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Grandma's Eyes: A Grandfather's Perspective on Love

John King

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spective on Love

by John King

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Cover: Grandma. A picture that works because it features her smiling eyes and yet innocently hides all the changes that come gracefully with age. To me, she has never changed.

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Dedication

Dedicated to
My Grandchildren whom I love deeply.

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FOREWORD

"True love doesn't need proof.
The eyes told what heart felt."

— Toba Beta, *My Ancestor Was an Ancient Astronaut*

THIS work is a reaction to a postmodern sexual freedom—and subsequent redefining of the terms of relationship—that are affecting the moral conscience of my grandchildren who naively assume that a grandparent's code of ethics and morals is old fashion and out-of-date—an impractical ideology.

A postmodern world recommends a level of sexual freedom where the physical pleasure is emphasized over the relationship and over love, something about which a grandparent has a loving interest in cautioning against.

All grandpa has to serve his interest in this regard is his near half century romance with grandma, of which he speaks freely to lovingly encourage the grandchildren to choose a lifestyle that will support spiritual and emotional health as well as help them discover a deep and enduring friendship and romance with the person of their choosing.

This brief work is the product of that interest, a story, as told—as the title reads—in grandma's eyes.

— The author

INTRODUCTION

"The eyes are one of the most powerful tools a woman can have. With one look, she can relay the most intimate message. After the connection is made, words cease to exist." — Jennifer Salaiz

I am always inspired to write because of the conversations I have with family that impassion a response from me out of a pure and unconquerable love for them. One such stimulus, was a recent conversation I had over something known as "casual sex." This occasions my interest in writing to my grandchildren about issues that speak to their happiness. I hope there is some wisdom in these pages. Because I write them, I refer to my bride, my wife, of many years, as grandma.

As a grandfather, I am always tempted to sit down with grandchildren and share with them the wisdom of the ancients back when I was a lad. But it is really ill-advised since much of what I learned is being challenged by academia, by a changing culture, by a morally more lenient understanding of what happiness is all about, by an expansion of the concept of the family unit, and by a redefined set of social norms.

I "saved" myself for marriage—more by accident than choice thanks to a demanding asthma that kept me off the social market throughout those early days when girls were all I could think about. By the time I could "hook up" I was daydreaming about only one whom I considered far too good for me. Back then, I lacked the necessary social skills to engage in a relationship with her, even though, I was dying on the inside to do just that. When her mother and my father thought the relationship unwise, I backed off. I still am in love with the memory.

A REVOLUTION

What occasions this writing is this ongoing dialogue with family over, what has been called, a "sexual revolution."¹ This goes back into my teen years; so, it is nothing new. My generation broke away from the religious strangle hold puritanism once had on society when women "of the night" (somehow "darkness" symbolizes something "evil") emotionally wore the scarlet 'A' on their reputations, and when their character became the unending gossip of old church ladies. Now relationships are fleeting, or a more acceptable term: *casual*. And it is all prim and proper. It is all lady-like. In fact, we are given to understand that, experimentation is the key to the search for a happier life.

What I am saying is that when a grandchild uses the word "casual" in describing relationships, I draw a blank as to what that means. A "casual relationship" is a contradiction in terms for this old man who sees a relationship as something that deepens with time and as something that requires a lot of hard work to establish in the first place.

And if we substitute the "s" word for 'relationship' it may give off a recognizable ringtone in today's parlance, but to a man as myself 48 plus years with the same and only woman he has ever been with, the idea does not deserve recognition as an independent life force. Sex does not, to me, stand alone or off from a plethora of terms used to describe relationships: intimacy, trust, ... love, to name three. There is nothing 'casual' here.

I prefer to call it CPI, Casual Physical Intimacy, because that is what it is. Saint Paul may have alluded to the casualness I am speaking of—but it falls short of all I want to say here—when he admonished believers:

Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." — 1 Corinthians 6:16 NIV

"Becoming one flesh" is metonymical for "intimacy."

So, I am concluding that CPI stands for merely an evening of pleasure where each other's name being exchanged or remem-

bered is optional. We are not talking 1 night stands, necessarily. Maybe 1 week or 1 month or even 1 year, but not 1 lifetime.

Civilized societies have lived this way, off the record, for generations going back into the biblical history but have only recently in modern times brought these practices into the light of cultural acceptance. This doesn't to me give it legitimacy or, ipso facto, make it the road to ultimate happiness or pleasure—as some may think. Nonetheless, this describes a way of life in today's civilized wisdom—Solomon and the book of Proverbs be damned.²

WHAT THIS BOOKLET IS ABOUT

Well, I still do have something to say to my grandkids and I hope they will give it some thought. While the standard church arguments carry some weight with church people, I want to share my thoughts with my grandchildren—some of who have disassociated from these bullet points of 'alleged' truth. I wish to go down another road and my hope is that they will follow.

Talking about the sexual relationship, I prefer talking about the role intimacy, belonging, togetherness and the total contribution of one's self play in that relationship.

There must be a reason why most love making isn't love making at all but a more person search for pleasure fulfillment in the dark. Feelings are very personal, seldom shared for fear of breaking the spell, the magic, of the moment. Sex is seldom an act of communicated love, less so, if it is casual.

DRESSING LIFE CASUALLY

If CPI cannot at the same time, at least, begin a shared intimacy, it fails the test of love. It is no mystery to me that many people will share their bodies with another more readily than their thoughts or heart. The deeper issues that tie 2 people

together, and that define "marriage," may never be discussed because they are too painful or too confronting; so, a relationship lingers only as long as the sex is good.

