure, but we do know that she was sufficiently disenchanted with your great-grandpa and life at the Green homestead in Bergen, NY that she returned to her family in Spokane when Grandpa was about 10 and stayed there 3 years. Grandpa said to me on our last visit to Wilmington, "In some ways my father taught me what I didn't want be as a father and husband". So, how did he learn to cherish Grandma so? To be a constant in the lives of his children? To be faithful, and responsible, and unselfish? Where did Grandma learn to love him tenderly, to think the best, and tell us we were smart and beautiful and worthwhile children (even when all evidence pointed to the contrary)? I don't know. It's just remarkable.

Before leaving this subject we need to face the sad fact that while your Grandpa actively and faithfully continues to love Grandma every way he can, her ability to love him back is severely constrained. And yet, understand this, dear ones, that although she cannot remember our names or even his name, can only rarely put together a complete sentence, and spends most of her time sleeping, when he comes into her room and wakes her, she lights up with a beautiful smile, and offers him a kiss, and rests her head in his arms, safe. At life's end the one thing she knows is that "He loves me and I love him".



*I, George, take thee, Ruth, to be my wedded wife,
To have and to hold, to love and to cherish,
For better or worse,
For richer or poorer,
In sickness and in health,
So long as we both shall live. This is my solemn vow.*

I have a favor to ask. You will have a chance to see Grandpa in July at Laura and Justin's wedding. Take some extra time to talk to him. Remember that you are the bright lights that illuminate the pathways of his heart, and he thinks about you a lot during the many lonely moments he must endure these days. And listen to him. Listen for the echoes of your Grandma, who can be with us only in spirit. You will meet few people in your life with more courage, wisdom, and love than these two, whose inheritance you carry.

May God Bless you all.

Allan