

The Literate Family

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God said let there be light, and there was light. The act of creation required language, words. The Ten Commandments were written on stone. Moses didn't bring down pictures to show the Israelites, didn't build a movie theater, or set up TV monitors; he brought words on stone, in stone. In fact, God forbade pictures, graven images. And the Lord Jesus Christ was "the Word, and the Word dwelt with God," and was God. Lehi in The Book of Mormon offered all of his treasure to Laban for the brass plates so that his people would have the history of their forefathers, the commandments, the words of God, and Nephi slew Laban for that same reason. The Koran and the Talmud are also books absolutely basic to the religion they teach. So it's obvious that words are important in the religious life, central to it. Without words, language, there is no religious life, no commandments, no ordinances, no prayers, sermons, no history, nothing.

And, if for no other reason than the religious reason, families might wish to be literate, be concerned with language, words, with the family words, vocabulary. And I define literacy as simply the serious preoccupation with words, with language. One of a family's major preoccupations, I think, needs to be with words, not only with religious words, but with all kinds of words, with language in all of its characteristics.

Ordinary words bring pleasure, danger, unhappiness; they define and control our lives; they are a family heritage passed to children; they hide, and even make possible, violence, obscenity; they bring great fun, pleasure, joy. Words are labels, containers, signals, histories; they index our personal lives. The words we use, if we look at them carefully, tell us who we are. One of the best descriptions of any family is how that family uses words. If a family wants to look at itself, it should set up voice-activated tape recorders in the house for a few days; in other words, "Watergate" the house, and then all sit down and listen to the family describe itself.

I am talking here today about words from the bias of husband, father, English professor, former Director of Composition, and a member of the University Reading and Writing committees, and as a teacher of freshman English. I have, according to my calculations, read about 20,000 freshman papers of various types. (I should like to talk sometime on the freshman mind.) But today I am talking about the literate family, the family that has a serious and intentional preoccupation with words, and the benefits, pleasures, and obligations of that preoccupation.

I will talk about the literate family and the family vocabulary under six subheadings:

- “Hiding” words
- Obscenity
- Violence
- Books and film
- Metaphor
- and the pleasure of language.

Obviously I can’t discuss all the implications of the literate family in 45 minutes, so I have had to limit myself, but these six categories I talk about here seem to me the most important, probably.

One of the best ways to hide from reality, a life-defeating activity, is to hide from it with words. For a simple example, let’s take the word “mistake.” All kinds of mistakes are possible, mistakes in mathematics, grammar, football, spelling and these aren’t very important mistakes. But we often use the word “mistake” to excuse ourselves from serious responsibilities, to try to hide from them. A young man gets his girlfriend pregnant and then says to his father or the bishop, if he is L.D.S., “We made a mistake.” Or he forges a check, shoplifts a watch, shoots cocaine, or plagiarizes his freshman term paper, and those are mistakes too. But they aren’t mistakes; they are misdemeanors, felonies, sins. And in a literate family he would know that, because a literate family pays attention to words, to its vocabulary. It talks about words like “mistake” and “accident”—which is another hiding word, a word that means I’m not responsible for what I did.

We do the most appalling things to each other and call these acts accidents. Sports, farm, nuclear, airplane, industrial, vehicle—all kinds of accidents are possible. A driver going twenty miles over the speed limit loses control, causes a five-car pileup that kills three people and seriously injures four others. This is an accident. The newspapers and TV news reports call it an accident; we as individuals talking about it say “accident.” We cause incredible human suffering and despair, and death, and yet it is all accidental. Some accidents are accidents, of course, but most aren’t. The National Safety Council and our own moral sense tell us that.

I know that no person who causes a terrible accident can possibly pay (however big a settlement her or his insurance company makes) for this kind of human suffering and loss. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ will, when accepted, pay for it. And we let him accept that burden, but we too must accept our responsibility, not try to hide behind an elaborate arrangement of words. If we do, and we all do to some degree, we take some of the meaning and significance out of our lives as moral human beings because we refuse to accept the responsibility for what we do, and in a literate family there is a concern for morality, a concern for the difference between right and wrong, and a determination to do what is right. And a

concern for morality means, among other things, a concern for words and their meanings, both hidden and obvious.

