



Chapter Two

The Blue Bead—The Power of Life Values



Letter to Addy

I must repeat myself. Only you will ever know what is best for you—only you. When it comes to understanding what you value most in life, it is important to pay close attention to what you love and enjoy—the things you do without someone telling you to do them, the actions you take unprompted, the causes you feel passionately about. These are the clues to helping you sort out what is important to you, but more importantly, to show you what you value.

When you first venture out on your own, you might still be clinging to the values your father and I hold dear, or maybe you will hang on to the values of other family members, your generation, or friends. It's not to say that some of those beliefs aren't also yours and will be good to keep, but carefully consider what you do believe. Drop the parts that do not fit you any more.

Before you can begin the task of seeing what fits and what doesn't, it's important that you have a clear understanding of what your father and I value. Most of all I honor individualism. All people have the right to be loved and accepted for who they are. I urge you to consistently “step into the shoes of another” before you judge or criticize others, or when others hurt your feelings. I ask that you care for those around you—by heeding your words and actions, by being kind and forgiving, by understanding that most individuals lash out at themselves and others from pain.

I value honest communication, believe in the pursuit of happiness and put God and family above all else. I believe everyone can live contentedly in the present moment, but—

here's the kicker—each individual is responsible for making this happen for themselves. One day you asked me, “Mom how come you are happy even when you are doing boring chores or doing things for me or Dad?” I realized it was my choice, and my choice alone, on whether or not I would allow external circumstances to affect my mood. Truth be told, I didn't always approach my chores and duties this way until an overriding value took charge—the value of the importance of supporting my family and working as a team. I believe we all have roles to play within our family structure. I have chosen mine—not all the roles are exciting, and some are even mundane—and this attitude supports another value of mine, which is the desire to serve others.

Once you figure out what is important to you, hold on to it with all your might. Don't be swayed by other people, even if a majority of them believes differently. It's your life to live. You are the one who has to wake up day in and day out and live the life you create. No one else does this for you. No one. If you are putting emphasis on issues, people or things that don't matter to you, then you'll be lost.

Always, always think for yourself and listen to your heart.

The Tribe Has Spoken

The most influential members of our tribe are our closest family members, parents or guardians, and siblings. The tribe extends to grandparents, aunts, uncles and close family friends, and it reaches even further—to social groups our families belong to, and even the community itself. This tribe of ours teaches us how to live within its system of beliefs and rules. Its members teach us its value system. Through their behavior and often repeated aphorisms, members of my tribe taught me how important it is to “love your neighbor as yourself,” or the need to “to do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” They also taught me to “to respect my elders” and “to mind my manners,” among many other things.

As children we often embrace our tribe's value system as law. As we mature, we begin to test the system to see if it serves us or not. Especially in our teen-aged years we may try to break away from it. As adults, consciously and unconsciously, we find ourselves doing a little (or a lot) of both.

Your children will go through a similar experience.

Our daughters are growing up in a time that is very different from the world in which we grew up. Our parents, grandparents and extended circle of family and friends were our primary influencers. Today's children are inundated with societal messages that aren't coming from us. No longer are we our children's chief source of information. They are bombarded with messages from TV, computers, cell phones, magazines...a cacophony that can block the words of even the most loving and persistent parent.

Not too long ago, I had a dream about the Vietnam War. Though my childhood had been sheltered, I had seen clips from the Vietnam War on the evening news. I watched young men under attack, running for their lives through the jungle. I remember piled bodies being evacuated—bodies of young men who were fighting for my country, for me

and my family. The images of war marked my psyche so much that thirty-something years later, I still process the trauma through dreams.

Our children are not only seeing war-time images on television, but they are hearing constant warnings of catastrophe: GLOBAL WARMING! ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTER! ECONOMIC DISASTER! VIRUSES ON THE LOOSE! News is funded by advertising, and bad news keeps the audience tuned in, all the better to sell you toothpaste, my dear.

When the children switch to entertainment, they are subjected to explicit language and sexually charged innuendoes in prime time sitcoms. A month or so ago, my husband was channel flipping. "What time is it?" he asked.

"7:25 p.m.," I said.

"Look what's on *ABC Family* at 7:25 p.m."

I glanced at the television. An adorable young woman, blouse unbuttoned, was sitting in a car with a young man.

I dug out the newspaper guide and discovered the *ABC Family* offering was *Greek*, one of their new shows.

Later that evening I did a little research. Amy Jussel, another concerned mom and founder of *Shaping Youth*, had this to say, "Since when is collegiate binge drinking, racy innuendo, sexcapades and the 'partay' scene 'ABC Family' fare, folks?"

I discovered that Disney-owned *ABC Family* is not targeting children or tweens. As early as 2006 *ABC Family* president Paul Lee said, "We're not for families, we're about families. We're not family television as it was in the 1950s. We're television about families that's relevant to today's 18-34 audience."

