

And for the rest of our lives

Short stories to touch the heart

Wallace Leal V. Rodrigues

CASA EDITORA
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“And for the Rest of Our Lives”

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Translated by the Spiritist Alliance for Books/Spiritist Group
of New York, 2004
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Original Title: E, para o resto da vida – Casa Espirita O
Clarim

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Cover Design:

Drawings:

Edition: Casa Editora O Clarim

Rodrigues, Wallace Leal V – And for the rest of our lives

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organization, which has the sole aim to promote and
disseminate the Spiritist Doctrine in English, as codified by
Allan Kardec.

The group was officially established on April 12th, 2001.
However, some of its participants have been earnestly
fostering the dissemination of the Spiritist Doctrine in the
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members have founded the Spiritist Alliance for Books (SAB),
which is an organization that aims to unite people from all
over the world who are willing to volunteer in the effort of
translating spiritist books (which were originally written in
other languages) into English.

Prepared and Printed by Gráfica da Casa Editora O Clarim

(A property of the Centro Espírita “Amantes da Pobreza”).

Phone: 55 16 282-1066 – Fax: 55 16 282-1647

C.G.C. 52313780/0001-23 – Inscr. Est. 441002767116

Rua Rui Barbosa, 1070 – Cx. Postal, 09

CEP 15990-903 – Matão, SP, Brasil

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oclarim@oclarim.com.br

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

133.901

Rodrigues, Wallace Leal V. (12/11/1924 –
09/13/1988)

And for the rest of our lives

1st edition: May 2004

Matão, SP – Brazil – Casa Editora O Clarim

128 pages – 14 x 21 cm

ISBN

CDD – 133.9

133.9 Spiritism

133.901 Philosophy and Theory

133.91 Mediumship

133.92 Physical Phenomena

133.93 Psychic Phenomena

Printed in Brazil

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DEDICATED TO ALL THE DEAR LITTLE CHILDREN, IN THE “INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF CHILDREN.” IT IS NOTEWORTHY TO BRING TO YOUR ATTENTION THAT THE COMPOSURE OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS IN THE STORIES ARE EXTRACTED FROM THE STUDIES AND THE MEDITATION OF “THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SPIRITISM,” OF ALLAN KARDEC.

PREFACE

Breeze... there would be no sweeter and more delicate name that can be given to the pleasant impression that we had when, one day, we entered the office of an old friend: Wallace Leal V. Rodrigues.

There was nothing outside that would justify the presence of the pure and fragrant air that enveloped the area and produced upon our skin a strange yet pleasant chill. It was as if we were in an open field or at the top of a mountain, or perhaps near the oceanic coast during a fall afternoon.

There were no air conditioners or fans inside the office.

The leaves outside, which could be seen from the door, were still.

However, inside the office, the sweet and fragrant breeze would flow back and forth.

Then, I said: "How strange, Wallace. Where is this breeze coming from?"

He smiled and we noticed flashes of happiness and goodness inside his eyes, which have always been characteristic of his soul: "It is a friend of mine, Anny. A friend who has come to visit, who announces her presence with the breeze you now feel in the air. I call her Breeze, and she seems to like the name. But what is of great interest is that when she is present, we feel inspired to write about children... sometimes, memories of the past; other times, brief accounts that were inspired or experienced by her. They are always situations that involve an adult and a child.

For this reason, her presence invariably brings a sensation of peace, love and tenderness while describing the little ones that you, as an educator, understand and feel in your soul, whom for so many years have confided in you."

A few months went by... now, our dear friend comes to us and surprises us with gratifying request that we write the preface of his most recent book, which contains many pages of material written by him at the moments in which he felt the presence of "Breeze."

What better prize for us, who are about to end our career in teaching?

What greater honor could the publisher “O Clarim” offer to the masters of the whole world and to children of all races, religions and social classes than to publish, during the international year of children, this ecumenical book that touches the hearts of children and adults alike, as the topics discussed in the book constitute lessons which are present in our daily domestic lives.

For me, as educator, the book was a grateful surprise.

My experience in education shows that children appreciate books which discuss topics relevant in their daily lives.

During my last days of teaching, I frequently used an old book written by Viriato Correa: “Cazuza.” I felt that the children would be ecstatic by the simple things of life.

For this reason we believe that this new book, written by Wallace Leal V. Rodriguez would be able to successfully assist the parents and educators in the task of not only instructing and educating, but also, more importantly, of educating for a life of increased tolerance, understanding, patience and resignation before the problems of life. Given that “educate for life” is the most important goal of education.

In this little book, which is comprised of short stories, the instructors will find many ways which will lead them to their objective of teaching for the benefit of the pupil, and to form citizens for better world.

We hope that this book, compiled by the intelligence of Wallace Leal V. Rodriguez and inspired by the kind presence of Breeze, will contribute to the recovery of the pedagogic conscience in the sense that Saint Exupery requests to save the “Mozart that exists in the soul of the little ones.”

Breeze loved the children just as we did.

Breeze understood them, and she returns once again for them, asking us, the adults of a world riddled by violence and aggression, for a little bit more tenderness and little bit more love, not such love as that which we express during celebrations such as the international year of children, but true love, until we shall part from this earth.

We hope that the end result is exactly as Breeze wanted it to be: a shout of alert, a recovery of conscience regarding our

faults and our ignorance, before the worldwide crisis of education.

Thank you, Wallace Leal V. Rodriguez, for such gratifying honor of writing the preface of your book. This honor I shall disperse to all the people in the world who feel the love that the children need. To all the masters of the present and of the past who spent their lives educating the children of others as well as their own. After all, these little souls are children of life itself. For them, an education based on a life filled with love and understanding.

Araraquara, May 1979
Anny Silveira.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

To support the campaign of enlightenment against evil, and preserve us from criminality, is our duty.

However, when referring to our family circle, there will be situations in which we will be compelled to see some of our loved ones confronting personal experiences that we consider difficult and painful.

In these occasions, we assume that we perceive the extent of the danger they are being exposed to, and thus we fear for them; sometimes, they march towards serious risks which are familiar to us. At other times, they approach dangerous situations similar to the ones in which we have once suffered.

What should we do in these instances in which we find our beloved ones wandering as inexperienced travelers, climbing the aggressive mount of temptation, threatened by avalanches that might possibly destroy the best possibilities in their present existence?

However, above all, we must recognize that no one feels comfortable with our constant interventions, which keeps them from the freedom of trying by themselves, the construction of their own happiness.

Each one of us is a world in itself, for the Creator provided us with individual and unmistakable characteristics.

Emotions and thoughts, much like fingerprints, vary from person to person. Consequently, a certain pathway that has led us to unhappiness in the past might be the one more adequate to the edification of our beloved ones' spiritual victory. Likewise, certain people with whom we are unsympathetic towards might possibly be the ones who are more capable of solving their problems, which without their presence, would remain unsolved indefinitely.

On the other hand, the circumstances that now surround the ones who we dedicate our heartfelt affection to may not be identical to those that we have faced in the past. In addition, quite often they might prove themselves more fit to overcome unpleasant circumstances that we, in turn, were not able to withstand. In this manner, they wind up creating respectable models of conduct for the comfort and safety of many others.

Let us, therefore, be considerably cautious in order not to harm the independence of those we love, by seeing them as God's children, just as ourselves, with similar needs. In this way we respect their right to build their own lives, and to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions just as we do with ours. Therefore, every time we find them facing imminent danger, let us bear in mind that the best way to assist them is invariably through prayer and the blessing of our good advices, which would encourage them to work and serve, fight and win, with the support of goodness.

Emmanuel

THE SCALE

When I was a young boy, I was always fighting with my friends over toys. Each time I would always return home whining and complaining about them. This happened most often with Bob, my best friend.

One day, while I was running home in search of my mother to complain about Bob, she heard me and said the following:

“Go bring your scale and the blocks.”