Now these hiding words, as I will call them, sometimes come very close to being euphemisms—the attempt to avoid the unpleasant or embarrassing by using pleasanter or less concrete words to describe it. We use a lot of euphemisms in our families when we talk about sexuality, excretion, birth, death, disease, insanity—and that’s probably okay most of the time. Why embarrass each other unnecessarily or make life otherwise unpleasant or painful? But of course, one’s whole life can become euphemistic, one lifelong euphemism, and that can be dangerous because then we really are hiding from reality.

Most real euphemisms serve, I suppose, some social purpose. They grease the social wheels, or skids, depending on your metaphorical view of life. And it’s fun to use euphemisms, and watch other people use them as they try to avoid saying something unpleasant or embarrassing. When was the last time you heard somebody at a funeral use the word “death,” “died,” or “dead”? Instead it’s “passed away,” “gone,” “gone to eternal rest or sleep,” “gone beyond the veil,” or “passed on” that you’re likely to hear, and that’s okay. Why not. As long as you understand the person, is in fact, dead, which is the reason for the funeral.

The literate family talks about the hiding words in the family vocabulary and their first cousins—euphemisms—because of the moral and ethical consequences. And these words are everywhere: industry, government, religion, education, advertising, the military, and mortuary science. The literate family has the habit of examining these words and as a result, the family members become more alert to life, more alive, more responsible—and moral. The literate family doesn’t want to be fooled by words. (By one definition, an educated person is one whom it is hard to fool in any way. Not to be fooled by life is to be educated.)

Now I want to talk about obscenity and how the literate family deals with it. Obscenity is bad, wrong, and destructive of family and moral life. We guard against it in our families, cities, states, in the nation as a whole. The Supreme Court has been asked to define and proclaim against it. Yet it seems almost impossible to define, and difficult to fight. Obscenity involves pictures, films, magazines, books, stage productions, gestures, and manners of dress, or non-dress, and language. Words. Also, when we want to say something is terrible, we say it is obscene. War, pollution, violence, child abuse, starvation—all these are obscene, by some definition. But I just want to talk about ordinary obscene words. Neighborhood, school, and office obscene words.

Obscenity has to do with sexuality. To be obscene is to make sexuality filthy, dirty, lewd, non-human, to exaggerate it. Obscenity also has often to do with people making money out of sexuality: obscene magazines, movies, TV shows, Las Vegas shows, prostitution, books, and certain kinds of clothing are big business. Also, people are obscene because they enjoy being obscene or they see themselves as clever or entertaining. And some use obscenity for satirical purposes; that is, they are intentionally obscene in order to get others to laugh at people, or institutions in order to bring about necessary and useful changes.

But I will limit myself to talking about the obscene words we use at work, in our clubs, athletics, and the obscenity our children use, starting in kindergarten. Now obscenity is bad because it cheapens sexuality, colors it, adds a kind of a stench to it, limits it, makes it exploitive and selfish, diverts it from its purpose—which is to continue the race, create families, and to express and receive love and joy.

Obscenity is, in part, a family problem. Children, grade school through high school, have their own obscene vocabularies. Many of these words they never use around their parents. They know they would be in deep trouble if they did. But they are always testing with words, always trying to see how far they can go before they get slapped down—figuratively speaking. It is in the nature of children to test parents. (Children are meant to perfect parents, not the other way around, according to a friend of mine.) Children learn their obscenities mostly from each other, and, of course, children are often naïve, foolish, silly—like their parents sometimes are.

One defense I see against obscenity is words, the right words, for what the obscene words name and describe. Obviously, this isn't the only defense, but it certainly is a good defense. And those words should come from parents, not primarily from the schools and sex education programs. These good words for sexuality have to have a value, and the schools can give them very little value. The family, the parents, must do that. These good words get their value for children because they are spoken and used by the people who love the children.

Children, and adults often use obscene words, because they have no other words to use. Much of the delight of obscenity, for children, is the secrecy, and part of that secrecy centers on the child's secret obscene vocabulary the parents know nothing about. Children like to have secrets, and they know almost instinctively that they must be secretive at least from their parents, about their sexuality. But if, from the very beginning, the mother and father teach the children good words for talking about their sexuality, dictionary and family approved words, much of that secretiveness is dispelled—not the mystery, the eternal questions, the delight of sexuality, its profundity—but the secretiveness.

(And this kind of secretiveness extends to drug abuse, drunkenness, hard rock, brutal clique-ishness, and Satan worship; and it is a secretiveness based in part on vocabulary. If parents understand these vocabularies and can talk to their children about them, they have a strong defense against these evils.)

