

In spring 2007 I was asked by a staff writer for the Naperville Sun to write a tribute to my father, in honor of the Sun's approaching Father's Day feature. What follows is a slightly revised version of what was printed. Containing elements of my heritage, my values, and my blessings for a grandchild, it is a short and complete values legacy.

A LEGACY FROM MY FATHER

I remember the huge Funk and Wagnall's dictionary, always spread open, settled on a wooden stand just at the door to my parent's bedroom. The book was 5-6 inches thick, the pages thin, slippery and gilt-edged. The print in the dictionary was small. I would ask my father, "What does 'this word' mean?" looking for an easy answer. His response was invariably patient, spoken sometimes with humor, "Look it up in the dictionary," or just "Look it up," making me do the work. Reluctantly, I'd go look it up.

My father was a Russian immigrant who came alone to this country at the age of 16, in 1900, knowing not one word of English. He learned English in the night schools on the lower East Side of New York City, with other newcomers to this country. He was almost 50 when I was born, proud of his ability to speak without an accent, and proud of his fluent command of the language. He and my mother used to pass the New York Times crossword puzzle back and forth daily,---"What can you do with this, sweetheart?"---until they completed it, even the hardest of all, the Sunday puzzle.

His love of using words properly and well---the best word in its rightful place--was one of his legacies to me. I entered a profession in which my love of words, chosen with care for their meaning and nuance, was extremely important, not only to me, but also to the people with whom I worked. These days, when I write and when I encourage others to put their own legacies into words, I continue to be blessed by his teaching. Matching with care what I think, feel and believe to what I say and write, is a thread trailing forward from "Look it up in the dictionary." It was a huge gift to me of what really mattered to him in his life-time--- from my father, Joseph Leonard Carch, of blessed memory.

I offer this memory to you, (*naming a particular descendant, or an entire family unit*) because I want you to know this heritage you carry within. My hope for you is that you continue to speak of yourself with care. I already see in you a love of language and a desire to let yourself be clearly known, and I see your joy in self-expression. I receive joy just in being around you, seeing you dance with your life, as you make music, sing your songs, and bring your love of music to others. May you always let your goodness flow from you, and may you bless others with it for as long as you live.

Love always,
Nanny

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June 9, 2007
Naperville, Illinois
Revised September 2008