“But what does this have to do with Bob?”

“You will see... let’s play a game.”

I obediently brought the scale and the blocks. Then she said:

“First let’s place upon this side of the scale one block for each and every one of Bob’s flaws. Tell me what they are.”

As I explained his flaws, a certain number of blocks were placed on one side of the scale.

“Have you nothing else to say?”

I certainly had not, and so she continued:

“Well then, now you will dictate to me all his good qualities, and I will place blocks on the other side of the scale accordingly.”

I hesitated, but she soon thereafter motivated me to speak: “Does he not allow you to ride his bike? Does he not share candy with you?”

I agreed and began to tell her his good qualities. She then began putting blocks on the other side of the scale. Suddenly, I noticed that the scale was uneven. There were more blocks in favor of Bob.

I smiled and mom said:

“You like Bob and were happy to see that his good qualities outweigh his flaws. This will always be the case, as you will eventually realize throughout the course of your life.”

It is a fact. Throughout my life this incident very much influenced all my judgments. Before criticizing someone, I always remember the scale and compare their virtues and flaws. And thankfully, the end result is always in favor of one’s virtues, which in turn fortifies my confidence in humanity.

THE CARRIAGE

When we were young, one of the biggest concern of our father was in making us understand the importance of courtesy in life.

Oftentimes I noticed just how much it frustrated him when someone would interrupt a conversation between others. I frequently made the mistake of getting into that habit. Despite being annoyed, he never confronted me, which surprised me a great deal.

One day, early in the morning, he invited me to go to the woods to listen to the singing of the birds. I accepted with great joy and so we went, our feet humid from the morning dew.

He stopped once we approached an open canopy, and after a short moment of silence, he asked:

“Do you hear anything besides the singing of the birds?”

I stopped to listen for a second and responded:

“I hear the sound of a carriage which must be coming down from the road.”

“That’s right,” he said. “It is an empty carriage.”

From where we were standing, it was impossible to see the road, and thus I asked in awe:

“How are you sure that the carriage is empty?”

“Well, it’s very simple to tell. Do you know why?”

Puzzled, I responded:

“No!”

My father placed his hand upon my shoulder as he explained and looked deep into my eyes:

“Because of the noise it makes. The emptier the carriage is, the noisier it is.”

He said nothing else and left me to think for myself.

Eventually I became an adult, and even today when I find someone who is loud and obnoxious, and who always interrupts the conversations of others, even if at times I find that such a person is myself, I immediately hear the voice of my father telling me in the woods:

“The emptier the carriage, the noisier it is!”

THE DOLL

One day my grandmother had commented that the candies – which had been made by her and my mom that morning – had disappeared from the closet. They did not know what had happened to them.

Nevertheless, neither of them looked like they were the least bit worried about what had happened to the candies, and so I said:

“They were stolen.”

Surprised, they both looked at me, and then my grandmother began to talk.

“Are you sure?” She asked.

“Yes!” I exclaimed. It was Peter.

Peter was one of my brothers. Grandma insisted once more:

“Are you sure?”

“Yes I am!” It was Charles who told me.

“My daughter,” she said calmly, resting her arm upon mine, “come with me to my room. I want to show you something.”

In her room she opened a drawer and removed from inside a doll that I had never seen before.

“Look how well dressed she is!”

I did not understand. This certainly had nothing to do with the stolen candies. Then she continued:

“Tell me what calls your attention about this doll.”

“It has a nice outfit, and a beautiful shirt!” I responded while observing the perfect fit, the cuffs and the collar.

As soon as I finished talking, my grandmother removed the suit from the doll. I began to laugh out loud when I saw that the doll itself wore not a shirt, but instead just cuffs and a collar.

Suddenly, I understood the situation and became rather serious.

My grandmother smiled and hugged me, saying:

“See how things are? We can only believe in what we see. And from what we see, we are only able to believe in half of it. Do you understand why?”

Many years have passed. However, every time I judge someone or something at first glance – as humans often do – I remember my grandmother's doll and its shirt.

THE BUCKET

When I was a boy, I was capricious and lethargic.

I lacked the persistence that was required for my studies.

One day, while I was playing in my backyard, my grandfather called me to the barnyard and showed me a bucket lying on the floor that was filled with water.

In his hands he carried a smooth and shiny pear, which I desired as soon as I saw it. Unfortunately, he refused to give me the pear. He instead placed this delicious and ripe pear inside the bucket, at which point it began to float. And so he said:

“You want this pear, don’t you? Then so it shall be yours. However, you must grab it using only your teeth, not your hands.”

The pear looked very delicious, and so I commenced my task, which appeared to be very fun.

Eventually I grew very tired and decided to give up before completing my objective.

My grandfather then motivated me to double my efforts and try again.

Soon thereafter, my back was aching and I was soaked in sweat, but I was finally able to grab hold of the fruit. And so it was with much pride that I handed the pear to my grandfather.

Then he smiled warmly and said:

“See how gratifying it is to succeed? If you want to reap the fruits of your labors in life and fill yourself with this gratifying emotion, simply remember this: you must persist, persist and persist. Here, the pear is yours.”

This lesson touched me profoundly.

Today, every time I feel discouraged, I always remember my experience with the pear, and so I double my efforts.

THE WATCH

When I was a girl in school, the year usually ended with a theatrical performance. I loved it, but I was never invited to participate, which made me very sad.

When I turned eleven, they told me that I would finally have a part in the play. I was very happy, but this state of happiness lasted only for a short while: they had chosen my classmate to play the main role. I played a very small part, which was of little importance.

It was very upsetting. I went home crying. My mother noticed that I was weeping profusely, and wanted to know what was wrong. Without saying a word, she placed my father's beautiful pocket watch upon my hands.

"Tell me, what do you see?"

"A gold watch with a numbered dial and moving hands."

Soon thereafter, she opened the back part of the watch and asked:

"And now, what do you see?"

"Well, mom, it looks like there are many wheels and screws."

My mom had left me bewildered, since this had nothing to do with my discontentment. And so, she calmly continued:

"This watch, though beautiful and indispensable to your father, would be absolutely useless should any part be missing, regardless of size or importance.

We embraced, and as I looked into her calm and warm face, I immediately understood without the need of any explanation.

This lesson has helped me to become happier in life. With the help of that pocket watch, I learned the importance of even the most difficult and trifle tasks, which we will all eventually face. It matters not if it is the most insignificant screw or the most unnoticeable wheel, as long as we work for the benefit of everyone.

I also learned that we should do our duty without expecting outside appraisal. What matters the most is fulfilling our duties at peace.

THE MEDAL

When I was a boy, I won a medal at school because I was the best reader. I was extremely happy and proud. When school was over, I ran home and burst into the kitchen like a tornado. Our old maid who had been with us for many years was busy at the oven.

I walked straight towards her and said:

“I bet that I can read better than you.”

I handed her my book. She stopped what she was doing and grabbed the book. After carefully examining the book, she stuttered:

“Well, my boy... I... I can't read.”

I was flabbergasted. Knowing that my dad was at the office that day, I ran there hastily. As my dad raised his head, I walked into the office sweating profusely and said:

“Can you imagine, dad, that Maria can't read? And she's an old lady too. I, who am still young, earned a medal. Isn't it amazing?”

I then stuck my chest out so as to show off my award.

Then, I inquired:

“It must be horrible to not be able to read, isn't it dad?”

Calmly, my dad stood up and walked towards the shelf, took out a book, and turned to me.

“Son, read this book for me to see. It is wonderful that you won a medal. Read it for me.”

Without hesitating, I opened the book and glanced over at my father in surprise. The page contained what appeared to be hundreds of scribbled lines.

“I can't read this dad. I don't understand anything written in this book.”

“It is a book written in Chinese.”

Immediately I remember what I had done to Maria and I felt ashamed.

My dad said nothing more, and I entered a mode of deep thought as I put down the book and walked away.