Is this what casual means?

Men's minds spend so much time on the physical—and I am guessing that women, too, have their own fixations and fantasies. But, although I am a leg man myself, and I might enjoy reminiscing about those days when I had the potency and energy to chase grandma around the kitchen table, that's not my topic here.

There is one aspect of grandma's beauty, though, for which all other interests are a mere subset. It is the story in her eyes. Her eyes, a woman's eyes, a person's eyes reflect inner beauty. The burden of this work is to draw our attention—momentarily, additionally, not exclusively, away from other aspects of a woman's beauty and charm and put the focus upon the eyes. Not in a physical sense—although, grandma's are brown and the softness of her eyes when smiling feeds my addiction to be near her—but as a window on the woman inside.

EYE SEE

Although, we should go into a relationship with our eyes wide open, that's not my point. This is the story of a longing to be found, to belong and of the need to be heard, to be held—to be openly accepted not as someone's dream but for who we really are. And as such it is, indeed, a story told by the eyes because they are the window to all this churning of the soul.

This is the story of a purer love that values a lover's self above physical form, soul above body, symbolized and yet real, visible in the eyes. True love making begins with a person's eyes. It is in the eyes that we see the person inside. It is in the eyes we can begin to value who they are and who they want to be in relation to us.

It is in valuing the eyes, first, where all objectifying comes to an end. From that first sparkle in their eye that betrays an early

infatuation, this is the story told in a lover's eyes that makes a lifetime of getting to know them very much worth the effort.

MUTUALITY

A relationship can be defined as the mutual awareness of love or friendship. Both can say confidently, "*I know I am your friend and I know you are mine.*"

My beloved is mine and I am his - Song of Solomon 2:16 NIV

Such a revelation of love for some is a narrative buried under years of hurt, but it is discoverable when finally read in a lover's eyes.

Causal encounters, on the other hand, no matter how gratifying, are *not* the kind of stuff such relationships are made of. Relationships are built social brick on social brick by 2 people working every opportunity to get to know each other. Friendships are developed. Love does not seek pleasure for pleasure's sake but enjoys life as a fringe benefit of caring.

Knowing that loving relationships and friendships are a necessary part of psychological, social and spiritual health, we must be cautioned against making casual encounters a major part of our social agenda.

UNDIVIDED ATTENTION

"Eyes should express how you feel," goes one make-up commercial. This is amazing insight into where the emphasis should be if relationships rather than casual engagements are important to us.

When grandma has something important to tell me, she requires my undivided attention. I set my eyes on hers as she shares her concerns and in each sharing I learn a little more about what she is passionate about. This has a cumulative effect with the passing years as I not only get to learn something about

her interests but I discover a deeper intimacy. Our relationship is built in these moments—those times when her eyes are the most important part of what makes her, to me, the lovely and loving person she is. When she is passionate about things—and I see it in her eyes—I am viewing inner beauty. (Beauty is not only skin deep!)

GRANDMA'S EYES

This is not the story of a dying ardor. This is not the story of the elderly with vacant stares looking out separate windows at a world they are no longer part of. This is not the story of a banal subsistence, a passionless comfort.

Not to embarrass her or write with insensitive pen: this is the story of getting to know grandma, learning to love, finding a more complete and perfect friendship, developing a life together, enjoying a sense of belonging, being at home with each other, learning to love, and discovering a greater, more meaningful romance.

This is the story in Grandma's eyes.

WHAT ' S A CPI?

"They slipped briskly into an intimacy from which they never recovered."

— F. Scott Fitzgerald, *This Side of Paradise*

CASUAL Physical Intimacy is no longer a social stigma. It is commonly practiced by each generation reaching the age of hormonal rage. So, it is not my place here to condemn it or to condemn predictable and somewhat normal human behavior. I had a church deacon once look me in the eye and say, "*Come on, pastor, we all did it!*"

This is not intended as a sermon to Pinocchio on the evils of Pleasure Island. No. This is not intended as a rebuke, only a gentle and loving suggestion to my own grandchildren, and by proxy all those young at heart, that they should consider looking at the possibilities for romance and pleasure that exist in finding and developing that *one* special relationship with someone with whom they can share a mutual love and friendship. CPI is not this.

This becomes eventually a life choice: do I want a romance or do I want the pleasure of the moment? Do I want to find someone that like a "soul-mate" ultimately reflects back all the love I radiate their way or do I just want to experience physical pleasure?

Soul-mate? Do I mean there is only one person for you and you have to go find them in a sea of humanity? Of course not. There is nothing magical about what I am suggesting here. There is no reason not to assume that there are thousands of possibilities out there. I am boldly suggesting you take some time to get to know someone, get a gut feeling that love is a possibility with them, before honoring your body's cravings for attention. I am

suggesting—no, I am saying—that real romance takes work, takes time, to realize. Many people, sadly, find that they entered into a relationship that wasn't going to work no matter how much effort they put into it. (I don't challenge this.) Some relationships were never meant to be, but never give up hope that you may still find one worth the effort.

FIZZLED

But doesn't romance with a single life's partner eventually fizzle out?