People, including children, are obscene, in part, too because they don't want to face reality. Obscene expressions are not more descriptive of sexuality, more revealing, than dictionary or family words but less. Words like "whore monger," "adultery," "perversion," "fornication," to list some negative good words, are much more descriptive of sexuality than their obscene counterparts because they carry a moral implication, suggest a standard, and because they are not so heavily connotative. They allow the user more distance, more objectivity and these words all carry a moral censure with them.

These words say of themselves that these things are wrong. They also admit that such things are part of human experience, that they can be talked about, discussed, named, and be understood.

These non-obscene words, which can be found in any home medical encyclopedia, allow a person to think and talk about sexuality with some objectivity. Parents who have taught their children these words can talk to their children about sexuality because they have words they can use. Parents, I think, and children too, often don't talk about sexuality because they have no words to use, or the words they do know are silly or obscene, and so not usable. But a child in a home has the right to know about sexuality which includes the right to know good words with and which to describe and discuss it. Without those words, the child, growing into adolescence and adulthood, is limited to the words learned from other children and adolescents, and that is unfortunate, and dangerous. (Not knowing about AIDS is an example of this.) The whole profound, spiritual, and wonderful experience of sexuality is prejudiced.

My point here is that families need good words for sexuality, so that the children, and parents, don't have to use obscene words when they think or talk about sexuality. These good, family-approved words dispel secretiveness, suggest the moral basis for sexuality, and provide a reasonable objectivity when talking about it, and, in general, make discussion possible.

Just as the right words can help protect the literate family, the family preoccupied with words, against obscenity, so can the right words help to protect the family against violence. Words are, in fact, a first defense against violence. The world is full of violence, which comes in many forms, of course. War is the ultimate violence. Eighteen nations were at war in 1982 (*Life* Jan 1983:8), and the threat of atomic war and biological war have become commonplace. We have mob violence, racial violence, vehicle violence, traffic violence, school violence, prison violence, the violence of guns, the violence in child and spouse abuse, the violence in our TV (including cartoons), in our movies (the Rambo syndrome), and in sports.

America is, of course, the most violent industrialized, civilized nation on the face of the earth. For example, it is estimated that in this country there are 200,000,000 civilian-owned guns (*New Yorker* 12 Nov. 1984:110). Handguns killed more than 11,000 Americans in 1981—40 times as many victims as in Canada, Great Britain, Japan, Israel, Switzerland, Sweden, and West Germany combined (*Maclean's* 19 July 1982:22).

Ordinary families are victims of what has become known as street violence, and they want to protect themselves against it. There are ways to do this, of course. Buy guns. Keep loaded guns in the house, decided you will shoot and kill anyone who threatens you. Buy more locks, buy guard dogs, pay more taxes to hire more police, move into protected housing areas, places fenced and guarded, move to less violent towns and cities, and, inevitably, teach the whole family karate. (Don't let any child out of the house until he or she has earned a black belt.)

But this violence in America is more than being mugged, attacked and robbed on the street. It is violence between neighbors, friends, and members of the same family. You are in fact

much more likely to be assaulted by a neighbor, friend, or family member than you are by an unknown assailant. And we don't know all the causes of American violence. TV, poverty, minority frustration, proximity of guns, drug addiction, worship of the criminal, the tradition of the Western frontier, a growing sense of universal doom—all of these seem to be factors. And various cures are suggested but one thing we don't often talk about is the right words as a first defense against violence, how important courtesy and the words of courtesy are as a defense against violence between neighbors, friends, and family members.

Teaching children to say, "I'm sorry," "Excuse me," "Please," "I was wrong," "That was my fault," "Pardon me," "You were right, I was wrong," "I've offended you, and I'm sorry" isn't easy. You have to work at it. You have to repeat it over and over again. Stop the child, remind the child, teach the child the effectiveness of words that words show a person is concerned, regretful, that he or she meant no harm. And parents have to show by their own example in the family that these kinds of words work, and they do work.

Another thing we can do is use the words to define violence, describe the violence, that we watch on TV, as violence. Always, or nearly always, we need to let our language intervene, whether it's *Superfriends*, *Dallas*, *Kojak*, *Magnum P.I.*, *The Equalizer*, *Gunsmoke*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Mighty Mouse and Friends*, or *Miami Vice*. In our families we should always define words like "hero," "manhood," "womanhood," and talk about cause-effect, necessary violence (violence necessary to the plot, theme), define sensationalism, be preoccupied with definition.

