

CREDO – Beliefs that have guided your life and how you came to those principles.

Read at KUUF, April 12, 2015. Thomas W. Graves

My parents were from Richmond, Va., but when my father finished medical school there, he took his residency in psychiatry in Washington, DC, where I was born, and in 1931 moved his family to his job at a new state mental hospital in rural NJ. The 1930s, of course, was the time of the great depression. Although we were protected from its disastrous effects, signs of it were everywhere. My friends and I could see that tramps were living in the woods near our homes. Jack King, my best friend in first grade, lived in a shack by the railroad tracks. To heat their home, he and his sister, Francis, picked up coal that had fallen from the trains. My mother was very angry at the political situation that created this poverty. My grandmother used to say that every rich man was a crook, and my mother agreed with her. My mother's father had been an engineer on the railroad, a Jeffersonian-style populist. My mother was a big fan of FDR, and later a member of the League of Women Voters. But, as a child, I wasn't interested in politics.

To me, this was about religion.

My parents didn't go to church, but they sent us to the nearest Sunday school and church, a fundamentalist Dutch Reformed. My very devout Sunday school teacher read us these kinds of lessons: Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling, and overturned the tables of the money changers.

And from the epistle of Paul to Timothy, regarding his ministry at Ephesus: For the LOVE of money is the root of all evil.

And from the gospel of Luke, 16:13: "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

These words made a great impression on me then, and still do. But I haven't lived them. All I can say is I have given much time and a little money to various charities and community groups, and kept all our savings in local banks without speculation. Not much to be proud of there, but it seems remarkable enough, given the money madness that infects our society. We are unable or unwilling to challenge the moneyed interests that cause so much pain and suffering – the agribusiness and food industries, land and resource speculators, labor exploiters, bankers risking depositors' money in illegal speculation. Their activities go on undisturbed, while we work to repair the damage they've done. But there's also money in the repairing. Institutional care of the sick and needy, prisons, remedial education, and prescription drugs are thriving industries. There's money in destroying the community, and money in patching it up. In other words, a community of people living well, in mind, body and spirit, is bad for the economy – and we are creatures of that economy. But my belief is this: if the health of our souls were our primary occupation, that, in itself, would create a just and bountiful world.

Regarding the health of our souls, I'll present just a few ideas from a book by Eckhart Tolle, "The Power of Now". Tolle says a profound transformation of human consciousness is available right now, no matter who or where you are. He quotes from Jesus, the Buddha and other spiritual teachers to show how the deeper meaning of their teachings has been obscured by false interpretation, so their transformative power is lost. This transformative power is what brings us into the Now, what brings us into a state of Being. Buddhists refer to this as the experience of no-mind. It's not a weird kind of mysticism. All true artists create from a place of no-mind, of inner stillness. I think we all know this. We're not creative because we can't think, but because we can't stop thinking.

Tolle explains that the greatest obstacle to experiencing this reality of Being is identification with our minds. Not to be able to stop thinking, he says, is a dreadful affliction, but we don't realize this because almost everybody is suffering from it, so we consider it normal. We are addicted to thinking because it provides us with our sense of self.

We believe that we would cease to exist if we stopped thinking. As we grow up, we form a mental image of who we are based on our personal and cultural conditioning. Tolle calls this phantom self the ego. To the ego, the present moment hardly exists. Only the past and the future are considered important. The ego must keep the past alive, because without it – who are you? And it constantly projects itself into the future to ensure its continued survival, and to seek some kind of release or fulfillment there – where we finally obtain peace and happiness. Even when the ego seems concerned with the present, it only sees it through the eyes of the past - or reduces the present to a means to an end. You might think this state of Being is a passive, meditative state. But, in fact, being intensely in the present moment is to be very alert, very much alive. It releases you from foolish fears and procrastination – you take care of the truly important things. And rather than being selfish and inward-turning, you turn outward into the real world. But where is the morality, the spirituality, in this? To the ego, death is always just around the corner. If you identify with a mental position, and you are wrong, the self is seriously threatened with annihilation. So you, as the ego, cannot afford to be wrong. To be wrong is to die. Wars have been fought over this and countless relationships have broken down. The forcefully compulsive and deeply unconscious need to be right is a form of violence. But when your sense of self is derived from a deeper and truer place within yourself, not from the mind, you can state firmly and clearly how you feel or what you think, but there will be no aggressiveness or defensiveness about it. I believe that. I believe that each of us must work for our own transformation, and this is the true path to a world of peace and justice.

Closing Hymn. #9 No Longer Forward nor Behind.

Closing Words.

A Scene from the play *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder. (With my background comments added.)

Emily is a young woman who has died. She sits in a row of chairs, representing a cemetery, with other dead people from her town. The Stage Manager is a kind of ghost who moves the action along from

one scene to the next. Emily has convinced the Stage Manager to let her go back to her home to observe her family once more, unseen.

For a while she watches a birthday party for her sister. Then she says to the Stage Manager in a loud voice, "I can't. I can't go on. Oh. Oh! It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another." She breaks down, sobbing. (The scene disappears.) "I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back – up the hill – to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look. Good-by, good-by world. Good-by Grover's Corners... Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking... and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths... and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you." She looks toward the Stage Manager and asks abruptly, through her tears.

"Do human beings ever realize life while they live it? – every, every minute?"

Stage Manager: "No" ...Pause...

"The saints and poets maybe – they do some."

Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Born 1836, Portsmouth, NH.

MEMORY

My mind lets go a thousand things
Like dates of wars and death of kings,
And yet recalls the very hour –
'T was noon by yonder village tower,
And on the last blue noon in May –
The wind came briskly up this way,
Crisping the brook beside the road;
Then pausing here, set down its load
Of pine-scents, and shook listlessly
Two petals from that wild-rose tree.