

# THE NAVIGATOR

*Charting Your Course for a Purposeful Life*  
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## Crossroads

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It's tempting to think it is our successes that make us. When really, success is just what we like to show. Success is almost always the result of hard work, and the more significant part of the equation is how we handle the challenges, failures and mistakes. Becoming a parent at such a late date in life, I thought, "well at least I have some maturity to contribute to this, and here is my big chance to do something well." However, unlike the smooth sailing I imagined would go hand in hand with my maturity, parenting has been full of challenges. Our children are precious. It has surprised me how much work it is to shape character. Theirs. Mine. No doubt my husband would add his too. Some days it seems like there are crossroads at every turn.

Recently I found a little pamphlet, which was distributed in honor of my Uncle Owen at his retirement party in 1968. In it he talked about the challenges and blessings he faced with the help of his executive team, which included my father, in their amazing endeavor building Georgia-Pacific Corporation. He quoted Miss Madeira of the Madeira School in McLean, Virginia:

"Function in disaster and finish in style."

He was talking about building a tremendously successful business, but it struck me that Miss Madeira's quote applies to every aspect of life and every crossroad. It takes both courage and character to function in disaster. In a pair of recent unrelated disasters in our household, two very wise friends reminded me that it is not so much the disasters that are important, but how parents handle them afterwards. That is where you find and cultivate the strength in your family. Good news.



*The Navigator* is a quarterly newsletter for all who have an interest in wealth. The rich really are different, but not in the ways most people think. Many envy the wealthy and presume they have no problems, but in fact, they face unique psychological challenges. Thayer Willis, LCSW, wealth counselor, speaker and author of *Navigating the Dark Side of Wealth: A Life guide for Inheritors*, helps her clients develop the meaningful lives we all treasure.

In wealthy families, sometimes the development of character is inadvertently neglected when things come to the children too easily. When children are shielded from life's crossroads and given easy escape routes from tough decisions, opportunities for the development of character are wasted. It is a well-known fact, though sometimes overlooked, that actions have consequences. A true understanding of this principle will guide your choices. There is no better way to learn this than experience. Recently, a bank teller gave our 12-year-old son too much cash for some checks he was cashing. It took a few minutes for us to realize it, and by that time the bank was closed. I knew that our next steps were very important. I could see our son was wondering if he could just keep the extra money or...how does this work? And I waited. After a while he said "maybe we should take it back." Yay! A triumph for his character building.

There is a steep price to pay for not learning lessons like this. I could have let the bank incident go, or I could have returned the money myself, but it was entirely worth setting aside time the next day to take the extra money back together. I strive to point out the importance of taking the high road. And naturally, I have learned the value of this firsthand. Sometimes we don't even see the high road. One time I faced a tough decision regarding my children's school. I was angry and wanted to back out of a commitment I had made. My Uncle Bob counseled me to follow through with my commitment to the school, and keep my commitment to myself to be a person of honor. Of all of the courses of action I was considering, that hadn't even been one of them. So I followed his advice and learned that in addition to doing the right thing, sometimes we need to ask for help with such a decision because we can't always trust ourselves to be able to see the high road. When emotions cloud our thinking, the choices become more difficult and perilous.

In some wealthy families, it is tempting to throw money around at life's crossroads and try to buy ease. Take the high road? Take the low road? The low road is always easier and much more popular. For many years our children were in a private school where we saw parents make "gifts to the school" to try to smooth the missteps of their undisciplined children. This anti-character-building behavior on the part of parents is detrimental to all involved, and the biggest victims of this dynamic are the very children parents mean to be helping.

I wish each one of you the courage and character to "function in disaster and finish in style."

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