It doesn't have to. Put another romantic log on the fire. There are ways. But more to the point is that romance does not have to be just physical. Romance is spiritual—not in a religious sense but in a "whole-person" sense. Romance is the real person you are and the real person your partner is finding each other in the crowd of ideas, choices, emotions, and all the other experiences that define life. Romance is a whole set of feelings, good feelings, satisfying feelings, fulfilling feelings, that make the physical aspects of a relationship—of pleasure—only the foothills of the mountain. A relationship that knows longevity also knows emotional highs and depths that CPI cannot provide because deep pleasure takes time—like giving definition and tone to muscles with weight-lifting. It takes time and endurance through all that life presents to acquire the emotional attachment for someone that makes them an inseparable part of everything good that has or will ever happen to you.

SHELF LIFE

Dare I think that CPI has a shelf life? CPI requires 2 people be physically capable of a strenuous undertaking. CPI isn't the answer for seeking life's pleasures when 2 people are sick or handicapped or living with severe limitations. Now days, men try to supplement their deficiencies with medications but is this

not artificial—a desperate attempt at reliving one's youthfulness instead of realizing that on the inside we are eternal beings and love is never solely dependent on physical stamina.

CAKE

Can't I have my cake and eat it too? Is it possible to enjoy the freedom of casual encounters and then when I am old "settle down" with someone who makes me smile? Maybe. I am not saying it can't work but since real romance takes time to mature into an inseparable union of two souls, shouldn't we start sooner rather than later?

I say to all my princes and princesses: don't misinterpret what I am suggesting. I am not wanting to shame those I love dearly into accepting an idea that just because I think it, it has to be wise. Grandpas don't know everything. But your grandpa has lived a few years and has discovered that there is much more to feel and enjoy than the momentary—granted—ecstasy of young love.

TOUCHED AND TOUCHING

Touching and being touched, holding and being held, never, ever grows commonplace; so, no romance can be a romance without it. But never think that the touch of a life's partner is any less of an emotional buzz with time. It never grows old. Our souls are eternal!

I OBJECTIFY YOU

"I am, at this moment, what I have always been to him: an object of beauty. He has never loved me as a woman."

— Philippa Gregory, *The Lady of the Rivers*

It was so easy to objectify grandma, in my mind to turn her into an object of affection, because I was drawn into a life long interest in everything I saw and felt about her. It was always a pleasant past time daydreaming about being with her. Those early days of marriage never really ended. Even my night dreams if they turned romantic were always about grandma.

And what's so wrong with this?

LIPS & HIPS & THINGS

One of my favorite dreams is worth retelling here because now I provide you with a context that might explain how, even now, I tend to think about grandma:

She was beautiful standing there in silk while a gentle breeze waved at me in the soft folds of enticement that encircled her. I stared as if objectifying away everything else about her—my eyes tempting me with uncontrolled desire. We were standing in 2 separate worlds: she and I. She busied herself with the mundane; I lost myself in that vision where all else is out of focus, emotionally fogged over by the blinding glow of an angelic form.

She smiled effortlessly in my direction and with absent-minded disinterest turned away again while the feeling of wanting to hold her caused by that look set fire to my soul flashing within me—like fire to straw—consuming all interest in everything else.

The fire of love stops at nothing—it sweeps everything before it. [MSG Song of Solomon 8:7]

And she stood there continuing to talk to who knows who—I think her mom. They talked something about her taking the car somewhere. I watched her walk to the car. I watched her leave.

Then, I awoke to the ache of her absence. It was around three in the morning. She lay silently sleeping beside me unaware of where I had just been. I rolled over in her direction and draping my arms gently over her motionless form, fell peacefully back to sleep.

We all, I proffer a guess, tend to dream about what others can offer us rather than ways we might benefit them. C.S. Lewis called it "need-love" and since infancy and that first hug we took from momma, we have been doing it.

As adults, we call this objectifying someone, especially if they feel forgotten or neglected, if they sense that in all our taking, we have not considered from whom we were doing the taking. We enjoy the gifts with no thought toward the giver—even christians do this with God's mercy.

No one denies a young man's fancy when attraction begins with physical beauty but there is much more to her than that—as we all agree.

TRANSMOGRIFICATION

With the years my body has undergone considerable change. My metabolism has slowed down; my skin has lost some of its elasticity; I have so-called "liver spots" showing up on my arms ..to name a few obvious differences with an earlier me. It can be said that grandma, too, has undergone a change as well which might make her look less attractive to younger eyes, but not to me. Her *eyes* have not changed.

They say: our eyes reach full size during puberty. This constancy of the eye helps other people recognize us, who we have become, even with all the changes.

To me, grandma's eyes remain as bright and alive with meaning as when we first met. Over the years, the pictures show a refinement with age but they are all part of the same story, of

the woman I realized I was in love with, now, almost a half century ago .

HER EYES

I learned in time that there was a part of her I didn't see; there was a part of her that was better discovered by listening instead of looking, listening to her eyes. It had always been important to listen to her expressed thoughts—sometimes in the heat of some disagreement. But young men, hormonally speaking, do not naturally engage in such. Over the course of a lifetime she was sharing the story of her passion, yet, for the first 3 decades of our life together, I heard very little of it and understood less.

The last thing I wanted was to be lumped together with that larger percentage of married men who seem to live on a parallel course of existence with their wives, where a wife's concerns seem never to cross paths with what interests them. I have loved grandma and wanted to be there for her... but that was more a self-made promise soon forgotten with the all consuming struggle of a career—a career that was swallowing up a lifetime of affection owed her.

