

# Cambridge School Assembly

## Top Ten Tips for Life

2/9/15

# Intro

- Thank you so much for having me here to talk! It's a huge honor to meet all of you, and see where my sister, Professor Wood, teaches.
- It has been a great pleasure to put these tips together because the task provided me an excuse to ask my friends about the most important things in life, which is always a good idea. We had some tremendous conversations; I hope that you enjoy the fruits.

Tip #1:  
There are no  
ordinary people.  
--C. S. Lewis



# Tip #1:

## There are no ordinary people.

--C. S. Lewis

- Trivia: What does “C. S.” stand for in C. S. Lewis?
- Hebrews 3:13- But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.
- The first tip: There are no ordinary people.
- Listen to this: “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations... There are no ordinary people... it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ truly hides—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.”
- This is from one of my favorite essays, called “The Weight of Glory,” by C. S. Lewis.
- Here’s **the point**:
  - The people around you are immortal.
  - The way that you treat them will help them along to being either glorious angelic splendors in Heaven or beings more horrific than anything you could possibly imagine.
  - So, everything you do with your friends and everyone else in life is like **eternally** important.

# Tip #1 Cont.

- This is the **most important tip** that I will say today **by far**.
- Good **art project idea**- Read “The Weight of Glory “ and then imagine how your friends might look in heaven and draw them.
  - Remind yourself what a huge responsibility you have to help them reach that potential.
  - I’ll talk to Mrs. Wood about it.
- There’s this great French guy named Charles Peguy who said something else like C. S. Lewis. He said,
  - **“When we get to Heaven, God is going to ask of us, ‘Where are all the others?’”**
- There are no ordinary people.
- Oh, yeah, so **I drew my rendition** for you all to get an idea of what I meant. Please notice:
  - Flaming wings, rocket booster feet, and fireballs coming out of the eyes. And how the angelic creature is about 50 feet tall.
  - But also arms of love reaching out to God and neighbor.
  - You and all your friends can be like this some day, so help each other along.



Tip #2: Pray all the time.  
–Raquel



# Tip #2: Pray all the time.

–Raquel

- I Thessalonians 5:16-18- “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”
- The second tip comes from my friend Raquel, who lives across the street from me, and is a good friend. We are both part of a group of people that invite homeless folks into our houses where we live, called a Catholic Worker community.
- Her tip: Pray all the time.
- Here’s what she said: “You should just pray a lot.”
- I think that she’s echoing the words of Paul the Apostle here, who also said, “Pray without ceasing.”



# Tip #2 Cont.

- So, Why is this so important?
- Here's why it's so important to pray all the time:
  - One of the most important truths in life is that we can only know the most important things with our hearts and minds, and not our eyes.
  - You know how I said a good art project would be to imagine your friends as eternal beings.
  - When we pray, we can know things as they actually are.
  - Isn't that weird, that we can only see the most important things with our hearts and minds instead of our eyes. You can't see that your friend is immortal, like a 50 foot tall angel, but he or she actually is.
  - When we pray, God gives us the heart vision, the truth about Himself and about the world, and he also gives us the grace to respond to it.
  - Here's an example. When your little sister or brother annoys you like crazy, you have a choice.
    - You can say I'm going to get really angry and hurt my sister so that she suffers because she made me suffer first.
    - Or, you can say, my little sister is an immortal soul and if I show her mercy and love, then she'll learn how to be merciful and loving from me, and we'll help each other along towards Heaven. And besides that, God loves me so much, and I want to share that love with my little sister.
    - Here's the thing: prayer is what allows us to do the second, better action. It opens our hearts to the reality of our sister's immortality, and God's love for us, which are things that we can't see with our eyes.
    - You gotta pray in order to understand the most important things in life.
- Mother Teresa said one of the greatest quotes about this. It's like Mother Teresa's business card.
- Here it is: show slide. I was wondering if we could all say it together a couple of times.

The fruit of silence is prayer.  
The fruit of prayer is faith.  
The fruit of faith is love.  
The fruit of love is service.  
The fruit of service is peace.



