

Patience: The Elusive Virtue

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September 17, 2019

There is much more to patience than “just waiting.” Patience is a quality that caringly holds one in the quest of inquiry, and then invites creativity to blossom forth. This I learned from my mother, and from her father: a gift from my adolescence in the late 1950s. What mother modeled to me was modeled to her, too, in the very ways that I learned patience.

My grandfather, “Daddy Carr,” (Otto P. Carr) was a patient and wise man whom seemingly all folks in town held in great respect. He was quiet, creative and successful as a businessman in the field of lumber and building supplies in our small college town of Morehead, KY. His patient pace and easy manner fueled an innovative, entrepreneurial mind that led him to becoming a successful businessman, and a stalwart community leader.

Daddy Carr was my male mentor. He taught me how to drive a car with mindful attention and graceful ease. As a former all-around young athlete – a left-handed pitcher – he mentored me into becoming a good high school golfer. As an intuitive innovative genius, he could “see” the potential of an idea and remained patiently devoted to “nursing” that idea to fruition. His humble character gave witness to his quiet steady successes.

One afternoon, when Daddy Carr and I were together in his home, he found an opportunity to share a bit of his self-styled wisdom. He said, “Roy Winston, I see you’re drawn to architecture and design, and that you like to think on things. You know how I got my start here in town by managing the telephone exchange? I kept getting ideas. One thing I thought – as I saw our repairmen climbing those telephone poles – I thought, ‘Someday there will be lifts that the men can use to hoist themselves up to work on those phone lines.’”

He had my attention.

“Well, ideas like that don’t just happen. They come from noticing things that grab your attention, that raise questions in your mind, and then you ‘study on it.’ Be sure you give yourself plenty of opportunity to ‘study on things,’ and not just act from the first idea that comes into your mind. My success as a businessman came to me because – with any project idea – I gave myself ample time to ‘study on it.’”

That piece of advice – coming from knowing that I had witnessed Daddy Carr often in the afternoons quietly sitting in his wing-backed chair ruminating – modeled a practice that I took up. I especially took it up once I entered college to study architecture, a field that involves lots of alone time and creative reflection.

As the years – and then decades – have unfolded, Daddy Carr’s advice has held me in good stead. There is a core story – my architecture school thesis project – in which Daddy Carr’s wisdom came to full fruition for me. This is not the moment I choose to tell that story. But this is the time for me to point to what I have learned as the underlying wisdom that has led me to adopting the virtue of patience. When Daddy Carr said “study on it,” he did not mean just to “think on it.” He meant to “think on the questions” and then to give those questions over to the Deeper Mind (one’s creative unconscious resources) for a period of ‘incubation.’

I have the patience to give my questions over to the stillness of my heart, and to hold my heart open waiting patiently. This is the deeper meaning of “study on it.” It means to “let it go for a time.” To “let it bake,” and “let it rise” on its own: to leave all control of one’s query to an Unknown Source that you can learn to trust as the very Source of Creative Imagination. That source is Deep Within.

This means also that one who’s willing to follow this path needs to release all results to what arises into awareness from within. In other words, Daddy Carr’s advice points wisely to developing a contemplative practice: to become completely still and quiet on the inside, and to remain receptive to what can then emerge from the inner stillness.

Patience: the virtue of waiting for wisdom to arise from the depths of one’s heart.