One of the real disadvantages of television is that it imposes silence on everybody. We don't talk about what we see; we don't describe it with words, evaluate it. We either say nothing, just sit there in the hot-tub with the kids eating popcorn and drinking Pepsi Free, or we say "Turn off that trash. It's nothing but violence." But why is it violent? What makes it violent? Why is violence wrong? Those are the things you have to explain in words.

Paradoxically, words make violence possible, of course. Words are at the very beginning of this violence. Blacks, Indians, Whites, Latin peoples, Orientals, Arabs, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims—we all have vicious bigoted, racist words for each other that permit violence. If you can call human beings *Yankees*, *fascists*, *red-skins*, *wetbacks*, *jigs*, *coons*, *gringos*, *commies*, *imperialists*, *capitalists*, *counter revolutionaries*, *haoles*, *honkies*, *whitey* or *kikes*, you move them into subhuman categories. You make them in some way less human than you are. Thus they become a threat, and after you have done that you can exploit, imprison, enslave, kill, and exterminate them, practice genocide. You have given yourself the right to do that, made it a religious, political, or racial obligation. You can even feel good about it.

And the literate family knows about bigotry, racism, how this violence on a national and international scale is language connected, and how it has its beginnings on the playground and in the neighborhood. When children describe other children as faggots, weirdos, retards, spazzes, nerds, geeks, jerks, they are, of course, playing with language, having fun I suppose. But they are also doing what adults do, using words to insult, hurt, weaken, ostracize, and control other human beings. (Parents who habitually call their children blockheads, numbskulls, worthless,

dumb, useless, or hopeless are doing the same thing their children are). And a literate family works consciously to control these kinds of words, to talk about their effect on the person spoken to, as well as the person speaking. Not to do so is to foster the beginning of racism, bigotry, and political intolerance, with all of their appalling consequences. The right words are in the literate family the first defense against violence.

My next point is that a literate family gets more fun out of books, is more interested in books, than it is in films, and knows books are more important than films. An excellent definition of an educated person is a person who has the habit of reading books. (An educated person is not one who has the habit of watching films). Under films I list movies and television.

The literate family insists that books are more important than films, in every sense. And I'm not talking here just about novels, but I also mean biographies, autobiographies, journals, diaries and non-fiction books on every conceivable topic—politics, history, animal behavior, war, eco-system, mysticism, language. I don't necessarily mean the great books, the books that have lasted, although I certainly include those—*the Iliad*, *the Odyssey*, *Canterbury Tales*, *Brave New World*, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, *Leaves of Grass*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Candide*, *The Rights of Man*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, *the Bible*. I mean also the books that appear in *The New York Times Book Review*, books reviewed in *Time*, *Newsweek*, books listed on your public library suggested reading list, and books recommended by friends as a good read. One of the pleasures of life is finding books to read.

The literate family obviously doesn't discount films totally. Films can be enjoyable, have emotional impact, instruct, they are even educational, but in the literate family they come in a very poor second in terms of education and pleasure.

As a society we don't really talk about the difference between watching films and reading books. But there is a great difference, a profound difference. There has to be, by the very nature of the difference between film and book. And the difference and the superiority of books are for the most part obvious or should be. It is obvious, for example, that the number and variety of books far exceeds that of films. In the western world we have been printing books for five hundred years and writing them for five thousand. We've been producing films for about a hundred. The B.Y.U. Lee Library for example, contains over 2,000,000 books. The film library contains 3,450 films. In the United States every year we publish about 50,000 books. Films are produced in the thousands, but not in the tens of thousands, and they don't exist in millions. (The Harvard Library has 10,929,899 books). Books exist on every conceivable topic written by every conceivable kind of person; something not true of films.

The literate family knows the experience of reading a book is far different from watching a film, a better experience, and that's why the literate family prefers books. Films create an infinite series of images to give the viewer a primarily visual and emotional experience. The images created for the viewer, tens of thousands of multi-colored images in each film, and there is sound, music, and of course words, but mostly images, an infinite series of images meant to thrill, amuse, terrify, overwhelm, and/or bring to tears—*The Sound of Music*, *The Killing Fields*,

Rambo (II,III,IV), The Ten Commandments, The Color Purple, Beverly Hills Cop, Psycho (II and III), Return of the Jedi, The Godfather (II), The Karate Kid (Part II), Gone With The Wind, The Wizard of Oz. And the viewer doesn't have to do much; watching films is mostly a passive, emotional, entertaining activity, a group activity. Typically the viewer's imagination is not overwhelmed, not involved, not intrigued, not expanded. The viewer usually doesn't have to make connections; the connections are made for the viewer.