Even now, every time that I attempt to flatter myself due to some kind of an achievement, I remember how much I have yet to learn and I say to myself:

“Don’t forget that you still don’t know how to read Chinese!”

THE SEEDLINGS

I was very young when a new baby had arrived in our house. It certainly should've made me happy to have a little brother, however, the care and attention that he was receiving had made me jealous, and oftentimes I would cry thinking that they loved me less.

My grandfather cultivated a vegetable garden in the backyard of our house. One day, when my jealousy was at its peak, he called me to the garden. I went to see what he wanted. He was crouching near the spot in the garden where he had seeded lettuce. The seedlings, which were of a very tender green hue, shined brightly through the beautiful and tranquil morning. My grandfather, focused on the task of separating the seedlings, did not seem to have noticed my mood. Then he said:

“Pay attention! I am separating the seedlings, and shortly hereafter I will plant them in their rightful spot. Care, my son, is not unlike lettuce: it needs to be divided in order to grow better. When I was your age I loved my mom dearly. One day I met a girl whom I married and later she gave birth to our son. Soon came another and yet another. But after each and every one of them was born, our love for the older ones had not ended. Love is something very peculiar because the more it is distributed the stronger it grows. Your parents are very busy with a baby because he is younger and more fragile. But the love they had for you has only grown.

The very moment that I saw the roots of the lettuce grow, beautiful and exuberant, a new happiness was born from within my jealous heart. My mom and my dad's care, while divided, grew day by day, much like that plant had to be divided so that one seedling would not suffocate another.

Many times after this experience when I felt that I wanted attention from others exclusively, the image of my grandfather's vegetable garden appeared in the back of my head, offering me a new perspective of peace and serenity.

The more divided that love is, the stronger and more profound it becomes. I could never forget this.

THE TURTLE

When I was a boy I was impatient, rude and rough in the way I treated others.

When I wanted something, instead of asking for it politely, I would vex others until they would give me what I wanted only to get me to leave them alone. Thus I turned into a cranky and unsympathetic kid.

I noticed that my behavior bothered my parents, but I was not concerned with this. As long as I got what I wanted, I was satisfied. But obviously, if I bothered other people, they would treat me in a bad manner as well.

Eventually I grew up and I somehow noticed that the current situation was very uncomfortable, and so I looked for ways of changing myself.

I was taught a lesson when, during one Sunday, I went with my parents and my siblings to camp. We ran and we played until I became very tired, and so I walked towards the riverside to rest. There I found something that looked like a walking rock. It was a turtle. I examined it carefully and when I walked towards it, the animal hid in its shell. I immediately came to the conclusion that I wanted the animal to leave its shell, and so I poked the holes in its shell with a tree branch. However, my efforts were in vain, and so I became, as always, impatient and irritated. Soon thereafter my dad approached me.

He realized what I was doing and crouched down beside me, telling me calmly:

“Son, you are wasting your time. You will not achieve anything, even if you keep poking the turtle. That’s not how you’re supposed to do it. Come with me and bring the animal.”

I accompanied him to the campfire that he had lighted with some branches from the woods. He then said:

“Put the turtle here, not too close to the fire. Choose a warm and comfortable spot.”

I obeyed. A few minutes later, due to the warmth, the turtle popped its head out of its shell and began to slowly walk in my direction. I was very satisfied and he turned to me, saying:

“Son, people can be compared to turtles. To deal with them you must never be forceful. The warmth of a generous heart will usually get them to do whatever we wish, not with annoyance but instead with satisfaction and spontaneity.”

THE TABLET

When I was a boy I was mischievous, insensitive, always responded bluntly to everything people told me and I never did anything to make our house anything near a paradise. Just the opposite!

My parents patiently offered me advice and provided me with limitless love hoping that I would obediently follow their advice.

One day my dad called me up for a conversation. I had done mischief of all kinds and I thought that he had finally lost his patience and would either hit me or ground me in some way.

To my surprise, he did none of this. He did not appear to be angry and merely said:

“Son, I notice that you have no idea about how you are conducting yourself. But I thought of something that can make you realize that. It’s a game, but it can help you a lot. Come with me.”

He then led me to his office. Inside, he told me:

“Look, here I have a new tablet, smooth and beautiful. Each and every time that you do something disagreeable or disobey us I will place a nail on this tablet.”

Poor tablet! In a short time it was riddled with nails! But each time that I heard my dad nail the tablet with a hammer, I would cringe from inside. It wasn’t only just the loss of a beautiful tablet, but also the feeling of humiliation that I myself had caused.

One day, when there was little space for more nails, I felt deplored about what I had caused the tablet and wished that I would be able to see it anew. I ran to my father confessing what I had felt, and he, while pretending to think for a while, said:

“I know something that we can try. Each time that you do something virtuous, no matter what the situation, I will remove a nail from the tablet. Let’s experiment.”

The nails began disappearing until at one point, there was none left. But I was not happy. When I looked at the tablet, although the nails were not present, their scars were.

I discussed this with my dad and he responded:

“That’s true, my son, the nails have disappeared but the marks they left behind can never go away. The same is true for our hearts. Every negative action we take leaves an ugly scar behind. And even if we do not commit this error once again, the mark remains: it is the blame.

Never have I forgotten about the nails and the smooth and polished tablet, whose beauty was unfortunately destroyed. I have thereafter remained very careful so that the sensation of blame shall not scar my heart. This experience has made me think a lot, and I am certain that a life well lived shall carry a heart safe and sound until the end, keeping it away from any possible scars of consequences.

THE TOY CAR

When we were little kids, father worked hard to support the family, for we were five children and we were all very young.

Since we all wanted a little toy car, just as the neighbor's kids had, he decided to be economic and bought only one, telling us it belonged to all of us.

We were very content, but soon we began to fight about who had the right to use the car first.

Since he was not able to purchase a car for every kid, one day after one of our fights, he called us over to discuss the issue.

"You guys were fighting because of the car, and that's not good. But there is a way to solve this problem. During the week one of you will have control of the car. The others will occupy themselves with housework by helping your mom. He who has control of the car will be able to spend his time as he wishes."

The plan did not appear to be a bad one, and when we made a raffle to decide who would have control of the car first, I turned out to be the winner. I was very satisfied, but during the days that followed I realized how boring it was to play without my brothers. Working together, my brothers appeared happier and more content than I was.

I confessed to them what I was feeling and we decided to talk to my dad again.

"What about you guys? Do you feel happy working together without John?"

They had all responded that they weren't. Not only did it make the work harder, but they also missed my company.

"Well then," said my dad after thinking for a bit, "Why don't you settle it like this: first, all of you work together to finish your chores. Then, with the remaining free time, you can play with the car as much as you want. How's that idea?"

We found that the solution was an excellent one. We began to work together, lending each other our help, and after we were done we all went to play with the car together. The fights died out and until today we have always kept alive this spirit of cooperation and brotherhood.

THE LAZINESS

When we were young, my brother and I were inactive and lazy. We always came up with excuses to avoid doing our chores, to skip school, and walk around the orchards, camps and quarters around where we lived like vagabonds.

Evidently, our parents were very much annoyed by this, but instead of grounding or physically disciplining us, they would wait for the right moment so as to catch our attention without having to abandon their loving and patient ways of teaching us a lesson.

This moment had arrived when during a certain day after lunch we were preparing to resume our vagrancies. My mother had called out not to me, but to my brother. Distrustful and anxious, I waited to see what she wanted. In her regular tone of voice, without sounding as if anything was amiss, she said:

“My son, do you think you can do me a favor?”

“Sure, what is it mom?”

I noticed that my brother also had no idea what would be asked of him. Mom continued:

“I want you to go to that barren strip of land and tell me what is over there.”

This strip of land lay in front of our house and was very familiar to us since we spent our time there when trying to evade working. My brother respected her wishes and returned in just a few minutes.

