

The Four Way Test

Delivered to the Rotary Club of Dwight August 20, 2008

1. Is it the truth?
2. Is it fair to all concerned?
3. Will it build good will and better friendships?
4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

It is a tradition in the Dwight Rotary Club each week that we have a story illustrating some aspect of the Four Way Test. This week we are going to focus on "Will it build good will and better friendships?"

Once upon a time, in central Illinois, a small boy lived in a small town. The small town had one bank.

As the small boy played outside of his home one day he began to notice that there were a lot of red headed kids in his neighborhood. The red headed kids all belonged to one family: three girls and four boys. However, until the little boy was invited home by some of his red headed playmates, he had only met six of them. When he came into their house, he met Wilbur. At this time Wilbur was about 6 years old. Wilbur had red hair like all the other kids, but at birth Wilbur was dealt a bad hand. Wilbur was born with numerous birth defects, including retardation, paralysis in the bottom half of his body and other physical handicaps. However, when the little boy met Wilbur, he found Wilbur to be quite happy. Wilbur was smiling, and was obviously dearly loved by his brothers and sisters, and his mother and his father.

As the little boy grew older he began to notice that virtually everybody in the small town, with one notable exception, seemed to regard Wilbur as a member of their family. The love that his brothers, sisters and parents had for Wilbur, and the love that Wilbur had for them and everyone he met, seemed to rub off on all who came into contact with the family.

Just before he became 8, Wilbur needed experimental surgery and treatment over in Europe. Doctors had predicted at the time of his birth that Wilbur probably wouldn't live much longer than 10 years of age, and unless he received the experimental treatment, Wilbur was certain to die soon. This was a time before most people had health insurance,, and the costs were astronomical. Almost everyone in town chipped in to help., but the money still wasn't enough. Wilbur's

parents one day went to the bank in town, along with quite a few friends, to attempt to arrange a loan, secured by their houses. The president of the bank met them, and gave them the good news that an anonymous donor had paid for all of Wilbur's treatment. The parent's suspected that the anonymous donor might be the president of the bank, and they asked him if he was. He said no. He also said that the question had come up before the board of directors, and the board had voted that the bank would not contribute to Wilbur's treatment.

Everyone in town knew what that meant. The president of the board of directors, the man who owned most of the bank, was a notorious skinflint who everyone in town hated. Think the Mr. Potter character in the movie "A Wonderful Life", without the charm.

Wilbur's parents were naturally overjoyed that their boy could receive the medical treatment. Wilbur went off to Switzerland for his surgery, and a year later he came back triumphantly. The treatment had been a success, and Wilbur would live past the age of it.

The years rolled by, as years have a tendency to do, and shortly after his 31st birthday, Wilbur died. All the medical treatment he received could extend his life, but it could not prevent his ultimate death from his birth defects. However, Wilbur's life had been a happy one and a blessing for everyone who had come into contact with him. Wilbur's parents and brothers and sisters had performed a miracle in enabling 'Wilbur o live as long as he had, thanks to the constant loving care they gave him.

At his funeral, the whole town turned out, except for the notorious skinflint, and Wilbur had a burial that was the talk of the town for years afterwards.

A few days after the burial, a small boy, now a man, was tending the grave of a relative, which was near the grave of Wilbur. It was about dusk, and he was the only one in the cemetery, until a car drove up close to Wilbur's grave. He saw a gentleman get out of the car, the notorious skinflint. He walked over to Wilbur's grave and stood before it. His back was turned to the observer, but the man could see by the movement of the skinflint's shoulder blades that he was sobbing. Suddenly the man understood who the anonymous donor had been all those years.

Love is a strange thing. The love felt for Wilbur and the love Wilbur returned had penetrated to the soul of the skinflint. Perhaps it was the only time in his life that he knew love. But because of Wilbur he had experienced that greatest of all human emotions, that indeed builds good will and betters friendships.

Thank you

Donald McClarey (Civil Law)
The Rotary Club of Dwight