Meanwhile, I enjoyed watching her move about my world. Perhaps, with sadness, perhaps with some embarrassing regret, all I could see was the form of a woman I wanted to love—in a physical sense—but failed to take into account that deep inside her undiscovered but discoverable was where the real 'she' lived. And the chance of finding her there is the chance of finding where true pleasures are experienced. Now that I am older, I have learned that romance is not just physical.

I am learning to listen to her eyes.

THE PERSON INSIDE

"Beauty is not in the face; beauty is a light in the heart."

— Kahlil Gibran

THE eye in this regard mirrors and symbolizes the soul unchanged and eternally young.

You need to reach the autumn of life to realize that age is a physical thing, not a spiritual or emotional thing. The spirit within is forever young. That's how I, even now, can be as passionate about adventures and challenges I am physically handicapped by age and no longer able to take on. We, who are elderly, often in a secret thought, enlist, by proxy, others, who are younger and more physically capable, to climb the mountains we can no longer climb.

We applaud at what youth is capable of because we feel their victories along with them. The young man or woman inside us emotionally participates in their successes, cheers at the announcement of their accomplishments.

YOUNG LOVE

And when it comes to romance, we enthuse over the energy of young love to express levels of passion we can only commemorate in sweetest memory. But our limitation is in the body not the soul.

Age imprisons my passion to love in a body ever slowing down, hiding the true feelings of a soul that has not aged a day since those first kisses were shared, that first exciting talk when I learned her name and my eyes met hers. I am a grandfather but I am still in my twenties inside and grandma's touch has never

lost its thrill.

TRUE ROMANCE

True romance is not just physical. True romance is primarily *not* physical. True romance is spiritual, and by that I mean, it is the engagement of the soul and spirit of a man or woman in an intimate moment with another's soul and spirit. It is a spiritual thing when 2 people find themselves spiritually in the same space, in the same moment, in the same experience, in the same ecstasy ..and this must not be dependent on how high we can jump or how far up a hill we can run, how much energy we can expend.

Romantic love is not an explosion of feeling which requires a young body to endure as much as it is a sweetly satisfying realization that we have found each other in a crowd of voices.

Romantic love is not a peak experience that says I have reached the top of the mountain as much as it is the sense of being at home living on that mountain top.

Romance takes 2 at a time—and only 2. It is the comforting realization that I am not alone. As I grow older, someone is emotionally holding my hand as we stroll closer and closer to that ultimate shore of time. We go together as far as providence allows.

CASUAL ROMANCE

Romance should, thus, endure through time. Casualness is not permanent, not enduring. Casual moments of passion are cotton candy, sweet to the taste—perhaps—but far from satisfying as sustenance. Can we, then, say that casual is a word not applicable to a lasting romance—a romance that still makes holding hands after decades somehow as meaningful as that first touch?

Grandpa wants you to know that with the years it is possible to draw closer and closer to a lover until you would contend both are occupying the same emotional space. ["*The two shall be one...*" Genesis 2:24]

(Not many make it to this experience and for that I have no general explanation. Nor do I have any interest in denigrating anyone's life choices.)

And what if *casual* is your thing—just for a few years—because it is somehow exciting and all your friends are into it. Can't romance germinate in that soil? I can't say. Beside, grandpa is not in the scolding mood. I just think that you will discover that a lasting romance, although it begins physical, soon expands past that boundary and enters in time into the spiritual realm where a divinely inspired love takes over the heart and makes romance a lifelong joy. And you should find that such a love is not a casual impulse or a short term experience. It becomes a life sustaining source of emotional and spiritual energy.

VISUAL PROOF

Romance is visible in the twinkle that reveals a lover's eye. In saying this, grandpa is not suggesting some science to determine true love. I am talking about a well known observation lovers throughout time noticed when they fixed their gaze on each other and began whispering romantic thoughts. You know if your partner is reciprocating.

Every romance begins here looking into each other's eyes. When did we switch our attention away to other aspects of a partner's attractiveness? A better question might be "Why did we?"

THE EYES HAVE IT

"The soul, fortunately, has an interpreter - often an unconscious but still a faithful interpreter - in the eye."

— Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

THE eyes are said to be the windows to the soul.

[Look me in the eye and say that!]

Eye contact provides a moment of consensus often when verbal communication is impossible, unwarranted, or inadvisable. But it is much more. Without pretending to know the psychology or the physicality that explains it all, looking into someone's eyes is like hardwiring 2 minds together. Thoughts become more real because the feelings that drive them or feed them are betrayed often through tears on the one side of deep feelings or that gleam in the eye that twinkles on the other.³

The eye was chosen to give voice to our humanity and what personally effects us the deepest, whether tears of joy or tears of sorrow. Looking into a lover's eyes while listening to the story of their heart will burst forth in torrents of romantic pleasure. But we often ignore the message. We are looking elsewhere because it is human to be driven by an interest in personal need rather than learning more about the needs of someone else—even someone whom we love.

In raw language: I saw grandma's legs long before I observed the color of her eyes. And that simple statement says volumes where my thoughts were at when we first met and I sought to begin a relationship with her.

CASUAL GLANCES

And speaking of relationships. What about a casual one, a relationship that has nothing to do with the eyes, with making eye contact in an effort to "read" a partner or know more about them?