Tip #3:  
If you get  
annoyed,  
that's your  
problem.  
--Luke



# Tip #3: Annoyance is a choice.

–Luke

- **Colossians 3: 13-14-** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.
- My friend Luke is a Dean of Students at a Christian school much like Cambridge, so he knows a lot about people getting annoyed.
- You know how I said that if your little brother or sister annoys you, you have a choice about how you're going to react, either in anger or in love.
- So here's the thing about annoyance. It's almost always your fault. If you take a step back from the situation, you can almost always choose not to be annoyed.
- So, nobody is every really objectively annoying. It's just that you get annoyed, which is something that you can prevent.
- This is where prayer comes in huge. When you pray a lot, you are much more ready to love people and be patient with them rather than grit your teeth at them.
  - And in prayer, God gives you His own love, which is the most powerful force in the universe.
  - Because think about it, what is more powerful than a force like love that can change the course of an eternal soul? An atomic bomb doesn't have as much power because it can only affect things on earth.
  - Through love and humility, you have more power through love than an atomic bomb.
- If you pray a lot, you can choose not to be annoyed because, as my buddy Luke says, annoyance is a choice.

Tip #4: Listen more than you speak.  
–Matthew I.



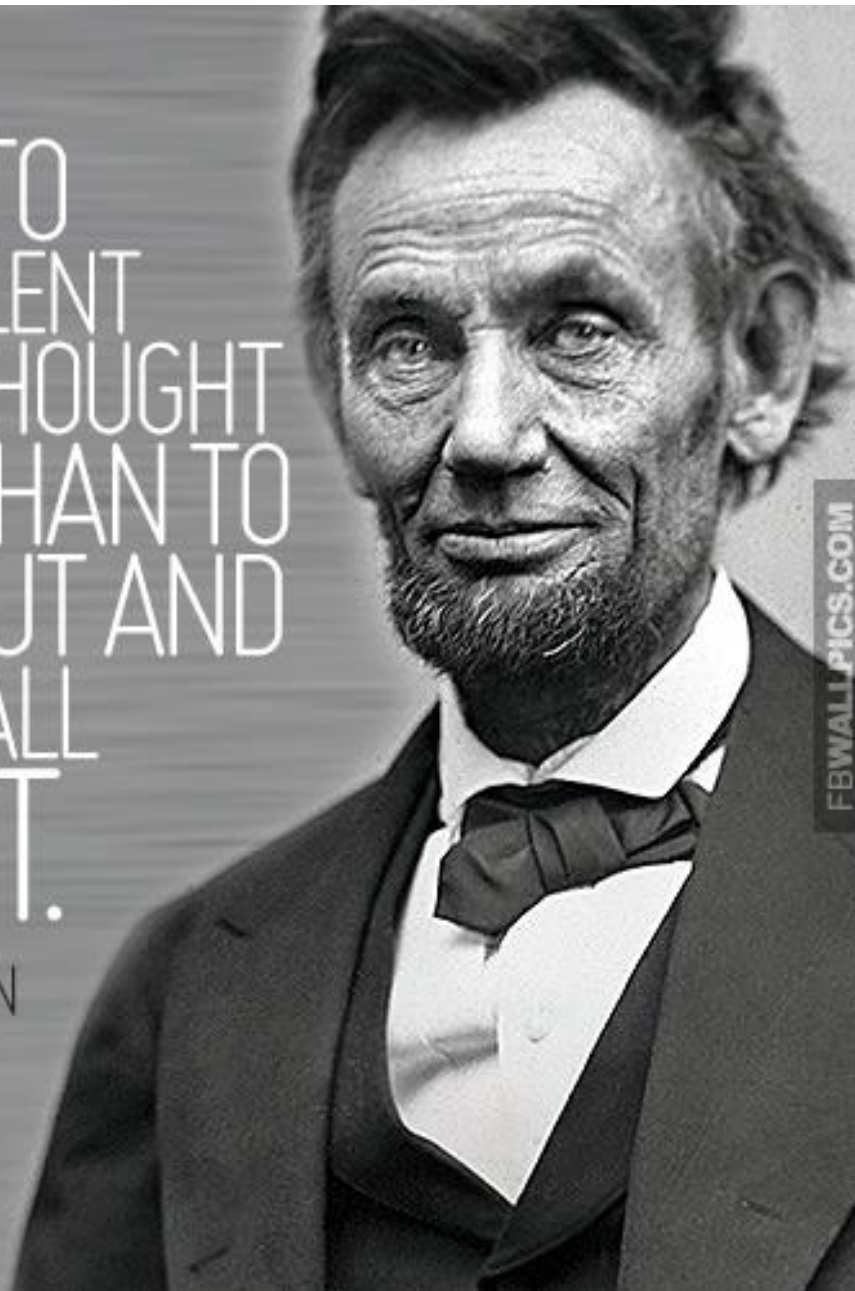
# Tip #4: Listen more than you speak.

