

Why You Must Leave More Civil Society to Your Grandchildren

This is a pretty serious moment in our country and the world for so many reasons.

Most of us are trying to go on with life, attend to the people we love and do our work.

Meanwhile, day by day, social media, television and the news transmit chaos.

My friend, Roger Bates, recently emailed me the words of a dying great-grandfather named Jack Edwards, who had served as a congressman in Alabama. They are words worth sharing.

“I am sending below a quote from my friend and former congressman, Jack Edwards, that I thought you might appreciate,” my friend explained in his email. “Jack was asked shortly before his death a few weeks ago what he desired for his great-grandchildren. His response was:

“My hope is that my great-grandchildren will grow up in a country where civility will have been returned to common discourse and to the efforts to solve the country’s problems. My hope is they will be a part of a process of coming together rather than pulling apart. My hope is that they will understand that the real answers are found through compromise and cooperation and not at the extreme edges of human thought.

“That is my hope for the future. This is my hope for the great-grandchildren, for the country and for all who exist in it, that we will come back to a time of civility in peace in working together for the good of mankind.”

I suspect a fair number of people feel the same way. The difficulty is this: “Where do I start?”

We have so many ways to become divisive quickly. Building consensus cannot happen quickly.

It takes time, effort, sacrifice and, dare I say, the willingness to lose a little of “getting my own way.”

No shortcuts exist to anything worthwhile. It asks commitment, the capacity to listen and trying to include as many people in your cause as possible.

You have to explain and adjust. Other people’s ideas will always improve the final outcome.

As I have watched through Ken Burns’ wonderful documentary series on country music, I have been remembering my growing-up years.

I was listening to John Hartford, Glen Campbell, Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan, James Taylor, the Byrds, Kris Kristofferson and all of that music.

I was also living through that time - Vietnam, racial turmoil, changing mores and a fast-changing world where women were coming into a new self-understanding. It was wonderful and scary, and there was every bit of acrimony then as now.

Division was everywhere. We were grappling as a world with pollution, and ecology moved into prominence.

Fringe preachers were predicting the end of time, then as now. That was 50 years ago.

One thing my generation can say that I hope will help is this: We are in the process of handing off the future to the next young generation. We believe in you, your zeal, your energy and your minds. You are the best educated generation ever.

One gift we can give is our perspectives: It’s been tough before, and we found our way through. Don’t despair.

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History can give us context for hope. Change comes slow, occasionally with rapid bursts, but learning to soldier on is important.

I'm a grandfather of three incredible little girls. I worry about the world we're leaving them too.

Beyond the fringes, there is a lot of quiet hope as people just keep on as best they can, taking grandchildren to school or being there while moms work.

An awful lot of people are caring for sick parents or helping neighbor families while one of them is in addiction recovery or dealing with cancer.

There's a lot of good, I'd say, in the whole world like that.

Civility will re-emerge when we do all that is within our might not just to post opinions online but get out alongside someone else and do all you can to make it better for everyone.

If that's an old and unexciting idea, well, it has one thing going for it: It works.

*Editor's note: A [version](#) of this article first appeared on Furr's [blog](#), *The Flatpickin' Pilgrim's Progress*. It is used with permission.*