A causal relationship is an oxymoron; the pleasures of a casual encounter or sexually charged engagement may have nothing to do with a relationship. (And yet, the secret is out: once a romantic relationship begins, human sexuality adds a level of intimacy which draws two people closer; we call it love.)

My thoughts here go beyond the biblical narrative which tends to simplify things in black and white terms while we live in the age of grey.

As one enjoys the casualness of a shared pleasure with persons they have no direct interest in getting to know (no romantic entanglements), they are, nevertheless, defining themselves in terms of a lifestyle that later may fail them when they want that relationship, that closeness, that sense of belonging. Allegorically, they are traveling a path that is leading them in the wrong direction and farther and farther away from that deep and enduring intimacy of real love. Think about it.

PUPILS

When I used to preach, eye contact was important to me in order to determine the interest of the congregation in what I was sharing.

When I negotiate an intersection where other drivers are anxious to drive through, I make eye contact to determine if I am next. If other drivers will not look my way, I keep my foot on the brake.

THE EYE ' S APPLE

... whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye -
Zechariah 2:8

THE "apple of the eye" is a term of endearment that even God uses referring to Israel—and by extension, every believer. He reacts to the severest circumstances we live through as though He had been poked in the eye. He does not sit by and just let it happen.

Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings - Psalms 17:8

Whether or not you interpret this verse this way, the question is: What if God's affection toward us were casual? For those who don't trust in God, the point is moot. But for each of us who does believe in God, this is paramount to asking: if God sought pleasure in the same way I do, would I find this acceptable? If He saw romance the way I represent it, would that be Okay with me? If when my life falls apart, God just moved on to someone else who could pleasure Him, would I understand?

Let's not talk God; let's ask: if someone I love—or with whom I am feeling more and more emotionally attached—were interested in a casual life style, would that be acceptable to me?

SYMBIOSIS

True romance is symbiotic, mutually beneficial. A CPI life-style is no place to find it because a one way relationship is a promise of love never delivered on.

To all my sweethearts and the gentlemen in the making that are part of me, let me gently support the idea that you really

want someone who will give back to you when you give to them. You really want a lover that tingles the heart with a life-long excitement. You really want someone whose beauty never fades—even if you must look beyond the physical for it. You really want to share those intimate moments that define you as a person with someone who will do the same—and who will become your best friend in the doing.

You really want a life-long romance, a life-long hand to hold that will never pull away. You really want to be in love with someone for whom the mutual attraction is stronger than the trials that try to pull you apart. You really want more than a casual physical intimacy with someone who wants more than that with you as well.

ADAM & EVE

Adam and Eve never had it so good as when they began their life's journey together. It eventually fell apart, sad to say, but in the beginning they defined bliss (A word we should probably now remove from the dictionary). If they are real to you or just a metaphor for the purest love, Eve represented to Adam, in the words of John Milton's "Paradise Lost," "*Part of my soul....*"⁴ Perhaps, few of us—perhaps, none of us—know what that really means (but I can dream, can't I?) of a time when love was pure and romance was king, when labor was pure pleasure and the converse between 2 lovers was—well—easy listening, even without the music!

Is it possible to have a closeness with someone that you feel their pain and participate in their joy—and they, yours? It is one of the few blessings of life to be able to say, whatever else happens for good or bad: "*I have been loved.*"

Adam and Eve were not brother/sister nor were they just 2 souls whose paths crossed in the night. They were husband and wife, 2 souls joined in a union, 2 lovers in a relationship, that far exceeded in intimacy and pleasure—or should have—all other relationships. My poetry is poor here but such a romance as

Adam and Eve symbolizes has to be placed on a level of intimacy far deeper than all other types of relationships. It can't be *casual* ...right? At least your grandfather thinks so.

MY FREEDOM

"You never really know what's coming. A small wave, or maybe a big one. All you can really do is hope that when it comes, you can surf over it, instead of drown in its monstrosity." — Alysha Speer

GUYS used to argue: *Why buy the cow if you can get the milk for free?* This spoke to the sexual freedom of the 1960's—free love. But a woman is no cow ...neither is a man! The rude inconsiderateness of such a statement assumes there is nothing more to a relationship than the momentary pleasure we might derive from it—something I hope this writing is disproving.

LONGWOOD

Grandma and I have often on vacation visited Longwood Gardens outside Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where we strolled hand in hand through rows of flowers collected from all over the globe. It is a veritable Garden of Eden and a sweet and romantic memory. We are drawn there on a yearly basis. It is a fixed part of our vacation. It has become such a meaningful part of our experience together. It has helped define the term 'romance' for us since we share a common reverence for the beauty of God's world and a humbled sense of privilege to be part of it while there. I am Adam with my Eve.

But for those who have never been there—or one of the many other gardens comparably awesome—this is all meaningless chatter. For those who lack an appreciation for the romantic value of a garden stroll with a significant other or who don't like flowers (I can't imagine) my experience is unreliable. So it is with

romance for those who have never strolled down those garden walkways.

Vacations, for some, are amusement parks. Romance, for some, is the thrill of the ride, a higher high, a climatic experience more intensely pleasurable than the one before.

But for some like grandma and I, it is the sweet fragrance of fondest moments together, the beauty of a quiet romantic stroll through Eden, the satisfaction of holding and being held.

These two experiences engender two different sets of feelings: one of a deep and satisfying closeness and love, and the other of a wild and free pleasure. Both are deep feelings. Both are memorable. Both are or can be romantic. Neither one is to be disparage as immoral or harmful for a relationship.