## –Matthew Insley

- James 3:3-6- “<sup>3</sup>When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. <sup>4</sup>Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. <sup>5</sup>Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. <sup>6</sup>The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”
- Tip from Matt, Catholic Worker:
- He says, “Listen more than you speak. It’s really hard to do. But if you do it, not only will you be more well liked and seem smarter than you are, and avoid making a fool of yourself, you’ll also in the process learn a lot about the world and about yourself, and be more temperate in your views.”
- I think that what Matt is trying to say is that it’s **a lot easier to get in trouble** by talking than by listening. Remaining silent is almost always a safe play.
- Here’s a word from James in the bible about what damage a tongue can do: “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”
- The same is not true for listening. **Listening is almost always better** when you have a choice.
- Here is another quote, from Abraham Lincoln. I actually put this quote on my Cistercian yearbook senior page when I graduated from high school.
- Show next slide.
- I think that this ties into our first point about helping people along towards Heaven too. Most often, our friends need someone who will listen to them rather than someone who speaks at them.

BETTER TO  
REMAIN SILENT  
AND BE THOUGHT  
A FOOL THAN TO  
SPEAK OUT AND  
REMOVE ALL  
DOUBT.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN



Tip #5: There is *not* an app for that.

–Toya, Southwest Airlines flight attendant





# Tip #5: There is *not* an app for that.

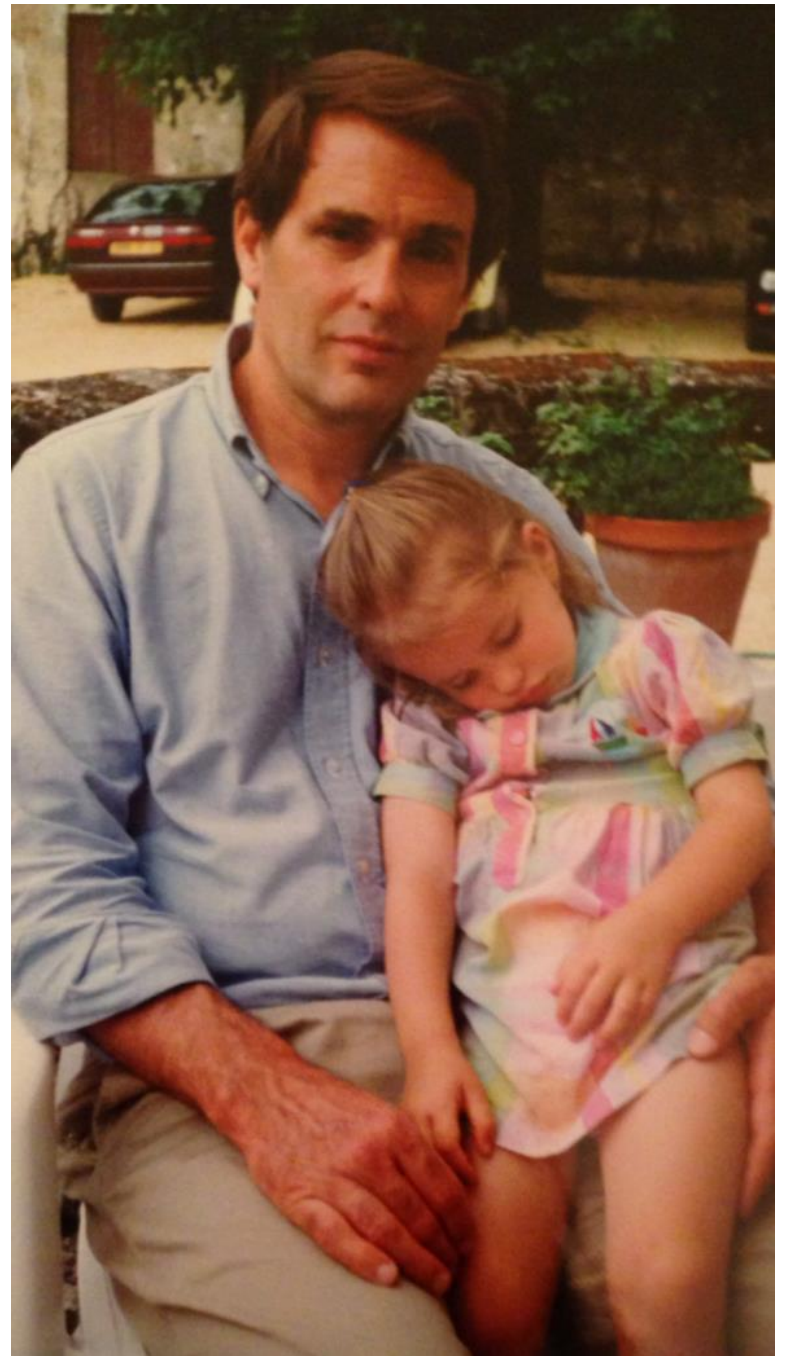
## –Toya, Southwest Airlines flight attendant.

- This tip comes from Toya, a Southwest flight attendant that I met at the Houston airport on my way here last Friday.
- Here's Toya's tip: There is not an app or a technology for most of the most important things in life.
- Here's what she said: "Learn basics. Go outside and put sticks and rocks together as see what happens. Nowadays kids don't understand there's no app for life. When I tell my kids to wash the dishes, they ask themselves, 'Is there an app for that.' No, here's a hand across your backside. Don't let my hand be your app for how to wash dishes."