“Mom, there is nothing over there but garbage and waste. Rusty metals, paper, broken glass, wire and bottles. Nothing of any worth.”

Then, as if she had not heard his last comment, she exclaimed:

“But isn’t there anything that can be of use from there?”

“Oh, mother! Of course not.”

Then, walking towards me, she asked:

“And now you. Go to the garden gate and tell me what exists in the other terrain.”

The answer to that was clear, but much like my brother, I went to check. I returned soon thereafter, saying:

“In the other strips of land there are houses, orchards and gardens.”

“Wow!” Exclaimed my mother. “Why do you think there is such an accumulation of garbage in the barren terrain?”

My brother and I triumphantly responded almost simultaneously:

“Because it’s empty mother.”

“Poor terrain!” Exclaimed my mother. “It turned into a barren wasteland because no one made any use of it. This leaves much to think about, for it is not unlike our daily lives. If we do not learn to make the most of it, it will be filled with uselessness. A lethargic life is like barren terrain: it contains everything that is wasteful and useless. It is because of this that a working man’s life, who learns to make the best of each and every day, has no place for vices, malevolence or any type of malignancy.”

My mother had barely finished talking and my brother and I were both already ashamed of ourselves.

Needless to say, we changed a lot from this experience. Since then, when we faced many diverse circumstances in life, when any opportunity for laziness arose, we would remember the barren wasteland, full of old, wrinkled paper, shards of glass and garbage. Everything worthless.

THE HAIRSTYLE

“Why are you losing your patience and your goodwill and beating yourself up over this?” Asked my dad when he had found me crying of anger because I was too young a girl and did not possess the necessary skills to adjust my hair to be in style with the current trends of college.

“It is in style!” I complained. “But my hair never stays straight!”

While looking at me with a blank stare, he said:

“Divide your hair down the middle, comb it back, and tie it with a lace.”

I did so, but not too good of a job. He added:

“Now use your hair like this for the week, and if the girls in your class don’t copy your hairstyle, I will give you thirty dollars.”

I thought that he was incredibly naïve. Thirty dollars was too much money to pass up.

I could not be more embarrassed even if I had arrived to school in pajamas. But when the week ended, almost all of the girls from my class were wearing their hair split down the middle and tied back with a lace!

When I had told my dad what had happened, he commented:

“Never be ashamed of an original idea, and if successful, never be concerned with what others do.”

Even though he had won the bet, he gave me the thirty dollars.

My dad could never imagine how much this simple lesson reinforced my personality and gave me the strength, especially in situations in which I was faced with peer pressure, to be myself and not follow the crowd as a robot.

THE ORANGE

When I was seven years old, I very much wanted to learn to play the violin, and with much sacrifice my mother was able to buy me the instrument and to pay a teacher for me.

After a few weeks, I noticed that I could not play any melodies and I was forced to do many exercises incessantly.

And so I told my mother that I was tired of learning the violin and that I was going to quit. We lived just a short distance from the city, and it was during when we were walking together – after she had picked me up from one of my lessons – that I explained to her why I was feeling down.

By chance we passed by the house of a friend who owned a beautiful orchard.

“Look!” said my mother. “What beautiful fruit!”

The spectacle incited my infantile imagination. There were apples, pears and oranges. The branches tilted from the weight of the fruits.

“Would you like to try one?” my mom asked.

“Oh! Yes I would. That big orange that looks yellow like the yolk of an egg.”

“Well then, you may get it.”

“But I can’t. There’s a fence. Besides, do you think the owner of the orchard would let me?”

“Yeah, you’re right. Let’s ask her.”

My mom called out to the lady who owns the orchard and she gave me permission to get it:

“The gate of the orchard is just ahead. You may go around.”

My mom thanked her, walked towards the orchard gate, and I ran in to grab the orange and walked back out happily with the orange in my hand. Then my mom said:

“You see? In order to enjoy the fruits of our labors it is necessary to work our way through and around corners. That which we absolutely desire is never directly in our reach. You will see that this is so throughout your entire life.”

Immediately, I remembered the violin.

I returned to my lessons and exercises, until I was capable of playing my favorite melodies.

And for the rest of my life I always remembered this experience and how it is necessary to work hard and walk around some corners in order to reach my objectives.

THE BASKET

When I was a little girl I was lazy and I complained when I was given even the most insignificant chores to do in the house. Whenever possible I made my siblings do my chores for me. As a result, they had little more willingness to accomplish these tasks than I did, and so we were always arguing with each other. My parents said nothing and hoped that we would solve our arguments without their help. Today I have learned that my father was merely waiting for the right time to teach us a worthwhile lesson.

One of my chores, which made me annoyed, consisted of grabbing a basket and going to buy bread for supper.

One day my dad returned from work and found that we were in a conflict, with the basket between us in the floor. He looked visibly fatigued, but instead of sitting down for a while to rest, he turned to me and said in a very calm tone:

"Sweetie, give me the basket."

Without hesitating I gave him the basket, thinking that I would be let go and my brothers would be forced to buy the bread. However, that is not what had happened. Speaking to all of us, he proposed the following:

"Since today, I have always given you money and you were the ones responsible for carrying the basket and buying the bread. Today, we're going to change that. You will give me the money and I will go to the bakery. I already have the basket and I am ready to go to the bakery to buy bread. I want you guys to please give me the money so that I can go buy the bread.

That unexpected declaration startled us, and for a moment we all remained speechless.

Without waiting even a second more, I grabbed the basket and the money and went to buy the bread, leaving my brothers in silence, perplexed. My dad went to take a shower as if nothing had happened.

Later when I had returned and when we were all seated at the table, he addressed us with much sincerity:

"Listen, my children. Supper represents a blessing from God and the hard work of each and every one of us. God

blessed us so that I would be able to work and earn money, so that you would be able to use that money to buy food, and finally so that your mother would be able to cook. This way, we would eat and feel satisfied. Cooperation is the guarantee of the habitat and all of humanity. Without cooperation the blessing of God would not be possible. Throughout your entire life you will see that this is so.

After this experience my attitude changed. This lesson had touched my brothers and I very much, and even today when we reunite we remember our father and that very supper. Each time that our cooperation is required, regardless of the job, we remember the basket and we gladly accept the task, certain that this way God's blessing will benefit us and all.

THE SAW

When I was a little girl, a few of my uncles and cousins came to stay in my parents' house.

My cousin and I would always argue as we disregarded our house chores.

Since I was the older one, I always felt the pretension that I should teach them to do the least significant things, which of course, was untrue.

One day, after seeing one of these arguments, my grandfather took us to the backyard, where there was a pile of lumber. Then, he grabbed the biggest log and said to us in a normal tone:

"The log shall remain in the middle. Grab one of the saws and begin to cut the log, each of you standing on either side."

We were very startled by his request, but we immediately obeyed. The saw was one of the very common ones in the countryside, which was handled by two people, each of whom stood on either side and pulling and pushing in order to cut the log.

I began sawing as fast as I could, but once again wishing to prove that my cousin was unable to do the same. However, each time that I would push the saw faster than she would, the blade would curve around the log and I would lose balance.

Then I noticed that if I sawed at the same speed and intensity that she did, the work progressed quickly.

By the time that we finished the work, we were dead tired. However, our movements were perfectly synchronous. Grandpa applauded when the log split into two, and thus he explained, smiling:

"You were able to finish the task effectively, and there is no such secret in doing it. You were able to work in perfect harmony. When you have any task to perform, remember that if you work together and with equal amounts of effort, everything will be easier and faster."

I can never forget that. Since in life most of the tasks that we perform involve working with others, I always

remember that log, and I always try to apply the lesson of harmony to my life.

VANITY

When my sister and I were around nine and seven years old, respectively, we scored the highest grades in our classes at school. And so we had come to the conclusion, based on “brains,” that our family possessed above average intelligence. We lost no time in order to make our friends aware of this.

One day, after hearing us boast, my dad called us.