The reader of books, on the other hand, must imagine what he or she reads, must work to understand what the writer intended, must create the images, use the mind. This is an active, not a passive participation, and that stimulates learning, knowing, and feeling on much profounder levels, typically, than a film can. The reader works with the words on the page, the language, to create in his or her mind what the writer has imagined, thought. And the reader often goes beyond the writer, uses the writer as stimulus to a whole expanded world of thought, emotion and values.

The film watcher, unlike the reader, generally can't move deeper into the experience, the subject, to higher levels of abstraction, to greater knowledge, understanding, to deeper and profounder emotion, as can the reader of books. The film watcher can't pursue ideas, can't watch ten or twelve or fifteen progressively more difficult and detailed films on the slave trade, the Mongol invasions, Puritans, prostitution, Greek art and architecture, Dostoevsky, furniture making, weaving, eagles, the Blackfoot Indians, or the Civil War. But the reader can read ten or twelve or fifteen progressively more difficult detailed books on these subjects, from different writers presenting different points of view.

Another thing films can't do well which books can is follow the mind. The mind can't be followed with pictures very well; it is best followed, when it is followed, with words. Words are the real index to the mind, not films. Words contain the heritage of mankind, of the race, community, neighborhood, family. Words, and their abbreviations, mathematical symbols, permit the mind to leave its tracks so that it can be followed. Words with all their symbolic, connotative, denotative, metaphorical power, their power to hold history, can do this; and films can't do it nearly as well. And that's why a literate family is a book family, not a film family.

A family can leave a heritage of books. I have heard of book families, whose children, when they marry and leave, receive a share of the family's treasury of books to help start their own literate families. (One would like to think of entering B.Y.U. freshmen bringing in the fall their inheritance of books with them, or at least part of it). These are books the family has read, discussed, enjoyed, books the family thinks are worthwhile, that express the family's values, hopes, and view of life. Such a family undoubtedly watches films, may they even have a film library, but the literate family knows that books are infinitely more valuable than films. They bring more pleasure, more life, more education, more understanding of God.

Hiding words, violence, obscenity, the family vocabulary, and the superiority of books over films all concern the literate family, and are fairly obvious concerns. A less obvious concern, but a very real one, is a metaphor. Metaphors shade our lives in many ways, describe us

to ourselves and to others, tell us how to live. Whenever we are faced with an unknown, and there are many unknowns, we inevitably make a metaphor to help us understand. We compare the thing we don't know or understand to something we do. And this usually means comparing the unknown, the abstract to the known, the concrete. The mind, God, death, eternity, life, truth, love, the soul, children, marriage, a human being—whenever we consider these unknowns, and in many ways they are unknowns, we depend on metaphors to help us out.

For example, what is life? Is it a tree, a swamp, a river, a battle, a road, a path, a sewer, a jungle, a fierce storm, a many roomed and windowed building, a weed patch, a rose garden, a whirlpool. If you see life as a swamp, a morass, something that engulfs you with its tragedies, horrors, complexities, sucks you down, doesn't give you a chance, is full, metaphorically speaking, of inevitable biting insects, poisonous snakes, vicious animals, deadly vapors—then you will live your life one way, gloomily, tragically, I suppose. If, on the other hand, you visualize life as a river that you will have a chance to swim up if you develop the required strength, you will live it another way.

Families teach certain metaphors, live by certain metaphors and the literate family knows this. So it explains and talks about metaphors, delights in them, and tries to live by the best metaphors. Death, for example, is a great unknown we try to understand and help each other understand through metaphor. Is death a sleep, a never-ending sleep, a dark cave with no candle, a journey to another land, a rising into light, parting a veil, falling into a great abyss, a turning out of all the lamps that will never be lit again, or a going home?

And children, are they piles of clay to be molded, wild animals to be trained, divine spirits to be nurtured, empty casks to be filled, a plague, a natural disaster, a joke adults play on themselves, weeds in the garden of life or flowers?