- I'm going to piggy back Toya's tip with one that I gave to a group of great eighth graders that I taught English to in Atlanta a few years ago. It went something like this:
- "Whenever you are tempted to watch TV, try really hard not to. Try to read a book instead. Television weakens your mind by lulling it into a lazy, passive state. It does the work of imagining for you. Books, on the other hand, exercise your mind's astounding ability to create entire worlds just from little black letters on a page."
- Here's what I mean. Your mind is like a muscle, like the most powerful muscle you have. Books exercise your mind, while movies leave it lazy. When you read a book, your mind performs this ridiculously amazing feat of translating words into worlds. Your mind takes lines and curves on a page and makes them into images, and then puts the images together to form a universe, if you read the Lord of the Rings, for example, full of dwarves, elves, rings, and wizards. That's incredible. That's the most fabulous capacity on earth besides the capacities of the soul. Reading books exercise the muscle, whereas movies do all the work for you. Movies produce the images so that your mind doesn't have to. The movie images are less wonderful than the ones that you can produce in your own head, and the spoonfeed you mind someone else's imaginings without making your mind work for them.

# Tip #5 Cont.

- The point here from Toya and me is that if we're not really careful these days, technologies like TV, phone apps, and video games can cripple our minds, and rob us of one of the greatest skills we have in our imaginations. There is not an app for imagination, just like there is not an app for most of the other important things in life either.
- The first point from C. S. Lewis relates directly to Toya's point, I think.
  - If we are all walking around with immortals, then imagining them correctly is one of the most important things we can do in life.
  - Computers and televisions weaken that capacity, which has eternal consequences.
  - So reading more books will help you love your neighbor because it strengthens your imagination.
- Has anyone ever heard of the philosopher Plato? How about his cave analogy? I won't go into it here, but try to read it, maybe in one of your classes, and then make the connection with television.