He had blown into a balloon until it was as big as a human head. With seriousness, he said:

“This here is John.”

And so he began to tell us the life story of John, who had accomplished many extraordinary feats.

Every time that John did something great, he would blow another puff of air into the balloon.

As the story progressed, John’s head would get bigger and bigger, in such a way that little by little my sister and I moved away in order to avoid the imminent burst.

Suddenly, just as John’s head appeared as if it could no longer hold any more air, the story finished.

“It’s not very fun to be around John right?” Asked my dad. “He is so full of himself and has such a thick head... this is what having a brain is, don’t you think? Let’s change the subject a little bit, why are your friends not showing up anymore?”

“We don’t know!” We responded.

“Just as you distanced yourselves from John, your friends distanced themselves from you. You guys were so proud and your heads were so big that they feared the moment that you both would burst, which would be very uncomfortable.”

Until today, whenever we accomplish something great, the memory of John keeps us from having “big heads” and from thinking of ourselves as the “brains.”

THE CHICK

I was ten years old when I met, for the first time, a true friend between my classmates.

Our companionship turned out to be the most important thing in my life.

However, I was very obsessive about this friendship, which made me extremely jealous whenever she developed an interest for anything that did not concern me.

My mom began to notice what was happening.

One day she called me to see a nest of chicks that had just recently been born.

I was astounded. They were beautiful little creatures, made of very soft golden velvet.

Enthusiastically, I cupped my hands and grabbed one. But I squeezed him with such a force that I nearly suffocated him. Naturally, he fought to escape, and thus ran as far as he could from me.

My mom noticed my disappointment and said:

“Get another one, but try to hold him smoothly and effortlessly. If you hold him too tightly, by instinct he will try to escape.”

I made a second attempt and the chick gladly accepted the palm of my hands. I smiled at my mom, happily. And so she said:

“You know, sweetie, people in this world are not unlike that chick. If we hold on to those we love too tightly, trying to imprison them in our grasp, they will not feel good. They will fight for their liberty, as does the first chick you caught. But if we place them on our palms, without tightening our fingers in a way that they only feel our warmth, they will realize that we wish not to imprison them, but merely to share our warmth without trying to impose anything upon them. That is why you succeeded with the second chick.”

What my mother had told me had taught me a great lesson.

I do not mean to say that I stopped feeling jealous, since that is a normal human emotion. However, every time that the

feeling of exclusivity speaks louder in my spirit, I remember the chick in the palm of my hand.

It was this way that I learned to keep near me those I very much desired to permanently live within my heart.

THE PAN

My family's old maid was a black woman.

Francis, her nephew – which often happened when we had no brothers or sisters – was my play pal.

In everything we did, Francis's role was secondary and passive.

He was required to give and never to receive.

One day I ran home because Francis and I had planned to build a ditch from the well to the laundry.

In doing this, we each took different roles in the project.

Francis was “condemned” to do hard manual labor, sweating and using all his strength repeatedly. I was the tyrannical guard, holding a pole in my hand!

The manner in which I was mistreating Francis was not unlike the manner in which a racist adult treats those of other color.

At this point the old maid called us:

“Kids, come help put my pan in the oven!”

We ran to the kitchen. The pan was in the floor and we grabbed it with our bare hands. But then with a loud shout we both let go, perplexed at the fact that she gave us orders to grab that pan when it was obvious that she knew that it was extremely hot.

And then, in serious words, so trifling and simple that even today I can hear them through the passage of time, she said:

“Wow. You both burned yourselves. How interesting! Your skin color is so different yet the pain you have felt is the same, isn't it?”

We agreed.

I could never forget this experience, which without a doubt made me a very different person.

THE MINUTE

When I was young, around the time in which chocolates and candies populated our dreams, I always took many minutes before I could decide which candy I wanted to buy.

After I finally bought them, I would take even longer to decide whether I should eat them now or save them for later.

One day, my grandfather, who often accompanied me in my trek through the world of sweets, grabbed his pocket watch and with a firm expression he said:

“Let’s make a deal. From now on, when you come to buy candies, you will have to decide before this big moving hand, which counts the minutes, reaches this spot. Do we have a deal?”

Before I agreed, he told me with much patience that life is, after all, a series of choices. He explained:

“It is necessary to make the right decisions so that we will not regret them later, in the case that this decision would turn out to be bad for us.”

Those first 59 seconds went by so quickly that I wasn’t even ready to make a decision.

The game lasted a few years. Eventually I was able to rationalize and make decisions with increasing ease.

What was of great value to me was the energy I acquired knowing that after each time I rolled the dice there will be no place to regret the outcome.

THE MILL

Near the end of the school year as my studies were coming to an end, I was the number one student in the class. This made me very proud of myself and in fact caused me to look down upon my friends as if I was “superior.”

We were used to spending our vacation at the beach, but to my and my siblings’ surprise, my dad opted for a change of plans and accepted the invitation of a friend who owned a mill. And so we went to a beautiful farm in the middle of a sugar cane plantation. Naturally, we would be able to go fishing, horse riding and enjoy other forms of entertainment.

The idea was not unpleasant for me.

The first few days were fun, but soon thereafter I was very bored because I had no friends to play with.

The farm boys were also on vacation, but spend a great deal of time working at the mill.

One morning while I was walking around lazily, my father approached me and said:

“Did you visit the mill? It is a very interesting place. It is there where most of the boys from the farm are able to find work. If you like to learn new things, why don’t you get a job there just to experiment?”

I like his suggestion. In the mill, after being familiar with what is done in there, I opted to help the boy named Bob after seeing that his work was the easiest, which required little experience and willpower.

Bob, who was very shy and almost illiterate, was immediately judged by my superiority complex.

I was in charge of filling a container with sugar cane waste, which was later pulled by a horse that was guided by my companion, which was then brought to a storage area.

I was sweating heavily and time was running out for me to finish the work.

And so the man who was in charge started to complain and he called Bob for a conversation. He approached me timidly and with his head lowered and stuttering as he spoke:

“I’m sorry, but Denis says that I should continue the job alone. The work is simple but it looks like you are having trouble with it...”

“Having trouble with it,” I thought. Then I returned uncomfortably to the farm. My dad happily approached me and asked:

“So, what were you doing there?”

“Nothing!” I responded.

Certainly, I was being honest, because in my conscience I knew I truly had done nothing.

“Well,” said my dad. “Don’t worry. Who knows? Perhaps you at least got some experience from it.”

And so he left without saying another word.

But he had proved his point.

I understood well and never forgot that lesson throughout my entire life.

From that day forward I learned that men have their differences. But this had absolutely nothing to do with superiority. In one way or another – as long as one holds the ambition to reach for the stars – each and every man is always able to be superior.

JUSTICE

When I was a young kid, I had the habit of always feeling as if I didn't receive justice. For one reason or another an injustice had been committed against me, without knowing that to me these injustices were merely any restriction which kept me from getting what I desired and dreamed about.

Invariably, I wept profusely in protest.

One day my dad called me and said:

"My son, let's make a deal. You know that daddy doesn't like to see you sad, right? Then let's do it this way: each time that you cry, write on a piece of paper the reason for your sadness. Put that piece of paper in the vase next to the writing desk. After a few days have passed, read it. If you think that the issue still bothers you, come to me and tell me why you are upset and I promise I will correct the injustice that has been committed against you. Do we have a deal?"

I agreed. During the first few days I filled the vase with paper. Written in black and white, my complaints appeared to be completely justified.

After a few days passed, my father came to talk to me.

"You may now begin to re-examine the papers you had written. Then you can come and talk to me."

And so I began. But then I started to realize that my complaints were trifles, and in turn they presented little or no reason to lament.

Instead of re-examining the pieces of paper after a few days, I began to examine them merely hours after I had initially written them.

I verified that there was no reason to complain to my father. And so I stopped crying, as I had originally done often during the day.

