

Chapter 1

Why I Am Writing This Book

Facing our nation today is a crisis of character. America leads the world in riches and power, but it is also at the top of the developed world in violent criminal activity, rates of imprisonment, sexually transmitted disease, abortion, and teenage suicide. In addition, children are lying, cheating, and stealing; and doing the same are business leaders and government officials. This has serious consequences for families, schools, and America's future.

Tony Snow, a Washington columnist with *The Detroit News* and former speechwriter for President George Bush, Sr., says about America's legacy that there is not a nation on earth that "takes greater pride in its moral heritage than the United States. George Washington expressed the Founders' loftiest hopes in his first inaugural address: 'The foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality...the indissoluble union between virtue and happiness.'"¹

Alexis Tocqueville, a French political writer and statesman, came to the United States in the early 1800s and studied our political system. From this experience he wrote his most famous work, *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville stated: "America is great

because she is good, but if America ever ceases to be good America will cease to be great.”

What has happened to character in America? Let’s look at some facts. The U.S. Department of Justice says that in one year the federal government spends “more than \$25 billion on direct expenditures for criminal and civil justice. State governments spend nearly \$59 billion and local governments spend over \$83 billion.”² That’s \$167 billion that federal, state, and local governments spend for “police protection, corrections and judicial and legal activities.”³

The Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states: “Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) continue to be a major health threat in the United States. CDC estimates that 19 million STD infections occur annually, almost half of them among youth ages 15 to 24. In addition to potentially severe health consequences, STDs pose a tremendous economic burden, with direct medical costs as high as \$15.5 billion in a single year.”⁴

From the U.S. Government Office of National Drug Control Policy comes this report: “Illegal drugs cost our society approximately 110 billion dollars each year, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.” The agency also states: “Accidents, crime, domestic violence, illness, lost opportunity, and reduced productivity are the direct consequences of substance abuse. Drug and alcohol use by children often leads to other forms of unhealthy, unproduc-

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tive behavior including delinquency and premature, unsafe sex. Drug abuse and trafficking hurt families, businesses, and neighborhoods, impede education, and choke criminal justice, health, and social-service systems.”⁵

If we boil just those figures down, the social breakdown costs taxpayers over \$1,000 for every man, woman, and child in America in order to correct situations that are due primarily to a lack of character—money that could be better spent for education, highways, and better health care. In addition, due to lack of character we should not forget the pain and suffering to individuals and society caused by drug abuse, assault, robbery, rape, venereal diseases, illegitimate children, alcohol abuse, and other socially harmful activities.

Our schools are a prime indicator that our nation is suffering a character crisis. America in the industrial world is on top, but in educational achievement it ranks near the bottom. Why such a disparity? It will be demonstrated that the character crisis facing our nation has serious consequences for America’s future success. We’ll examine what went wrong and what can be done about it. But before delving into the problems and solutions, I want to share my experience of what prompted me to write this book, for it will reveal one of the major reasons for the rapid decline of character in today’s society.

I left industry at the age of 40 to become a New

York City high school teacher. As I taught I became dismayed at the poor quality of education the students had received. While searching the permanent records of one of my tenth-grade classes concerning their reading and math scores, I discovered that over half of the class had a fifth-grade reading level or lower, and nearly half had only a fourth-grade math level.

In order to become a teacher, I had to go back to college to become certified. I attended Oswego State University, City College of New York, and New York University. NYU had the largest research library in New York City, and since I was on a leave of absence for the book I was writing on education, I spent countless hours at its library doing research. To discover what was happening inside New York City schools, I became a substitute teacher, teaching all grades from 1 to 12, in 27 different schools throughout the city. Some classes were orderly; however, I observed students climbing on desks, tables, and cabinets; throwing paper airplanes and balls in classrooms; running around the rooms and halls; harassing teachers; yelling; fighting; and knocking over chairs and desks. While substituting, I was threatened and cursed, had my foot stomped on, saw a teacher assaulted, and stopped numerous fights.

In my extensive research of schools, I discovered that schools across America had the same problems and worse, and many of the students were improv-

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erly taught. After devoting ten years researching for America's educational crisis and solutions, I wrote, *Schools in Crisis: Training for Success or Failure?*⁶

When I moved to Texas with my wife and five children, I went back to my former trade. In 1986 I began with my two sons Reliable EDM, a specialized machining company. Today it is the largest company of its kind west of the Mississippi River. Since I wrote about the educational crisis, now I wanted to provide materials to help solve the educational crisis. I chose to write picture books that would teach children the time-proven principles of how they can become successful.

As a businessman I knew the importance of first impressions. I took great pains that the books promoting virtues were of the highest quality, and that they were interesting and not preachy. As a parent of five children, a grandfather (currently fourteen grandchildren), as well as a teacher of children for many years, I reasoned that there would be a great desire for interesting storybooks teaching children the necessary virtues that lead to success. What I experienced shocked me. What I discovered has long-term consequences for children, parents, schools, and the future of our nation. It goes far beyond my writing experience; it's an issue that enters into the foundational principles of what makes a lasting and successful society.

My Passion

Since my machining business was successful, I left the work of running the company to my two sons. Now I could devote my time and energy to my passion—writing books. I was born in 1930, and since 1955 happily married. I served in the Marine Corps during the Korean War, was a high school teacher, assistant dean of boys, tool and die maker, foreman, tool designer, operations manager, and presently owner of three businesses. I taught a Junior Achievement economics course at Prague University in the Czech Republic, and served on the Texas State Board of Education Review Committee. I interviewed numerous students and parents as an assistant dean of boys, and hundreds of workers for employment as a foreman, operations manager, and business owner.

With my varied experiences I decided to produce interesting, high-quality character-building picture books that taught children the time-tested principles for success. To my great delight, parents, teachers, librarians, and especially children have enthusiastically endorsed the books. The entire “Another Sommer-Time Story™” series of 20 books and read-alongs have won these awards: Teachers’ Choice Award™, Benjamin Franklin Award, ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Award, and iParenting Media Award. To date we have sold over 200,000 copies, many to public schools and libraries.

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In addition, *It's Not Fair!* won the Children's Choice Award, *The Ugly Caterpillar* won first place in the Benjamin Franklin Award for "Children's Picture Book," and *Today's Librarian* chose *Mayor For A Day* as the "Best Children's Picture Book." All books have been accepted by Accelerated Reader® and Scholastic Reading Counts®. Even though these books have been enthusiastically endorsed and won numerous awards, they received strong opposition from some of the leading review journals. I want to stress that what happened to me as a publisher is not the important issue; the important issue is why these character-building picture books were rejected.

That rejection was the crack in the door that spurred me to investigate why character is so strongly under attack in our nation. As I opened the door, I discovered there is something much larger than rejection of character-building books—there's a major philosophical battle raging in America concerning the erosion of values that has serious implications for our schools and society.

Character Under Attack!