MTV claims to seek out a similar aged market, but the reality is that the younger children do most of the watching. And in case you are a parent who remembers *MTV* as a way to hear the latest rock or pop stars' music videos, you are sorely mistaken.

Today's *MTV* is all about reality TV shows. One such show featured Tila Tequila (who holds bragging rights for having the biggest MySpace.com audience at one time) and her search for a mate. What viewers didn't learn until after the show debuted was that Tila is bi-sexual. The program served as front row seats to girl-on-boy and girl-on-girl graphic physicality.

One afternoon I was in the car with a friend and our three children. My friend had no idea about *MTV*'s reality programming though her 12-year-old daughter viewed it regularly. As we adults whispered about Tila on the front seat, my friend's 10-year-old son announced, "I've seen that show. She kissed girls and boys. They swam in a giant champagne glass. Yuck. Gross."

As in typical "find-your-true-love-on-TV" fashion, Tila's first "shot at love" didn't take. She taped round two. In the first episode of the new season, one suitor covered his privates with a box and asked her to open the gift.

We are witnessing a major shift in values, and the new tribe driving it is not our grandparents, not our parents, and not us—the driver's seat is occupied by television, music, and the internet. *Girl in the Mirror* author Snyderman gave us a warning: "The competition for our daughters' attention is fierce and if we don't begin talking to them

about the important issues early, the people who write the scripts and dialogue for movies and television shows will. Page 11.”

In this new world of rampant technology, it’s impossible to protect or shield our children from constant media bombardment. It’s in our children’s friends’ homes, in doctors’ offices, in the restaurants when we go out to eat.

If we can’t protect and shield our children, what can we do?

Inoculate them.

And how do we do that?

By communicating with them. By sharing what we value and why.

“You always return to what you know,” was one of the sayings repeated by my tribe. This means that when it’s all said and done, you are more than likely to go back to what’s familiar for you, and what is familiar is “what you know,” what you have learned from living with your family and within your community. Since we can’t keep the bad news and information out, the burden is on our shoulders to determine what we do value and to share our beliefs with our children. Our job, then, is to establish a strong foundation and clear understanding of what we value—what we deem most important in our lives. And what we value most then needs to be labeled and modeled for our children.

If we believe in hard work, truth, honesty, realness, God, then it’s up to us to make sure our children understand why we feel the way we do. As they grow and mature, they will step away from some of our values, but they will also hang on to others.

Because communicating my own values to my daughter, Addy, is so important to me, I made time to discuss my values with her. I began the discussion with some of the simplistic advice from *The Last Lecture*, a book by Carnegie Mellon University computer science professor Randy Pausch, who died of pancreatic cancer. Some people may think his aphorisms sound like clichés, but sayings become clichés because they convey a basic truth. It was this simple expression of basic truths that helped me outline my value discussion with Addy.

One of my favorites was, “Whether you think you can or can’t, you are right.”

I used this quote to begin our discussion. I wanted her to understand how powerful her beliefs are. To demonstrate I told her about the *Little Engine that Could*. Even though Addy had heard that story before and didn’t like it, the example still worked. The point was made.

Along the same lines, we talked about “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, try again.” I told her stories about Rudy Ruettiger, the 5’6” and 165 pound man who dreamed of playing football at Notre Dame, and Liz Murray, the homeless girl who eventually graduated from Harvard. Both heard many no’s before reaching their goals. Both succeeded beyond their imaginations. These stories are movies and can be rented if you’d like to share the story with your daughter.

Another story I shared was the story of Ben Carson, a black pediatric neurosurgeon whose mother, Sonya, turned his life around. Sonya had a third grade education and had married when she was 13. When Ben was eight years old, his parents divorced. Sonya worked two and three jobs to support her two boys. By the time Ben was in fifth grade he ranked at the bottom of his class and had developed a terrible temper. Alarmed, Sonya

made a commitment to herself and promised she'd change things so that her boys could succeed in life. She reduced the number of hours the boys spent watching television, allowing them to watch three programs weekly. She made them finish homework before playing with friends and insisted they each read two library books a week, then write a report on each one. She didn't waver. She persisted even though she couldn't understand what they wrote.

Within two weeks of starting the new regime, Ben astonished his classmates by naming the rock samples the teacher brought to class. The event changed his life. Ben understood he was not stupid. He suddenly hungered for knowledge. Ben now had a chance to be something, simply because his young, uneducated mother was determined to give her children a different life—one that would be better than her own. She wasn't going to stop. She wasn't going to give up. She was going to keep making changes until something worked.

Turns out that the dumbest kid in the fifth grade, Ben Carson, grew up to become the youngest Chief of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins University Hospital.

These stories can lead to discussions about “brick walls” and what to do when you run into one, about how important it is to never give up when it matters to you.

Addy and I also talked about the “Golden Rule.” I often repeat, “Do unto others as you would have them to do unto you,” so that saying wasn't a new one for her to hear. Another one we discussed: “Watch what they do, not what they say.”