Today I understand that this was all part of my dad's lesson. With much discipline he was able to teach me how to reflect before I react. He was able to build in me a sense of respect of what justice and injustice really is in the face of our egocentrism, desires of privilege and improper pretensions.

With this my spirit of tolerance received a boost that has benefited me for the rest of my life.

THE MOTH

My dad was a thrifty and good-hearted man. Since I was young, he had always taught me to enjoy simple things in life.

One of my pastimes as a child was to collect moth cocoons and to watch them morph into butterflies when springtime came by, which to me was a beautiful spectacle. Their struggle to break free from the cocoon stirred my deepest sympathies.

One day, using a very thin scissor, my dad began to cut the outside of the cocoon, trying to help the moth to break from its imprisonment.

In an instant, the butterfly was dead.

It was as if the work was required in order to guarantee its life.

"Son," said my dad. "The struggle with which this butterfly attempts to gain its liberty helps it to isolate the venoms of the body. If these venoms are not excreted, the butterfly will die. The same is true for us: when we fight for something we desire, we become a stronger and better person. But when we complete our objectives with little effort, we become weaker and less competent, lacking in character. It is as if something dies within us.

Today I know that I am capable of dealing with adversity, thanks to the profound lesson that my dad gave me during that day.

And all because of that dead moth.

THE APOLOGY

When I was young, I was very absent-minded.

In just one day I was able to break my mother's scissors, rip my doll's hair while I was climbing a tree, and finally break fine china while helping to wash the dishes.

After each and every one of these disaster, I immediately ran up to my mom and said:

"Sorry, mom!"

I was sure that after saying these magic words, my mother would forgive me entirely.

The next day during one of my disasters, I spilled coffee in the tablecloth.

"Sorry, mom!" I said quickly.

But my mom smiled, grabbed a towel, and rolled it around my head like a turban. Then, she took a wand that she had purposely left nearby, and placed it in my hand. Then she said with good humor:

"Now you are a magician, with a magic wand. Say the magic words 'Sorry, mom,' upon this coffee spill ten times.

I repeated the magic words while the rest of my family watched, struggling to keep back the laughter.

When I was done, I curiously asked my mom:

"Did the spill disappear?"

"No!" She replied.

When I realized what had happened, I complained about the deception.

"It would not have disappeared had I said the magic words a thousand times."

"Well then," said my mom. "This means that 'Sorry' is not a magic word. Isn't that interesting? A simple 'sorry' cannot make disappear a spill which could have been prevented in merely two seconds if you had paid attention. Would you like me to fill your cup again?"

Since then my mom never had to tell me to be careful again.

Each time that I think I had forgotten my lesson, I would remember the turban and the magic wand.

THE CAKE

My brother and I always came home very hungry at the end of school.

One day, when I asked to be fed, my mother placed us on opposite ends of a piece of cake that lay on the kitchen table.

As she placed a knife beside the cake, she said:

"One of you is going to cut the cake, but the other is going to choose which piece he wants for himself."

My brother, trying to be a wise guy, quickly placed his hand on the knife and was just about to cut the cake into two unequal pieces.

However, he suddenly stopped. He glanced at my mom and then at me, and cut the cake into two equal pieces.

And so he waited so that I may choose a piece. Regardless of which piece I chose I would receive the same size cake, and this way neither one of us would be prejudiced.

Thus we happily ate our two equal pieces.

Since then, regardless of what we eat - be it bread, sweets, munchies, or cake - it would all be consciously divided into equal pieces.

This had taught us to be respectful to the rights of others whom we are required to share with.

THE RIVER

There was something that had always worried me when I was a child:

Not to be driven by frustration in face of the difficulties life presented to me.

But I wanted to overcome these difficulties by all means.

I could not always solve my problems with violence, and so I would be engulfed in tears.

My grandfather would often try to help me by showing me the error of my ways.

One day, while we were sitting by the riverbank watching the current slowly move downstream, he turned to me and said:

"My dear girl, closely observe this river. In its ideal state it is running downstream. It will flow until it finds a place for the water to rest. However, its trip is not always tranquil. Observe, its obstacles are not few: rocks, terrain elevations, tree branches and trunks. Regardless, the river pushes on. Yet it does not throw itself blindly into these obstacles. Just the opposite, first and foremost it looks to see if it can overcome these obstacles. If it is not possible, it will simply slip around these obstructions and continue its journey serenely. It is this way that you should look to overcome the obstacles of life and to proceed in peace."

These sensible words from my grandfather profoundly impacted my spirit.

Even today I remember my grandfather's lessons when facing obstacles in my life.

THE BUTTERFLY

Like all disobedient boys, I had the habit of getting stuck in sticky situations.

Then I would always run to my mom to bail me out.

Without getting annoyed or punishing me, she would always find a way of letting me handle the situation myself.

To me, I felt that she was doing that because she just didn't want to help me. This misunderstanding would leave me silently angry.

One morning, during the eve of spring, she called out to me in the garden. I went to see what she wanted. She showed me a cocoon, firmly attached to the branch of a cypress.

"Look," she said. "The butterfly is already moving inside the cocoon."

It looked to me as if the butterfly was jumping inside, and that made me very impatient.

I had a knife in my pocket, and thus I took it out, opened the cocoon, and without consulting my mom I said:

"I am going to help this poor butterfly get out of there."

My mother simply curved her arm across my shoulders, watching the entire operation.

But to my surprise, what had left from the cocoon was not a larva or a butterfly. Frustrated, I stared at the little animals. My mom fondled with my hair, and with a sweet tone in her voice she said:

"My son, it was not yet time. The caterpillar was working to finalize its task: to acquire enough strength so that it would be able to reach heights far above the world in which it did nothing but crawl."

I gazed at the caterpillar, imagining that ugly, brown insect crawling upon the floor, and the multicolored butterfly in the air basking upon the sun's rays. My mom continued:

"Without worrying, thinking or comprehending, you opened the cocoon with your knife. The poor insect inside had not yet matured according to his need..."

With my very eyes I had seen that the insect was now neither able to crawl nor to fly.

I understood what mother was saying. The little animals of which she spoke were us, the children.

If I always depend upon someone else to solve my problems, I would not have the capacity of evolving and improving my attitude, to mature, and to cease crawling as would a young child, unable to develop myself spiritually, and thus fail to reach for the loftiest heights.

I never forgot that incident.

Life is conquered through multiple stages: each and every one prepares us for the upcoming battle.

Harmony, the perfect order of the law of life, is what guarantees to us all victory. They are not external, but internal.

And thus the best effort is the one that comes from within us, for our own benefit.

THE REMEDY

Thanks to a technique my father taught me, I was able to learn how to control my anger at a very young age.

Me and my brother always fought amongst each other.

We also had altercations very frequently.

One day, while seeing us very angry and without getting angry himself, my father gave each of us a piece of rag. Then he took us next to a glass door.

"You will all clean the same sheet of glass, but each one of you will clean a different side. Start from here."

We were forced to look at each other's eyes constantly, and it left us angry and restless.

Soon thereafter, me and my brother burst into loud laughter.

And so we forgot about our anger.

"Laughter," said my father. "Is the best medicine for anger."

Even today, when I am irritated by someone, I imagine our faces displayed through the glass as we stand, face to face, cleaning it.

And each and every time my anger fades away.

THE VAT

My dad died when I was very young.

Widowed and poor, and lacking the desire to re-marry, my mother was forced to work very hard in order to support us.

When I was a bit older, I told my mom that I would like to learn to play the piano.

She therefore doubled her efforts in order to be able to afford to rent a piano and buy me piano lessons.

But soon thereafter, I was sick of the repetitiveness and tediousness of piano practice.

Each and every time that I would close the piano lid and run to my backyard in order to play, she would look at me with great tranquility, without uttering a single word.

She would then return to work, a task which would take the entire day.