WILD

Yet a garden walk is sustainable as part of a longterm relationship even as our energy level wains. We tend, also, (most of us) to outgrow amusements but can always appreciate other, more quiet, romantic moments. But while the energy level and interest is high, take the wild ride. Enjoy an exhaustive and spontaneous night of pure pleasure with someone you love—not as a casual engagement but as part of a longterm partnership.

Riding the rapids, in a night of passion, can be very romantic. Having intimate engagements that expend large amounts of energy or become in effect a great "bedroom" workout that collapses in an exhausted sense of satisfaction can be, and should be, a part of a lasting romance. No one should deny this. Tumble down water falls together (metaphorically speaking) but also follow that with a hand in hand walk home. Make love and then hold each other. Let the holding part last a lifetime; it will make the love last a lifetime.

PERSONAL CHOICES

"It's not hard to decide what you want your life to be about. What's hard, she said, is figuring out what you're willing to give up in order to do the things you really care about."
— Shauna Niequist, *Bittersweet: Thoughts on Change, Grace, and Learning the Hard Way*

AM I advocating total abstinence before marriage?

I wish I could but that's an old fashion morality that not even then had people lived up to. No. Grandpa is asking each of my grandkids to be smart about how he or she spends their life. You only get one and, though, it doesn't look like it should matter how you enjoy your youth, every past action impacts your future choices. It is as if you are traveling a road to somewhere important. You can read the map and look ahead to see where it leads you and choose where you want to be in your future or you can simply explore each turn and bend and wait to be surprised with what's up ahead. Those surprises are usually unwelcome.

C.S. Lewis wisely warned:

"...Taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into ... a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures and with itself"⁵

Being sexually active doesn't mean you blew your future to smithereens and now you have to live with the consequences of some very bad choices. God isn't that demanding or unforgiving and we, humans, are very resilient. It will be like walking a woodland path where you might find yourself lost among the trees and you want to get out. It is far easier to do if you are

somewhere near where you entered or, better, if you read the map first.

Here are some harmless recommendations to consider:

FEEL LIFE

Feelings are not your enemy, although at times you might think so because they can get you into situations hard to get out of.

I made a personal discovery that some of my feelings are very demanding, even addictive. Temptations—if I might use the term to mean something I would rather not do (or do) but can't seem to get myself to co-operate—are very, very real.

I was like Cindy, our first dog years ago, when she was in heat running from window to window and wanting out to ..you know what. It represents a different kind of 'pain' because in a sense I felt tormented by desires I couldn't or shouldn't fulfill—at least, not at the time. (In part these were desires, at the time, I couldn't deal with because I was young.) It's hormonal, I'm sure, because now in my later years of life I feel much calmer.

(When I met grandma and she said, "yes," all I could do in my daydreaming is anxiously await for the honeymoon.)

STAY HONEST

Say it the way you feel it, of course, without putting someone else down.

Life is too short as it is, why waste personal energy and resources on lies just to make someone else think better of you or to protect someone from what will inevitably be made known to them? I took a lifetime to figure this one out; so, if you struggle with this level of honesty or how to say it best, I totally under-

stand.

But honesty frees the soul to live. (We can keep secrets but that's a good 'hide' Not telling is not lying.) Yet we are always under oath within our own conscience. Don't violate that closest of friends, the person you really are.

BREAK THE MOLD

Be everything you want to be—the designs of others on your life be damned!

As you live your life, you will change your mind, tweak the views you hold, develop a more faithful conscience, and get more acquainted with who you are inside. Don't deny the beauty that is you, my dearest grandchild. Grandpa took a lifetime to figure this out, too. I discovered myself amongst the rubble of failed attempts at pleasing others.

I want to be me!!! It is the best me there is, and the one most respected by me first and then others. Those who don't respect who I am are no friend of mine; why pretend they are!?

BRING YOUR MIND ALONG.

And when it comes to CPI? Grandpa knows that all seriousness is a boring thought. But when it comes to pleasure, bring your mind along with you. Read your partner's eyes. Not all the important parts are below the neck. What are they all about in this moment? Are you and they on the same page, emotionally? Are you comfortable with them. Are you falling in love with them but they not with you?

USE FILTERS

It's important to be able to filter out persons and situations

that misrepresent your heart or lifestyle. It is sometimes too hard to make these considerations once you are deeply and romantically involved.

Grandpa once, as a pastor, had opportunity to counsel quite a few people who regretted choices because they jumped into the water instead of testing the temperature first with just the big toe.

What if you become romantically involved with someone who simply wants a ticket to a different life; their feelings don't match yours? What if you are casually intimate with someone who now latches on, stalks you, won't take "No" for an answer when all you wanted was a night out? What if their principles or values are left field to your home base or their needs exceed your resources to meet (What if they prove "needy"?) because they needed professional counseling before going with you but they never got that help? What if your partner is viewing centerfolds or online porn sites and has a fantasy agenda for you that is downright nauseatingly abhorrent?

These are just a few off the top of grandpa's head. Use filters. Take time to get to know someone. You be the judge of how much time. Don't let your casual become too casual. Don't let their casual become yours, if you don't want this.

FALLING IN LOVE

"your hand touching mine. this is how galaxies collide." —
Sanober Khan

I had a deacon once who assured me unreservedly that no one "falls" in love. It is always a process and a product of time together that brings two people to this astounding personal revelation.