Then we ended our discussion by talking about this one: “Life isn't fair,” but more importantly we talked about what to do when faced with an unfair situation. I told her that her father and I believe the only thing you can do is: “Saddle up and ride.”

Values Discussion Begins with You, Mom

If you don't have a clear sense of your own values, think about your childhood and those values you learned as a child.

For example, in my own home my parents not only talked about values, they also modeled values to me. I knew my Dad valued hard work. I knew it was important to my mother for me to be kind to others. I knew one grandmother cared a lot about how others perceived me. Learning and then minding my manners meant a lot to my parents and grandparents.

I learned you had to work hard to earn money and “money didn't grow on trees.” I learned “less is more” when it came to talking about myself and accomplishments. Holidays were cherished and family time valued highly. I learned “blood is thicker than water.”

Many times I learned my lessons with the help of often repeated aphorisms:

“The early bird gets the worm.”

“Children should be seen and not heard.”

“If you can't say anything nice, then don't say anything at all.”

“Birds of a feather flock together.”

“Spare the rod; spoil the child.”

Some of what I learned as I matured had to be unlearned. It took me years to stop abdicating my power to others. For whatever reason, I didn't learn to trust my own instincts and constantly handed over decision making about my life to others. Another lesson needing to be undone was a deeply engrained message that it mattered what other people thought. "What will the neighbors think?" We were also taught that proper young ladies don't raise their voices, which included questioning, shouting and being angry. What I didn't know then is that there is a time and place for all emotions to be expressed. Unfortunately, I interpreted the lesson to mean I had to suppress all negative emotions.

As I transitioned from young adult to my mid-thirties, I began questioning some of the values I learned. I discovered there were many beliefs I didn't believe in and that actually hindered my ability to navigate in the world.

I wrote about this evaluation in *Grab the Queen Power*. As I wrote I examined my own values, the ones that helped me and the ones that held me back. After finishing the book, I began the process of getting rid of the values and beliefs that no longer served me. That's required step number one.

Step number two is reclaiming values that do fit. Now, for example, I value my own opinion and intuition more than the opinion of others. Certainly, I ask for and receive advice, but now I have added discernment. In the next step, it's important to name what you value and then to teach what you value and believe to your children. Maybe you'll be around to help influence your grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but it's good to think about what you would want your children to know if you weren't here to guide them.

If you knew your time with your children would be limited, what would you say to them now?

Guidelines for Mothers

Values explain why you want to accomplish certain things in life. Even though our values represent our highest priorities there often exists a gap between these ideals and our present reality. Our performance related to those values is never perfect; but as our ability to honor the important things in our lives improves, something wonderful happens. We suddenly experience the satisfaction that has so often eluded us. As Abraham Maslow explained, "Unifying our values and our everyday performance provides 'self-actualization'." Basically this means that we are able to bring together what we do on a daily basis with what we truly value, and doing so makes us happy.

Take the time to figure out what you value most. If you are having trouble defining your values, consider the following list:

Children	Family	Spouse
Financial Security	Health/Fitness	Spirituality
Integrity/Honesty	Efficiency	Service to others
Education/Learning	Inner Harmony	Happiness
Imagination/Creativity	Influencing Others	Generosity

Dependability/reliability
Occupational Satisfaction

Time Management

Productivity

Ask yourself what your highest priorities in your life are. Make a list of five to ten things. Consider why these are your highest priorities. Write them down. Post them on your office or closet wall.

A woman that I interviewed for *Queen Power* told me she was taught you could tell what a person valued by what she paid attention to. What grabs your attention? Are you committed to positive encounters, positive results, or are you more interested in the mistakes people make? Do you have a budget and follow it, or do you impulse shop and sweat the consequences until pay day? Do you say you love Christmas, but keep your family in turmoil while you try to pull the perfect holiday together, or do you say you hate it, and begrudgingly do a few traditional things because “that’s just the way things are done”?

What about your daughter? Does she have interests she loves to explore, or does she stand in front of the mirror, trying to figure out how she can look like everybody else, but better? What is she interested in? And if you are unhappy with the values your daughter is exhibiting, are her interests a reflection of how you look at the world?

Have your daughter complete the same assignment and then set time aside to share your values with each other. You’ll enjoy this exercise. Maybe you’ve not asked your daughter these questions before. Don’t try to talk her out of her values or the order of importance she selects. Instead, let her know you also respect her opinion. Then share with her what you value and why. You can often return to this list when disciplining or disagreeing because typically what you value most is what drives you to make corrections or decide discipline is needed. Again, remind her that you are her biggest fan and that you will do everything in your power to build her up.

When you are watching movies together, make a game of noting what the characters value. Do you or she agree with those values?

As you and your daughter consider what you hold most dear, add a new bead to the bracelet. The blue bead represents values. When you add the blue bead to your bracelet, you are committing to being aware of what you give your attention to, of how that expresses what you hold most valuable in this life, and how your actions align with your values. What a gift to share with your daughter.