One day, while I was unwillingly playing the piano with little or no interest, she silently approached me and said:

"You are very tired of practicing. Please close the piano and come help me wash this load of clothes. I am very tired and it would do me some good if we both worked together."

We worked the entire afternoon. My mother said she was a little bit tired, but in fact I noticed that she was working harder than she should. However, she was unwilling to take a rest. Thus, a new load of clothes were put into the vat right after we had finished with the previous load.

After we stopped working we went to have dinner, and at that point I was feeling so tired that I felt that I was about to cry. The water and the soap had made me my hands rough and wrinkled and my fingers hard and numb.

Then I noticed something: my mother's hands were always like that.

As I swallowed down my tears, I said to my mother:

"Mom I've been thinking. I very much wish to play the piano. It will tire me so, but I must work hard and persevere."

"O.K., my dear," said my mom as she looked into my eyes. "If you wish to become a pianist then I cannot force you

to be a washerwoman: I will make an effort on my part and you on yours. Right?"

Today I am a professional pianist.

THE RESIN

When I was young I was obsessed with the notion that any infantile tragedy would leave me grief stricken and reeling with a guilty conscience.

One day, during mid summer, it rained exceptionally hard, with an overwhelming draft that carried away everything around the house.

When the wind settled and the rain disappeared, my dad invited me to walk with him through the woods.

"Look at these trees," he told me. The branches have been torn in such a manner that it is entirely possible that the tree will die. But now look at these. Even through that storm, they remain intact."

As I observed the branches, I was more than surprised: I was stupefied. My father, with a very calm voice, said:

"As you can see there are two types of trees in this world: the stubborn ones and the intelligent ones. The intelligent ones fabricate resin for themselves while the stubborn prefer to preserve their branches as they are. As water falls, it accumulates over their husk. As the wind comes, it tears them down with brute force. And so the branches with no resistance fall. However, the intelligent ones keep the resin circulating as blood does in our own veins. When the weight of the water exceeds that which they can withstand, they simply allow their branches to bend. When a hard wind gushes by, they simply move with them. Then the water drops and the wind calms down. The next morning they remain intact as you see them now."

He meditated for a second, and then said as he looked straight into my eyes:

"Be as the resinated trees. Support what you can and let any extra weight fall off, just like the water. And when a harsh wind comes, it will not knock you off your feet."

Because I was able to remember throughout my entire adult life the story about the tree, I did not attempt to deal with more than I could handle, saving me a lot of stress.

THE FEATHERS

When we were young, my sisters and I were dreamers.

Dreams and the imagination go side by side very well.

Every now and then, we made up stories about our friends. These stories transformed into neighborhood gossip which, in such a small city, ended up causing unfortunately incidents between my family and other neighboring families.

We did not mean to cause these incidents, but as long as we continued to feed our imagination, the number of incidents did nothing but multiply.

Each and every time that one of these episodes would repeat themselves, we would run to my mother and say:

"Mom, we promised to repair the damage that we did."

My mom realized that punishment or reprimands did little to teach us a lesson, and so she would just listen to what we had to say, without saying a single word.

I clearly remember one day during the eve of winter. It was very windy and we were playing in the barn. Meanwhile, my mother, whose hair danced gracefully around her neck, was sitting on top of a stool in the middle of our yard.

This intrigued us quite a bit, but we were soon distracted.

Soon thereafter she once again captured our attention, when she called upon us:

"My darlings, please come here. Beside you are scissors and a pillow. Bring them to me."

We obeyed. But we also asked: what was she planning on doing with them?

"Now," said my mother. "You will cut the pillow in half. Each one will cut one side."

We once again obeyed. The pillow was stuffed with feathers, and as soon as wind passed by, it caused the feathers to fly away, a beautiful spectacle to our eyes, much like a blizzard. My sisters and I frolicked throughout the yard.

Then my mom called us once again. Beside her sat a sewing basket. From it she took a new pillow cover, which was empty.

"Look," she said. "Now you guys will stuff this pillow."

What my mother was implying was to carry out a task that was absolutely impossible. And so we said:

"But mom, that's impossible. The feathers are flying everywhere."

"Yes, wasn't that amazing?" my mother said as she pretended to find it breathtaking.

And so she made a comment that I and my sister could never forget for the rest of our lives:

"These feathers are like gossip. Once they have been released it is impossible to put them back at bay."

Personally, every time I feel like spreading gossip, I always remember the story of the pillow and the feathers, and that it is impossible to gather the feathers and place them back inside the pillow.

THE CUP

When I was a young girl, I always visited my grandmother during Saturday afternoons. One time, I went to see her, as usual, but I was worried and upset. She was working with her plants in the garden when she saw me and immediately realized something was wrong. She interrupted her work, invited me to come in and said:

"Come with me to the kitchen. Today I baked up a new recipe and I would like you to try it."

I was not very enthused by her delicacy, and I ended up telling her all my troubles. As I was narrating, I had a great misconception in which I believed my life would be ruined.

My grandmother listened attentively, without making a single comment. When I was done, she took a cup and filled half of it with water. She placed the cup in front of me and said:

"Tell me, is this cup half empty or half full?"

"Either way is correct." I told her, ignorant as to what she was getting at.

"That's right! You may say it is half empty or half full!" she said. "In the same manner, you must never say that your life is half empty or half full. Each and every one of us have our ups and downs in life. But our life is only happy based on how we are able to handle obstacles. It all depends on us. We might always be sad because the cup is half empty or happy because the cup is half full."

Until today, whenever I feel sorrow, I always remember my grandmother's cup. In our lives there are times of happiness and times of sadness, but the cup will never be full. It all depends on our point of view.

THE POCKETKNIFE

My biggest flaw when I was young was that difficult tasks always seemed to frustrate me. I was capable of everything except persistence.

One night, my dad called me up for a conversation. In his hands he held a wooden tablet and a pocketknife. As I approached, he said:

"My son, cut a line across the entire tablet."

I obeyed, and soon thereafter, he put the wooden tablet and the knife away.

The same exact thing was repeated multiple times every night thereafter. By the end of the week, I couldn't contain my curiosity. Yet everyday the same thing happened. Each time that I cut a line across the tablet, the groove enlarged.

At one point, the wooden tablet could groove no more. I had worked so hard at cutting the tablet that eventually it split in two.

My dad then looked at me and said:

"You never thought this was possible with so little effort, did you? It seems that your success and failure depends not on your strength, but your persistence.

That was a lesson that even a ten year old boy was able to make use of, not only in his childhood, but also for the rest of his life.

THE DETOUR

Me and my younger brothers always fought with each other when we were children. Stubborn and tenacious, we always wanted things to be done our way.

One day my dad took us to a train station to watch one of the trains make its stop and drop off the passengers. As soon as we got there, we heard the train's whistle coming towards us from the opposite direction.

"Do you see?" asked my dad. "Two trains are coming from opposite directions. What do you think is going to happen?"

We did not respond. We were scared and confused, waiting for the inevitable collision.

However, soon thereafter, one of the trains changed directions and went on a detour. The train with passengers then pulled up to the station.

As the passengers disembarked, my dad turned to us and said:

"Did you see that? It applies to people as well. We all must follow our own paths, but on the same road: the road of life. If do not make use of detours, a crash will inevitably occur. There are many detours at our disposal: they are called patience, fraternal love, tolerance and good will. The children, adults and even nations would understand each other much better if they made use of these detours."

We never forgot that lesson. Whenever our opinions clashed, which we knew would only have negative consequences, we remembered that detour, and so we would find a way to resolve our issues.

THE BAG

Before leaving, a guest of mine said:

"I like coming here. It's a place where I can say whatever I want, knowing that it will not be publicly known."

The compliment fits my mother a lot better than it fits me.

One day, when I was merely eight years old, I was playing by the window while Ms. Silva confided important information unto my mother regarding her son.

When the visitor left, my mother noticed I was listening, and thus she called out to me:

"If Ms. Silva left her purse here, would we give it to another person?"