Tip #6:  
You are the sum  
of your habits.  
--Gregory



# Tip #6: You are the sum of your habits. --Gregory

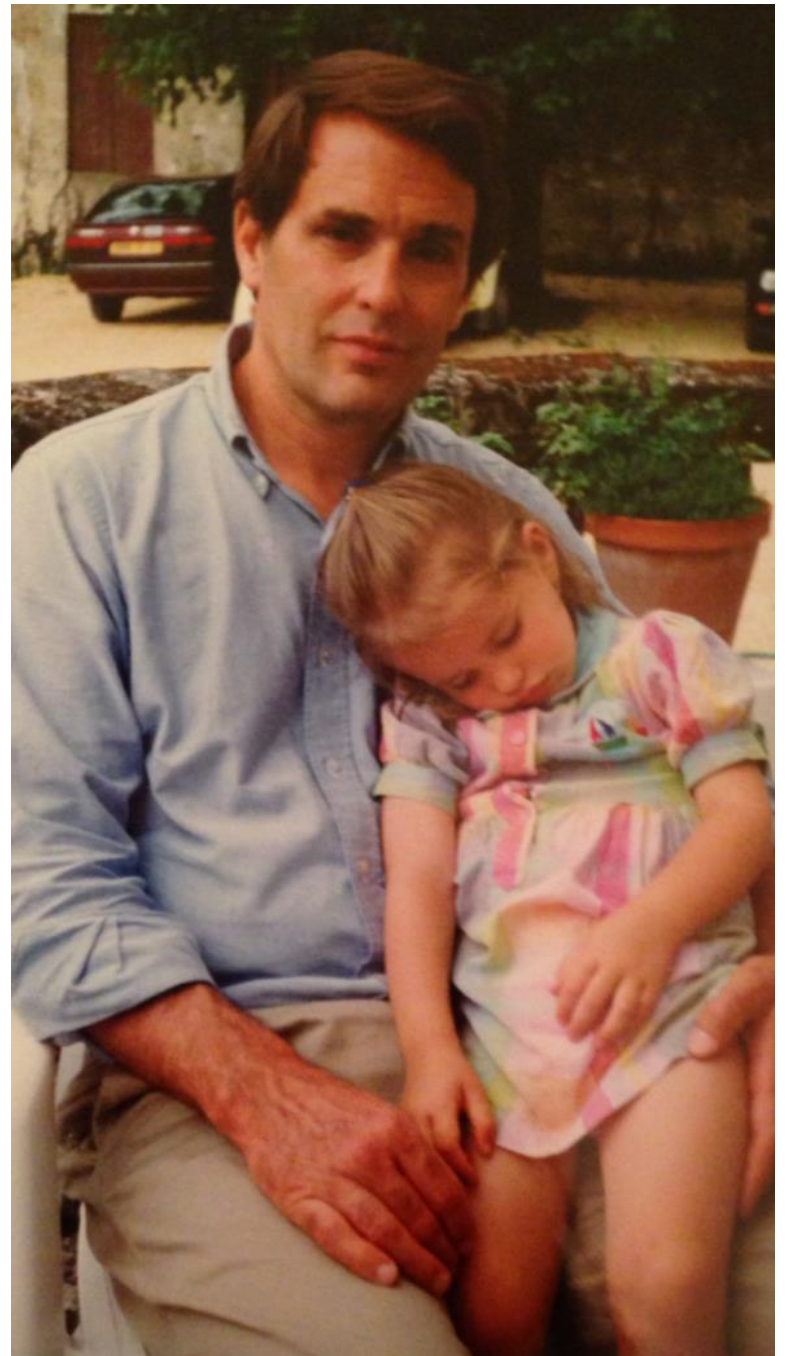
- Jeremiah 13:23- “Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.”
- Here’s a tip from my dad, who is one of the greatest folks in the world.
- Tip: You are the sum of your habits.
- Dad: “You are the sum of your habits. Virtues are good actions repeated on a regular basis. You become what your habits are, whether your habits are of virtue or vice, so take care what you do repetitiously. One day you wake up and realize that you are the sum of your habits, even though you might have been thinking that you were on a different course.”
- The point here is that the decisions that you make now about how to live your life will stick with you.
- Here’s another quote from Aristotle about this: show quote.