Attraction is the movement of 2 people drawing emotionally closer and closer together, pulled by the gravity of their beauty—both inside and out. There is a galaxy of stars—maybe a multiverse of heavenly bodies (in the human sense)— all around but their worlds now revolve only about each other.

I was in grandma's orbit after our schedules at school seem to collide. She was everywhere and I was beginning to notice. Sitting on my bed in the dorm one night, I was staring long at her photo on my night stand when I blurted out loud, perhaps to a surprised roommate, "*I think I'm in love!*"

ROMANCE THE FEELING

How simple life would be if once fallen, fallen only once. But is it possible to fall in love with another even while being in love with someone else? The simple answer is, "Yes."

The human heart is equipped with an unimaginable capacity for love. It is up to us, as individuals, to define our love in such a way that our relationships do not overlap or "walk on" each other. On some level, we don't have to choose; we can have more than one friend, but when it comes to romance, 'caution' is the word for the day.

EXCLUSIVITY

Many people are exclusive in their view of romance and if you are one of them, check out your partner's feelings in this matter. Grandpa is still in love with the memory of a couple old girlfriends. (Don't tell grandma.) But these memories are just a subtle smile in distancing thoughts that are quite outside the gravitational pull of my heart. Grandma is clearly monogamous (not a curse word) and so am I.

But when romance with more than one other becomes a strong force it tugs on our thoughts and dreams to where we may be confused about who we really do love or if we love at all. Maybe CPI is a way for some people to avoid asking such harrowing questions. But I caution you, lovingly: settle the romance question without physical engagements which can jumble your thoughts and feelings even more until answers become deceptively wrong.

HER EYES ARE BROWN

"...be that line from a poem
that i hold in my eyes."
— Sanober Khan

IN some of the simplest ways grandma still thrills me. She takes me to highest mountain peaks where I can leap off and float back to earth knowing I have touched the heavens. Her smile is electric!

But her most redeeming feature, the *pièce de résistance*, is—you know—her eyes. And they're brown! The color is merely a personal preference of mine (probably part of that initial attraction—I don't know), but they are soft and warm to look into and they seem to smile back at me when she smiles.

Grandpa's weird. Okay. But, please, keep in mind the reason I began this little booklet: to get you to see a person through their eyes so you , as you converse, can discover the real person inside the beautiful body, so you can begin to learn about the person you are attracted to and decide if the attraction is worth continuing.

NO LIE

The eye does not lie; so, it is vital to talk to perspective romantic partners. Walk and talk. Take a stroll in the park and share stories. Sit across from one another in a restaurant and talk about yourselves. Eye contact is natural and the vibes you give and pick up are automatic. No one needs to become a psychologist. (Don't talk at work where there are distractions—we call it, work, for a reason.)

PASSION

Can the eyes show passion?⁶ For anyone who has been in love—and that's probably all of us—the answer is a resounding, "Yes!" In a Psychology Today online article we read:

"...making mutual eye contact and staring deeply into a partner's eyes can help to create (or rekindle) feelings of passion and love."⁷

Spending times together, talking, sharing, discovering, asking questions, listening to each other, simply caring enough to be there for one another has helped immeasurably to bring grandma and I emotionally closer. Now, I cannot imagine life without her. Now, her smile begs to be kissed. Now, her wish is my command—within my resources to provide it. Now, the beauty of other women is a different kind of beauty, a mere physical art form. Grandma is so much more. ..to me. I grade other women as to how much they measure up to her. Other women fall short and are not worth a second thought. As the saying goes: "Why discard a diamond to pick up a piece of glass." That's how I feel about grandma. My feelings are based on nearly 5 decades of being with her and finally listening and expressing my concern in ways she can appreciate more. (And we have only just began!)

Intimacy with grandma is spiritual. It is growing old together and realizing at some point that this is what I wanted all along. This is the sum of life, to walk off—as they say—into the sunset with my "Princess Bride."

This journey to get to know her and love her began the day I noticed her eyes were brown.

FINAL THOUGHT

BECAUSE you are forever in grandpa's thoughts—and grandma's as well—I would be remiss if I didn't say something about your happiness as it relates to what I have shared with you so far. This should sum up everything I have said.

In today's worldview, happiness is tied to a sense of personal freedom, the right to be who we want to be, live as we want to live (within our means, of course), and enjoy life and all its available pleasures.

In grandpa's 'day', happiness was supposedly the result of an allegiance to duty to living responsibly and getting a good education so we could earn a good living. (For a lot of women it was marrying Mr. Right.)

This is your day not mine; so, I will not—nor do I want to—drum into you platitudes about duty and responsibility.

HAPPINESS

What makes us happy ...ultimately? What can charge our emotional batteries to keep us joyfully jumping along through life the longest: pleasure based on a casual life style or a long term relationship? I want to say the latter.

Let's start with the simple but welcomed fact that we all need amusement and pleasure in our lives. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," the saying goes. I am religious enough to believe that because "Eden" is Hebrew for "pleasure" that God intended life to be pleasurable. We didn't invent the pleasures associated with holding and touching; we just discovered them.

I am ... wonderfully made; Psalms 139:14

Yet the problem with pleasure is that I need to know something about myself in order to choose from the thousands of choices out there that might provide that interest. Not everything that you like, I will like. So let's start there: self-identity. We all need pleasure, vacations, time off, fun but that means, first, we need to know as individuals what, indeed, turns us on.

