

Things I Wanted My Grandsons to Know Before I Leave

Kenn Stobbe

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Things I Wanted My Grandsons to Know Before I Leave gathers insightful guidance for young men facing common situations.

Kenn Stobbe collects useful advice in *Things I Wanted My Grandsons to Know Before I Leave*, a book about cultivating faith and integrity.

Even though the collection's primary audience is Stobbe's grandsons, its sayings' applications are universal. The book serves as a counsel for general situations, including at work, of faith, in relationships, and when it comes politics. They caution against being prejudiced, keeping the wrong company, and basing important decisions on temporary emotions. Most are hopeful and encourage learning from one's failures and broken relationships. They laud values including kindness, prudence, humility, commitment, and courage.

Humorous quotes help to balance the book's heavier sayings out, as with the suggestion not to buy a dog when you're drunk, or with a funny observation about hearing aids: once thought of as a curse, they also allow their wearers to turn them off to tune out unsolicited advice and instructions. Such straightforward entries couple with direct thoughts, as of failure being a result of giving up and not a result of losing, to make the collection accessible.

But not all of the entries function in such obvious ways. A quote about frogs' legs and buffalo wings on a restaurant menu is ambiguous, holding the audience at a distance; in such moments, the lack of context leads to difficulties and potential misunderstandings. Further, there are familiar thoughts without new information, as with a quote about approaching unpredictable events with courage, even without being sure of the outcome.

When the book's entries are fleshed out with context from Stobbe's life, as is the case with the book's quotes about marriage and old age, they become more engaging. There's a conversational, casual sensibility to the book that makes its succinct advice feel both folksy and direct, and its evocations of the American West lodge it in a unique time and place.

Still, despite the book's often inspiring turns, its general lack of cohesiveness is an impediment to its general usefulness. It explores numerous topics (parenting, careers, and friendships among them) with varying implications, but without organizing these in a unifying manner, so that a quote about humility is followed by one about parenting, which is succeeded by another about pursuing dreams.

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EDITH WAIRIMU (December 23, 2021)

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