

“Thoughts to Share with a Young DeMolay”

By: David C. Goodnow

David C. Goodnow was initiated into Vincennes Chapter DeMolay in Vincennes, Indiana, in 1952, and was inducted into the DeMolay International Hall of Fame on June 19, 1998. He joined CNN Headline News in October 1982, as one of its original anchors at the Atlanta International headquarters. He reported from the anchor desk for more than eighteen years and was on the air when some of the major stories of the 1980's and 1990's occurred, including live coverage of the Gulf War.

One very simple truth is this: none of us...whether DeMolays or not...have any idea how or to what extent our lives have impacted upon others, others we don't even know. We never know all of it in this life. Someday we will, but not now.

Young man, if you think who you are and how you conduct yourself aren't being observed closely by others, think again. Give yourself some credit. You might be more of a trendsetter than you know. Some people may hold you in high esteem and you not even know it. They may seek to imitate you in their lives. You may unconsciously be giving them cues from your actions. Impressionable young people may seek to duplicate you.

It's like the pebble tossed in the pond. The waves it makes may be small but they spread out to affect many parts of that pond...possibly some distance away. From where we stand on the shore we may not see where all the effects of the waves are felt in the pond. But the effects are there.

What if you knew someone you would meet on a certain day would be strongly influenced by you? How would your day be changed? Would you have to be “on your guard” so as to make a difference in that other life?

Young DeMolay, what if you could rewind any day in your life that you were not on your guard? You could evaluate what you said and did. Now, what if part of that replay would include those who observed you? This was something you didn't know at the time. You could see how they were affected by what they saw you say and do. It's too bad we don't have that kind of imaginary replay machine. It could be our personal monitor to show and tell us when we drop the ball.

It is possible, in this day and age, to live an honorable life that spells achievement of your goals while also paving the way for someone else who may not have the tools to put it all together. You can do both. You don't have to choose one or the other. You can help that someone along the way by leadership and example.

When we become DeMolays, we learn about certain rules that we're supposed to observe to govern our lives. We learn about the paramount nature of **reverence, patriotism, love, courtesy, comradeship, faithfulness and cleanness**. If we really learn to live by those rules we will have made the giant step that ultimately means achievement.

We DeMolays are not actors who can "put on a face" to set a good example and then take it off like a mask to relax and put our mental feet up somewhere. If we operate that way, we will undoubtedly fail someone when they arrive at a critical point in their life. They may have somehow dropped the ball. They may desperately need the leadership you can provide at that very moment. You can't say, "I'll get back to you later." No. Your leadership and example is needed right then. young man.

Each life has its own certain number of days to be spent. Of course, we don't know how many of those days we have. To waste them is to waste a gift. We DeMolays could be doing so much to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Not every day will bring you great success or even a small victory. Don't you just love it when some days come along and everything seems to go wrong? "Yes," you say, "it must be true what some people think. Bad things come in threes...or maybe fours or even fives." Those are the days when we want someone to come along and help us.

Do you think everyone may have been helped by a kind person in some way? It may have been a teacher who went the extra mile to help days, weeks or even many years ago. It may have been someone who helped you get a job or was there to help you in your new job when you asked for guidance. Do you have any obligation if that has happened to you? If so, what do you think it is? I suggest two things: first, we all have been helped in this way; and second, we should PASS IT ON! When you have a chance to help, don't pass it up. PASS IT ON. You undoubtedly thanked the one who helped you when you asked for it. But it didn't end there. There is an obligation. You can carry on with that kindness and it may not even take much time. Passing it on may become a very agreeable habit.

Young DeMolay, the job of living means many things. One is that we leave footprints of a sort. Our words have had meaning...at school, at home, at work. So has all that we have been, are now, and will be as people. The lives of those who are interested in helping others are part of a great mosaic. It builds through the generations. We may work at living decent, helpful and productive lives, but we don't live forever. When we pass from this life to the next others come along who will

take up the baton and run the relay, doing their part, leaving their footprints. Each of us is a part of that greater picture. That is why the study of history is so important. It is the record of human failing and achievement. It is there for all to see and know about. It shows what does and doesn't work in human relationships. If not rocket science. It's all right there for us to see and learn from if we want to. You might also think it is an interesting study of those footprints.

How would history have been changed if special kindness had been extended by certain people at certain times? If you do your reading on the subject, you know there have been many instances where lives could have been changed for the better by positive actions of a person or even a group of people.

Let's speculate for a moment on how the lives of some of history's most awful dictators might have been changed when they were children. Was there an event or series of things that happened to warp the child? Might these things have been overcome by the positive actions of another? Could that positive action have been simply the upstanding, honest character of another person? How might this have affected a young Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Hidecki Tojo, Pol Pot or Saddam Hussein? Millions of lives might have been saved if the massacres they caused had not happened. Take a moment and ponder how things might have been changed years ago by the actions and upstanding character of a person who could influence a young mind in a positive way. Is there a young person out there right now who could become one of the world's next dictators unless someone steps in to lead by example?

DeMolays can be a force for good in their homes, schools, jobs, communities and lives. The precepts are not complicated. The rules are simple. Why? So we all can see, understand and apply them. It doesn't take a PhD to know how to make your life an example for good. You are already out front in many ways by your decision to become a member of the Order of DeMolay.

There are those who don't know what DeMolay stands for. The only thing they may ever know about DeMolay, and you, is what they see you doing and saying in your life. Telling people how to live is one thing. Demonstrating it by your actions is another thing altogether. It is leading sometimes by unintended example. Talk is cheap. Young people get a lot of free advice of all kinds. Some of that free advice is worth every dollar they spent for it.

These same young men may not know exactly what it is about you as a DeMolay that is different but they can sense something is different. They may not be able to explain what it is about your actions and attitudes but they know you have something that may be better than what they have

in their lives. For them, at that moment, you are DeMolay. You put a face on the organization. You breathe life into it.

If they see and hear someone they know to be a member of this fraternity of brothers acting and speaking in a dishonorable way, they may never ask you about DeMolay. They may just mark it down mentally that there isn't much to DeMolay. They may think it's nothing but some kind of club and continue looking for strong leadership and example from another person. We all know there are some very bad people out there looking for disciples. They want to find someone with a loss of purpose, someone easily influenced. How many of those lost souls would have been changed if they could have seen and followed the example of a persuasive DeMolay in just the last few years?

Young man, it has been said you should be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some person ever reads.

We in the news business have the sad duty to report what seems to be an unraveling of our society. The sad and sometimes cruel stories seem to come without end. Some of them are gruesome beyond belief. It seems we have almost become accustomed to events that continue to tell of the dehumanizing of us all. Life seems cheap. There are some of us who remember when this kind of widespread, angry social behavior was not even dreamed of. If those in my high school class had been told things would be as they are right now in our country some years hence, we would have thought it was only wild fiction. It could never happen.

Our society has gotten more sinister in the last several decades. Reporters have seen it change with great speed. People explode in anger at one another over what may be just simple things: road rage. school rage. just plain rage. We've all heard about people "going postal." When that joke began to make its rounds on the evening talk and variety shows, the audiences would laugh. If and when we laugh at that these days, we laugh nervously because it could happen anywhere. It's not really funny anymore. Young DeMolay, you are leaving footprints as you pass through your life. Others may see and follow them. They can lead all kinds of places. There are those who may desperately want to see some example of upright character to help them out. You may be it. You may not know it but you may be the example in a critical moment in the life of another. You could actually be setting the course for the rest of the life of another human being. Is that important? You may be that pebble in the pond. Make sure the waves you make in the lives of others are the right kind.