# Aristotle

It makes no small difference, then whether we form habits of one kind or another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference.

--Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics.

Tip #7:  
Get out of your  
bubble.  
--Gregory



# Tip #7:

## Get out of your bubble.

### --Gregory

- Romans 12:13-16- 13Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.c Do not be conceited.
- "Travel as far and as close to the earth as you possibly can, when you can. 'Close to the earth' means as much in contact with people in whose land you're travelling."
- Ex. Working on a kibbutz in Israel which is something that my dad did, or hanging out in Uganda which is something that I did last summer.
- But also just be visiting other neighborhoods in Dallas that are really different from ours.
- It's really important to be close to other people in the world, especially the poor.
- It's really important because there is a lot that we, as wealthy folks, can do to help them and learn from them.
- And we can't do that if we don't meet them.

Tip #8 Abortion is the biggest deal.  
--John and Claire, Mother Teresa





# Tip #8: Abortion is the biggest deal.

## --John and Claire, Mother Teresa of Calcutta

- Psalm 139:13- 13For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- Like many of the other tips, this one is about seeing behind the veil of appearances and into the true reality of things.
- The tip comes from my friends Claire and John Fyrqvist who live on my street back home.
- Tip: Abortion as the biggest deal.
- Claire and John work for an organization called Right to Life in South Bend, and they dedicate themselves to proclaiming the truth that the people that we can't see because they are very small and very young, that these are people too, just like me and you, and that they deserve the right to not be killed by abortion. Claire and John dedicate themselves to this mission because they think that abortion is the most violent and atrocious crime in our world today, and because there are many people that deny the littlest and most vulnerable people in our society protection from people who want to kill them. So their tip to you all is that abortion is the biggest deal in the world right now.
- Who here has heard of Mother Theresa? She had something great and clarifying to say about this in a speech that she gave when she accepted the Nobel Peace Prize. I will read a couple of lines from it so that you can get the idea of what this humble and beautiful woman was trying to say. (See next slide)
- So Mother Teresa is begging us, like Claire and John beg their city through their work, to acknowledge the truth that killing unborn babies is just about the worst thing, and that as long as that kind of violence is practiced and protected under the law, every other kind of law seems hypocritical. In other words, people can't say look, it's OK if you kill your baby, you just can't kill anyone else. It's pure madness, but that's what our laws in America and many other countries say. So I challenge you, along with my friends Claire and John to do whatever you can to fight this biggest of all problems.
- A recording of Mother Teresa's speech is posted on [cliffarnold.com](http://cliffarnold.com) if you want to hear it.
- Oh, and I heard that the pro-life club is one of the biggest clubs here. That's really great and shows that you brilliant Cambridge students have your priorities straight.

# Mother Teresa on Abortion

- “I feel the greatest destroyer of peace today is abortion, because it is a direct war, a direct killing - direct murder by the mother herself.... And this is what is the greatest destroyer of peace today. Because if a mother can kill her own child - what is left for me to kill you and you kill me - there is nothing between....”
- --Mother Teresa, Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech.

Tip #9:  
Treat yourself well.  
--Professor Wood



# Tip #9: Treat yourself well.

--Professor G. A. Wood

- 1 Cor. 6: 19-20- Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.
- Pic: The original hipster.
- “Eat healthy, sleep 8 hours, exercise just for 20 minutes or so every day.”
- These form a baseline for a happy existence.
- They make us better able to work well and love the people around us.
- How much easier is it to be kind and not annoyed when you are well slept?

