

The Paw Paw Letters: Life Lessons for Aaron

James Porch

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Today's children are bombarded with news of violence, greed, and tragedy. This is part of the reason James Porch pieced together *The Paw Paw Letters*. Herein, Porch writes thirty-five letters to his grandson Aaron in an effort to teach him about values, morality, love, greed, and the loss of integrity. Raising a child with Christian values while the secular world hums in the background can be difficult. Porch asks the reader to think about what life was like decades ago, back when violence wasn't around every corner.

Porch mixes in musings about the world alongside details about his Mississippi childhood during the Great Depression and subsequent historical events. The reader is invited to imagine a world with quick fifty cent haircuts and where communities pitch in to raise children. Porch is trying to pass "on values with hope" to his grandson and, in effect, he is asking people to remember what matters: community, family, generosity, and faith.

The author's use of the epistle or letter format personalizes the overall feel of the book. When relating lessons about values, current or real events, and the definition of family, the intimacy of letters works particularly well. If the reader closes his or her eyes, they can imagine their own grandfather spinning tales about his childhood.

Porch, the reader's Paw Paw, hopes for something better for his grandson. However, there are moments where the lessons seem caked in bitterness. He speaks about the "end of neighborhoods" and how this is the "STUFF" era. Porch believes he grew up in a good place with wise folks during hard times, but certain readers may wish that he had connected the past with the present – to bridge the gap. Still, there's something beautiful about reading about a place where everyone feels famous and where people truly look out for one another.

This book is as much an autobiography as it is a non-fiction project pleading for a better world. By the end of the book, the reader will feel as if they know and love Paw Paw, as if they have been adopted by Porch himself. *The Paw Paw Letters* push the reader to do better and to remember that hard times may come and go but strong people last. Porch wants the reader to understand that "the past is part of you, and you hold the responsibility as an American citizen..."

LISA BOWER (July 29, 2011)

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