The metaphorical possibilities are limitless, and it is great fun to talk about metaphors, but I want to mention three other particular metaphors here. They are widely held, and I think can be quite destructive to family life. The first is man as beast, or animal. Is man an animal, a creature driven only by instincts, appetites, without morality, religion, faith, hope, without God? Sometimes you would think so, for we describe ourselves as looking and acting like animals and having their nature. We grunt, snarl, bark, hoot, hiss, and howl. We are strong as oxen, smart as foxes, quick as snakes, fat as pigs. We are, at times, foxy, kittenish, mousy, and we can even be snakes in the grass, wolves in sheeps' clothing, dogs in the manger, birds of a feather.

But are we beasts or human beings, and what is the difference? And I say "beast" here rather than animal because a beast is something more terrible than an animal, although in some ways like an animal. After all, some animals we know, live in families, have language, and care for each other. Beasts don't. A beast is something terrible that human beings have created to describe themselves metaphorically.

Another dangerous metaphor is the metaphor of the subconscious. This Freudian metaphor tells us human beings exist in two parts, a conscious, and a subconscious. The

conscious is what a person knows about him- or herself, is aware of, can understand, control, whereas the subconscious is what the person doesn't know, isn't aware of, can't understand. And this subconscious dominates the person, drives and grips him or her.

According to his metaphor human beings are icebergs with only their tips showing, buildings with vast hidden underground networks, pools of deep water, books with many important chapters sealed, or vast hills, or caverns, in which only one small candle is lit. In the metaphor a person cannot know him- or herself. And this subconscious is often malignant, toxic, manifesting itself in all forms of aberration. And it all has to do with the forgotten past, adolescence, childhood, babyhood, and all their deprivations. And anyone who accepts this metaphor uncritically spends most of his or her time looking backward, usually in despair.

One of the most dangerous metaphors is "fall in love." Now the metaphorical word here is "fall," as in fall down the stairs, off a chair, or over a cliff. The whole sense of the metaphor is a precipitous action, something uncontrolled, a surprise, and, of course, something wonderful. Now, obviously, it's all right to fall in love if you fall in love with somebody who is in many ways like yourself in age, religion, health, social background, values, race, and so on. But think of the catastrophes' brought on by the wholehearted acceptance of this metaphor.

And of course, we teach our children, particularly our daughters, I think, that they must fall in love, and, of course, be fallen in love with. This metaphor is promoted by advertising, movies, TV, magazines, novels, and mothers, and its accompaniments are youth, beauty, and wealth—the American values. To be young, beautiful and have money, and to fall in love is to have the best, if not all, American life can offer.

This idea of having to fall in love, to use that as the primary basis for marriage, is a western notion. It isn't shared by the middle-eastern, Africa, and Asian cultures. They have more sense. Marriages are arranged, families choose the partners, or a marriage broker does. Think of the unhappiness because we insist that romantic love be the primary basis for marriage, and be, perhaps, itself, the greatest experience in life.

The good metaphors, the life-giving metaphors, which I don't have to talk about here, are, of course, the tree of life, the eternal ring, the bread of life, the gospel as a great spring of life-giving water, the iron rod, the straight and narrow path, life as a journey, life as a garden, a vineyard, the burning and cleansing fire of the Holy Spirit, life as a great drama or play, life as a book we write. These are the metaphors we need in our families to interpret and guide our existence, for a dominance of wrong metaphors can obscure and limit our lives.

My last category under my title of the literate family is the pleasure of language. A literate family, a family that has as a primary preoccupation words, language, books, is a family that has a genuine dimension of fun, pleasure, joy. It has the pleasure of just talking about words, what they mean, metaphors, puns, connotation, and denotation. And it has the pleasure of discarding words that don't work, finding better ones, becoming more accurate more precise, finding meaning through words. (An education has, for example, to do with how many things

you have labels, words for.) And there's the pleasure of reading aloud and memorizing prose, poetry, scriptures, to have the sound of well-spoken English in the house, language at its best, its rhythm, its noise.

A family that knows the same books, owns books, shares books, talks about books, fills shelves with the books they read and treasure (which signify their deepest emotions, values, profoundest thoughts) has a great pleasure. To see the kids reading books, building their own libraries is a good thing. Through those books they connect to the past, know the thinkers, believers, the great people and events, and also find the clowns of history, the eccentrics, and they see life in some of its foolishness, and splendor, they experience a great range of emotion and they are helped to know God.

Well, a literate family is good for many reasons. But perhaps one of the best reasons of all (and I speak selfishly now), it can send its literate sons and daughters here to B.Y.U., where we will be pleased to accept them into freshman English and continue what their families have so well begun. Thank you.