Tip #10: Keep going!  
--Regan



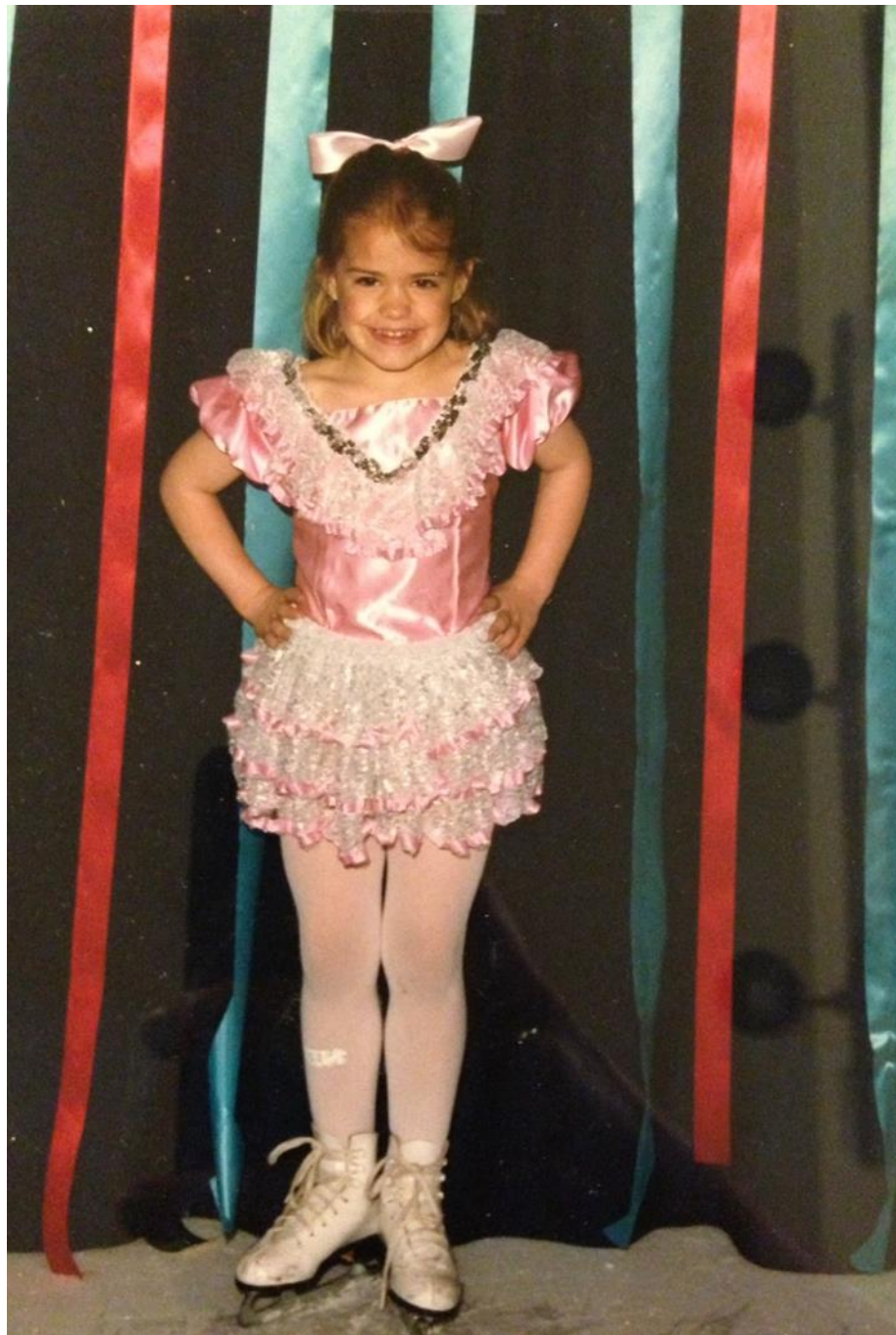
# Tip #10: Keep going!