"Of course not!" I protested.

My mom continued:

"Well, today Ms. Silva left something even more precious, because she confided us a story that if divulged would do harm to many people. This story is not ours, in the manner that we cannot spread it to anyone whom we wish. It continues to be hers, even though it remains here with us. Therefore, we must not give it to anyone, do you understand?"

I understood perfectly. And since then I have always understood that trust, or anything which is confided in another person, still belongs to the one whom originally divulged said information.

When, for whatever motive, I feel as if I am not acting accordingly, I always remember the story of Ms. Silva's purse, and eventually I learn to close my mouth.

THE SPARROW

When I was eleven years old, my dad's friend gave me a toy rifle as a gift. My dad thanked him with little enthusiasm. Then I quickly ran to the orchard.

My first victim was an English sparrow. I remember him clearly, as well as the pride I felt of being such a good shot, but I felt a vague sense of remorse while seeing the bird drop from the sky.

My insecurity induced me to go after my dad. When I found him he was busy taking insects and flies that were imprisoned in a spider's net and placing them in a matchbox.

"What is that for dad?" I asked.

"Come with me and I will show you."

After taking me to the garden, he showed me a bird's nest behind the bushes. After opening the matchbox, he placed the insects in the birds' open mouths. I understood his motive and offered to help.

"It isn't easy!" He said.

I spent that afternoon looking for insects and going through the earth trying to find worms. At night, my dad placed some cotton in the nest in order to keep the birds warm.

The next morning, my dad came into my room when I was getting dressed. In his hands was one of the birds, dead.

"He died during the night!" said my dad. "Let's do whatever we have to in order to save the others!"

After eating dinner, we found that another bird had died from the cold. A few days later, while I was eating breakfast, my dad came in with yet another bird who had suffered a similar fate.

"It looks like the last one is very resistant," said my dad as he smiled. "I hope soon he will be able to use his wings to fly. But the poor infant must pass through many harsh moments, since there is no one who may teach him the secrets of flight, and although it may not seem that way, perhaps he is feeling rather weak. These birds, since they are young, need constant care and nourishment, and unfortunately we were unable to provide him with said nourishment."

One day we saw the bird: the sole survivor, swinging from a branch. The fact that this bird needed to fly became to me supremely important. At that point, we saw him throw himself into the air. He flapped his wings, but alas it was in vain. One second later he began to fall. He was agitated for a bit, but then... he died.

"Poor thing. He had no luck!" said my dad.

Feeling horribly guilty, I quickly said:

"Dad, it's my fault! I was the one who killed their mother!"

"I know my son, I saw what you did. Don't be hard on yourself, you are not the only boy who has done this. I simply wanted to show you that by harming others, you will also aid in harming those around them, including those who we love the most or those whom we are loved by. And so it is anything but rare that in the end we will end up harming ourselves."

THE MAGNIFYING GLASS

When I was a boy, I was known to others as being a capricious child. I always had a new plan in my head, and I talked about it enthusiastically with my family. When I would begin my homework, I would soon thereafter become bored and disinterested. And in the end, I would get another great idea. This would repeat itself very often, with no comments in the household.

During one summer day my dad called me as he was reading a newspaper in the yard. While holding a magnifying glass in his hands he said:

"Pay attention and you will see something very interesting. It is an experience."

With the sun aimed at the glasses, the reflection flowed right through the newspaper, but nothing happened. I was intrigued. Then, he ceased moving the lens, and focused the sun's rays at a fixed position. After a few moments the paper caught on fire and there was a hole in the newspaper.

I was very intrigued by this, but I did not fully understand the experience. My dad then explained to me:

"My son, this principle can be applied to everything we do. In order to get what we want out of life, it is necessary that we focus all our attention on the task at hand. It is much like the concentration of the sun's rays through the magnifying glass. When it made contact and covered the corners of the newspapers, nothing happened. But when it remained there for a long period of time, you noticed that a hole was formed. Everything is a question of patience and concentration. Sometimes, when we feel like quitting, a solution to our problem appears, just like the hole in the newspaper eventually forms."

Because of this incident I can remember numerous times in my life in which I gathered the patience in order to persevere.

THE VASE

My brother Eduardo and I always had violent arguments.

Each and every time we would invariably accuse each other of being wrong.

One day my dad heard our outbursts, and during one of these fights he came to talk to us. We closed our mouths immediately when he approached us. Instead of punishing us, he, in a normal tone of voice said:

"My sons, would you please follow me to my office?"

We followed him. Yet me and my brother were still angry, and we refused to look each other in the eyes.

My dad entered his office, closed the door, and placed two chairs around a table.

"Please." He said. "Sit down."

It was impossible to guess what he was getting at, for the placement of the chairs could not have possibly been worse, since I and my brother were forced to look each other in the face. But we tried to avoid eye contact by staring at the cover of the table, and by following every movement my dad had made.

Calmly, he lifted a red vase decorated in both sides, with a white flower inside.

Then he placed the vase in the center of the table.

He turned to Eduardo and said:

"Son, what do you see?"

"I see a red vase!" Said my brother, who revealed through his voice a sense of curiosity.

Then it was my turn:

"What about you, son?"

Without hesitating I responded:

"It's a red vase with a white flower."

"Excellent!" said my dad. "That is exactly what I wanted to know."

He said nothing more. He simply opened the door and walked out.

My brother and I gazed deep in each other's eyes. The lesson was obvious.

Until today, anytime when I have an argument with my brother, or when we have a conflict with anyone else, we always remember the red vase.

The episode remained in our memory and our spirits definitively... everything is a question of point of view!

THE COIN

One day during my childhood when I was in my father's store, I was approached by a beggar who was asking for some change.

When I noticed the man in his rags, I felt distinctly depressed, and thus I ran to the counter, grabbed a coin and handed it happily to the beggar.

My dad saw everything, yet he did not say a word. He continued to attend to his customers.

Not too long afterwards, a woman appeared who was also asking for change.

I did not hesitate to run to the counter to grab a coin, yet I was stopped by my dad, who said:

"Where is the piggy bank where you store your change?"

"It is right here in your work desk, dad."

"Well then, bring it here son."

When I brought the piggy bank to the counter, my dad told me to open it. I obeyed.

"Now son, pick a coin exactly like the one you were about to give to the lady."

I did so.

"Now you may hand it to the lady."

I did what he told me to do, yet I was very surprised. When I returned my dad explained:

"Son, the greatest charity is that which is given from ourselves. You acted in the right manner the first time, but you did not give that which was yours. To give is to receive, but we only receive from providence if we give that which belongs to us. Do you understand?"

Indeed I had understood. He then concluded by saying:

"Have you ever heard people commenting about those who provide courtesy through another's valuables? This is it. I ask that you only use your own valuables when providing charity and courtesy to others. That is the right way to give."

Since today I have never forgotten that day, because that was the day when I learned the true meaning of giving. It has remained with me throughout my life and helped me to provide charity the way it should be.

The author, Wallace Leal V. Rodrigues, was born in Divisa-ES, on December 11th, 1924. His first contact with this publisher was when he moved to Araraquara in 1940, and later he became the editor-in-chief for many years. As an author and translator of numerous works published by O Clarin he revealed the full extent of his knowledge. Wallace was a writer of brilliant intellect and an extraordinary researcher of international literature, who seek beauty, culture, and art, always combining them with the objective of exalting the grandeur of life and of human virtue. In this book, which is aimed at all ages, he placed all his sensitivity, and all the grandeur of his soul, inviting us to let the moral virtues in our hearts blossom.

No one appreciates our undue interventions. However, one of the objectives of this book is of expressing a cry of alert, a call for a conscious analysis regarding our imperfections and our lack of understanding in face of the moral and educational crisis that prevails in the present day. We can all benefit from this book, regardless of our age, profession, sex or religion. The simplicity and smoothness of its stories paves the way for a life of harmony and happiness.