



A Letter From Clair

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# To my family

I hope to live for a few more years...continuing to do what I enjoy most - playing tennis, singing in the Church choir in Ajijic and Karaoke in the village, playing cards with friends and staying connected with all of you, my family.

I am writing this Legacy Letter in May 2016, in my 83rd year, from San Antonio, Tlayacapan in Mexico. The sun is shining, the birds are singing and the occasional horse and rider clip clop in the lane beside the office of my condo at Birds of Paradise. The hummingbirds are eating greedily (little pigs) at the feeder and, if it's after 4 o'clock, I'm enjoying a martini (gin and vermouth), on my porch.

It is my wish this letter gives you a glimpse into some my life experiences; the values and life lessons that guide me. In turn, it is my hope some of these insights will help guide you for the balance of your lives.

My birth in Walkerton, Ontario on October 1, 1933 was unique! I was the first of six sibs before me to be born in a hospital in Walkerton, Ontario. My sisters Marianne and Joyce also can claim this distinction. The six sibs before me were born at home on our farm outside of Formosa, Ontario. My parents didn't talk about their values but we grew up under their guidance. They influenced us with their strong work ethic, faith in their fellow human beings, and positive attitudes in everything they said and did.

My mother especially drilled into all of us - forget past actions that make you unhappy. You can't do anything about them. Live for today and plan for tomorrow. I have often said that 99% of the things people worry about never happen, and that you can't control the other 1%!

If I could use two words to summarize the memory of my youth it would be positive attitude. We were a large family without extra funds for anything like recreational activities. But we enjoyed three meals a day and a roof over our heads. There was lots of laughter, games, music, dancing and overall happiness in just being alive.

The Pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church in St. Catharines, Ontario helped my parents buy a large former hotel and they converted it into our home with a few separate apartments to rent out. They also bought a 32-acre fruit farm outside of the city limits. My brothers, Jerry, Nelson and I would go out, early in the morning, with our dad to cut asparagus before school. We also grew tomatoes, grapes and plums. I was 8 or 9 years old at the time. We also picked tomatoes and grapes. The tractor used for tilling the soil was a Fordson iron-wheeled monster. We would have to crank it by hand to get it started.

My main memories of being young are of living in Dundas, Ontario. My parents were very Catholic. My mother insisted on everyone going to mass on Sundays. That was a given. Most days after dinner, we'd all kneel down and say the rosary. We'd recite each Hail Mary and Our Father as quickly as we could. We counted the time down before we could go

out and play. Many Sundays, after mass, we'd come home and my mother would play the piano and my dad the violin. They'd play songs we could sing to or, sometimes, we'd do a little dancing.

I didn't see my dad much because he often worked out of town. I remember a time when he took me to the store and bought me an ice cream cone for five cents. That was a big deal for me.

After my father died at age 62, my mother converted the third floor into an apartment and made some money renting it out. She was a worker. She'd paint and wallpaper and would recruit my brothers and I to help. She loved to play Bridge, and there was always a card table set up in the living room. We were forced to learn the game from childhood!

Family means a lot to me. I am the proud father of five children and grandfather of eight. I am proud that all of my children have succeeded in life and I'm proud that I've helped them when I could. I've tried to practice honesty and integrity throughout my life.

Here are a few insights that have helped me so far on life's journey:

Listen carefully when someone speaks to you.

My line of work in human resources was often confrontational and argumentative. There were two sides; the union and the management. They believed in the rightness of their position. I was successful in getting two sides together by listening to what people said and not think of what I was going to say next while they were talking. When I'd ask them a question, I'd let them answer the question without interruption.

### *Keep busy.*

I like to be busy. I plan ahead. My calendar is full. I like to look forward to my day; it could be tennis or swimming or going to an interesting talk. I liked my work and looked forward to it; I'd begin work every day at 7am.

If you're unhappy with your work, find another job that you like or, if that is not possible, accept your situation and find other outlets for your energy.

Maintain good relationships with people you meet, whether you like them or not. Make your word your bond. When you agree to make a deal on anything, don't go back on your word, even if you have second thoughts about what you agreed to.

Help other people with their problems and/or objectives when you can.

Be happy for what you have, not envious for what others have.

When situations happen in your personal or business life that are beyond your control, accept it and get on with your life.

Regardless of the challenges that you face, it could be worse. Don't feel sorry for yourself. People will avoid you if you're a whiner or negative on most things.

You only go through life once, so if you have ambitions for objectives that are not beyond your reach, work towards achieving them.

Be open to new adventures. Don't be afraid to leave home. Go north to the Territories or the Yukon. The opportunities are there for young people. That's where you can gain experience in a short period of time that will open opportunities in the south if you decide to return.

### *Enjoy music.*

It's impossible to be unhappy if you sing and enjoy music, even if you're tone deaf. I sing in the church choir in Mexico and enjoy the ambience of the group I sing with.

Be kind to everybody.

I'm a facilitator. I try to help others by connecting people with other people with similar interests. I get some satisfaction from that.

Don't get upset or anxious about things that aren't really important to your lifestyle.

Ask yourself, is this going to change my life and make me happier than I am now? For me, health and happiness are at the top of my 'To Do' list.

Sometimes you have to work at it. You read, you experience and you think about things.

Think about what you want to do and where you want to go.

Keep an open mind about life and the people you meet along the way.

I've encouraged my five children to keep an open mind as they go through their lives. I hope my grandchildren will do the same.

### *Be there for your children.*

As a parent, that's all you can do. Keep an open mind and, if your kids don't match up to your expectations, well, so what? It's their life, not yours.

Divorce yourself from guilt.

If you did the best you could with the information and resources you had, that's all you could do. Many things that happen in life are beyond your control.

Have no regrets.

I seldom think of regret because to think of that is to change the whole cycle of life. To dwell on the past is useless, in my opinion, except to learn from it. Life is what life is. Sometimes we're fortunate in the choices that we make in life and sometimes, not so much.

## Keep a positive attitude

The biggest value that has helped me through my life has been attitude. The old cliché about how you see things; whether a glass is half full or half empty: I always try to see the bright side of things. For example, in my Mexican condo, I have to walk up 20 stairs many times a day; sometimes lugging up groceries and other necessities. Instead of resenting it, I say to myself, 'Clair, it's good exercise for your muscles and your heart'. That's my attitude.

I didn't have any grand plan starting out in life. I accepted life as it came, and planned for something better in the future. I was fortunate to be born with the personality and disposition that I have. My parents certainly helped shape that. I have had a good work ethic but not at the expense of a balanced life.

I grew up in a healthy and positive family. My mother played games like Bridge and Crokinole. She loved life. She went through tough times but had a great zest for life. As kids, when we would complain about something that happened, she'd say, 'Forget the past. You can't do anything about it.' That has served me well.

Being alive makes me happy. I love life. I found tennis. If I hadn't found tennis I would have found something else. My life is very simple. I don't sweat the small stuff.

Here is a saying that means a lot to me and that I have tried to live by.

### The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference.

People worry about dying. I don't. I've lived a good life. I've tried to live each day to the fullest. I'm just happy I'm still alive at 83, playing tennis, singing, drinking my martini and red wine. I love being in Mexico. I play card games with my friends at The Birds of Paradise complex. I'm thrilled that all of my five children and other family members visited me in San Antonio Tlayacapan, Mexico in December of this year 2015 and 2016.

Each day I wake up and think, 'Hello world, here I am for another day!'

## I love you all!

Dad, Pops, Faja, Gpa, ,Gramps, Clair