--Regan

- Romans 5:3-5- 3“...we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”
- Regan: “All of life is a journey back to God, the bursting explosion of love from which we came.”
- This is very similar to what Clive Staples said, right? It’s really important to realize what we are made for and where we are going.
- Reeg adds: “When you fall on the road, ask for mercy, get up, & keep going!”
- So, I leave you with a quote from St. Bernard:
- “Let us all run forth with hearts full of love towards God.”
- Thank you very much for your invitation and attention!

# Summary

- Tip #1: There are no ordinary people.
- Tip #2: Pray all the time.
- Tip #3: If you get annoyed, that's your problem.
- Tip #4: Listen more than you speak.
- Tip #5: There is not an app for that.
- Tip #6: You are the sum of your habits.
- Tip #7: Get out of your bubble.
- Tip #8: Abortion is the biggest deal.
- Tip #9: Treat yourself well.
- Tip #10: Keep going!





# Outtakes

- Below are other great tips that I didn't fit into the top ten, but which are still great.

# Dad

- Invest in relationships rather than other things. Relationships are what you remember, what you take away. Even if you don't see people after a certain chapter of life, they live on in your memory, and they are what make a rich memory life. You don't remember the assets, the mosquitos; what you remember are the conversations, especially the conversations with the people you love.
- Travel as far and as close to the earth as you possibly can, when you can. "Close to the earth" means as much in contact with people in whose land you're travelling. Ex. Working on a kibbutz, hitchhiking where safe. Those provide rich memories.
- Find a place that makes you happy and stay there. Moving is disruptive of both relationships and family. Bloom where you are planted to the greatest extent possible.

# Dad

- Think carefully about whom you marry. Because however many times you marry, you'll marry the same person again and again. Better to marry once and avoid a lot of sorrow.
- Never underestimate the value your kids will have for time spent with them. For example, Elizabeth remembers walks along the beach in Winnetka (where we lived when we were kids). I'm guessing we did it a dozen times. It was not a large portion of total time, but those small number of hours created a very large memory. So, invest as much time as possible with people you love in places they will remember as happy places. Ex. Camping on Paradise Divide. We didn't do it often, but it created very large memories and it occurs to me often.

# Dad

- Take time to sort your deck. For example, by driving. Quiet time doing something like driving is therapeutic. Maybe you should take a trip whether you need it or not just to sort your deck. Also, driving with friends and family can be time used for sorting the family deck. If you take a long trip together, you can sort through things tangentially that might be difficult to take head-on, but which can be treated as they come up because you touch on a broad range of subjects when you are together for numerous hours in an encapsulated situation.

# Dad

- The family table is where life is shared, not only nourishment, but people share their lives at the table. So, family supper would be a high property if I were doing this again.
- Health is wealth. My father always said the following: what you do to build or harm your body in your younger years will be manifest as you age, so take care of yourself, establish good habits, avoid destructive habits like smoking, for example.
- There's a very old idea: You are the sum of your habits. Virtues are good actions repeated on a regular basis. You become what your habits are, whether your habits are of virtue or vice, so take care what you do repetitiously. One day you wake up and realize that you are the sum of your habits, even though you might have been thinking that you were on a different course. (Include Aristotle quote from ca.com). A variation on this theme is the saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. You become what your habits make you no matter what you intended.

# Dad

- Final quote/tip: “I will think about others. Mom is patiently waiting for me to help her. I will think about things while we complete the robing ceremony here.” (Tip: Do your duty.)

# Gracie

- Let your parents know how things are going. Give them a call and tell them how you've been doing. Fill them in on your life. Thank them for all that they've done for you. Bless them because they've blessed you. When you go off to college, they grieve your loss, so if you call them from time to time and thank them, it will mean the world to them. When you do that, they can pray for you and be a part of your life. A way to bless your mom would be to call her and just tell her how you are.
- Exercise, eat healthy, and sleep. If you can regularize your life, nothing shall be impossible.
- Read a lot of books.
- Perseverance. If you don't like something, stick with it. If you're struggling with a paper, a book, a painting, stick with it and it'll be good. Work is so hard, but it's good for the soul. There's a lot to be said for not taking short cuts and doing it the hard way.
- Hospitality. It's important to reach out and have friends over and invite people in.