SELF-IDENTITY

Our happiness is directly tied to our identity as persons because unless we know what pleases *us*, how can we choose. And unless we are talking about vacationing alone we need someone else who will satisfy our need for pleasure. Adam needs his Eve, and Eve her Adam. That relationship is one of discovery. It's a quest to learn each other's need to be loved and it requires more time than casually getting together provides.

Happiness, therefore, can not be defined by a casual acquaintance or someone who doesn't know what makes you happy or, conversely, saddens you. Casual acquaintances cannot read your eyes. They are more interested in what they can take from you, not give to you.

It takes time to develop relationships, those friendships—and romantically speaking—that special relationship that gives someone else an added sensitivity to your particular needs and interests and how to please you. There are a thousand paths to happiness but only one that ends where you live.

You need to know what best represents your personal quest for happiness and share that with someone whose attraction and desire to be known by you is mutual.

INTIMACY

Getting to know what brings you pleasure, is a very private

quest. It is private because what pleasures you is very much a part of who you are. This part of you is very much on a need to know basis only. Psychologically, we all have a need for privacy. There has to be a part of us that only our closest lovers and friends know about.

Your privacy is directly related, then, to any sense of happiness you may enjoy. And 'private' is another word for 'intimate.'

I am saying that being intimate with someone is sharing who you really are with them. That's how two become one in biblical terms. And even if everything about you is similar to a million other people, that special combination: your strengths and weaknesses, your character, your personality, and your needs and wants and longings and hopes and dreams—that combination—is your personal, psychological and spiritual DNA. And since romance is built on intimacy and intimacy means you begin to share all this with that one special someone, you can see how this part of you is not for a casual, just-passing-thru, engagement.

So your happiness is tied to all this: who you are, your likes and dislikes, your needs and wants, your interests and what provides you pleasure, and this part of you is very private by choice. This private side of you shared becomes the intimacy that binds you in a relationship or in a friendship to someone very special.

It is this intimacy that is the secret handshake that welcomes you into the relationship, that you long to be a part of. It is the ultimate goal of happiness, through that relationship, to give you a sense of belonging, a person with whom you can be at home.

BELONGINGNESS

Once we know who we are, we always want to belong somewhere, to fit in, to be a part of someone's life. Our happiness depends on it. Casual relations are by definition non-belonging. Casual relations are fleeting opportunities for pleasure

that are defined more by experimentation or general ideas that most likely misrepresent your personal interests.

To assume that a party—no matter how well organized—is how you would plan it, were you in charge, assumes too much. You can try new things; you can allow others to choose the decorations that accompany their idea of a pleasurable evening but unless they know you, the fireworks will fizzle eventually. Why experiment with someone else's idea of what pleases you when through a long term relationship—and through getting to really know someone and they, you—you and they can discover pleasures together that more represent both your personal needs. Enjoy each other for a lifetime, if the both of you so choose.

Even when we are at the party, we need to feel that we belong there, that we are not just crashing someone else's plans. And that sense of belonging is built on a longterm relationship that has taken the time and effort to build it.

FINALLY

In a sense, you could draw a straight line from you, who you are and your needs, ...to the person whom you can trust to meet those needs ...to a very intimate relationship with such a person ...to a fulfilling sense that you have found acceptance or belonging with them ...to your personal happiness. You can understand why grandpa cautions against too much "casual" in your relationships.

MY EPILOGUE

Grandma does not like me to speak of her in public settings or to put the accent on her importance to me when with friends..

Fathers can give their sons an inheritance of houses and wealth, but only the LORD can give an understanding wife. —
Proverbs 19:14.

Silence is not an option, however, when I tire of sharing my thoughts with myself in otherwise empty rooms. So, as the dreams are dreamt, the feelings felt, the thoughts trapped like rays of light in the diamond of my mind, for me, they need to find expression, if nothing more than in the printed page.

To say I think of her often understates the attraction she has to me. Now that I am retired, daydreams of her occupy my thoughts. Night dreams are vivid visions: some of memories, some of longings, some of just the never ending delight that comes with thinking of her. Dreams share the paradox of marital oneness, the silence of unspoken words, the evolving expressions of an aging yet ageless romance—all—continuing to stimulate the mind and stir the heart through the night. I look forward to our next rendezvous, the next revelation her eyes will tell.

Endnotes

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1. the liberalization of established social and moral attitudes toward sex, particularly that occurring in western countries during the 1960s, as the women's liberation movement and developments in contraception instigated greater experimentation with sex, especially outside of marriage.
2. Proverbs 5:18 May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.
3. I tread lightly here: when our sweet daughter-in-law thought she would never enjoy the rewards of motherhood—all based on statistics compiled by medical professionals—her tears gave voice to her sorrow. But, months later, when she announced the expected birthdate for their first child, the twinkle in her eye was, for us, a chorus of angels heralding the news. No star ever shown brighter. No joy, so joyous. She said nothing but her eyes whispered tales of that deep and quiet euphoria of pending motherhood.
4. John Milton's "Paradise Lost," Book IV, Line 485.
5. C.S. Lewis. *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics* (San Francisco, CA.:Harper 2002), 89.
6. Given the research results, it seems that eye contact may be an important part of dating and relating, beyond simply getting a lover's initial attention. - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-attraction-doctor/201503/loving-eye-contact-how-mutual-staring-can-create-passion>
7. *ibid.*

