



Posterity: Letters of Great Americans to Their Children

Dorie McCullough Lawson

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An elegantly designed, beautifully composed volume of personal letters from famous American men and women that celebrates the American Experience and illuminates the rich history of some of America's most storied families.

Posterity is at once an epistolary chronicle of America and a fascinating glimpse into the hearts and minds of some of history's most admired figures. Spanning more than three centuries, these letters contain enduring lessons in life and love, character and compassion that will surprise and enlighten.

Included here are letters from Thomas Jefferson to his daughter, warning her of the evils of debt; General Patton on D-Day to his son, a cadet at West Point, about what it means to be a good soldier; W.E.B. DuBois to his daughter about character beneath the color of skin; Oscar Hammerstein about why, after all his success, he doesn't stop working; Woody Guthrie from a New Jersey asylum to nine-year-old Arlo about universal human frailty; sixty-five-year-old Laura Ingalls Wilder's train of thought about her pioneer childhood; Eleanor Roosevelt chastising her grown son for his Christmas plans; and Groucho Marx as a dog to his twenty-five-year-old son.

With letters that span more than three centuries of American history, *Posterity* is a fascinating glimpse into the thoughts, wisdom, and family lives of those whose public accomplishments have touched us all. Here are renowned Americans in their own words and in their own times, seen as they were seen by their children. Here are our great Americans as mothers and fathers.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

Posterity: Letters of Great Americans to Their Children Details

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Carlton Moore says

Nuggets of wisdom and interesting factoids from history.

Sarah Musser mcalister says

This book was all right. I wish that I could have read a little more about who some of these people are. It was also sad to read some of these letters. My favorite letter was the one that Barbara Bush wrote to her kids. I'm glad that this book ended with that one.

Bill Krieger says

What a wonderful book! Posterity is one of my all-time favorite reads. The author is David McCullough's daughter. (pedigree!) As the subtitle says, she has collected "letters from great Americans to their children". I got this as a present from my own amazing daughter. (pedigree in reverse, ha!) Thanks, Hol!

If you have kids, then this is powerful reading. The letters are quite personal and intimate. Nearly all the letters are more than a century old, and nearly all the letter-writers are famous or rich or powerful. And yet, the letters ring true to anyone who is a parent. It's heartening that we share so much with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Edison and Abigail Adams, and on and on and on. It's a common bond of loving our kids and caring for them above everything else. It's really heartening to read.

A common theme in the letters is the frustration of communicating with our children. Whether scolding or giving advice or even praising, parents struggle mightily to get their message across to their kids. "This is important! Listen to me!" (ha!) You want so strongly to help and guide things directly, but our greatest impact as parents is indirect, as role models.

I'd love to write letters like this. And maybe I'll write one or two. But it's pretending at this point. Generations ago, you had to write letters just to communicate. And parents were regularly separated from their children for many months or even years. I think this adds to the urgency and passion in these letters from the past. Losing this intense level of communication kind of stinks, but progress always has a cost.

I don't have any quotes (QOTD) for you. The whole book is one big QOTD. I initially had the paperback version. I read a couple of the letters and (chop chop) ordered myself a hardcover because I knew I wanted to highlight like crazy and also read it again later.

I'll mention one letter specifically because I poo-poo'ed it. At the end of the book, there's a fairly recent letter from George H. W. Bush to his children and grandchildren. I saw it and made a face-scrunch. I anticipated that it wouldn't be as strong as the older letters, and it wouldn't be as intimate. I was totally wrong. The Senior Bush's letter is a beautiful message to his grandkids describing his struggles in aging. Really great and human!

Father's Day is coming up... go get it.
A great read!
yow, bill

Emily says

What a moving book. I loved reading the honest voices of these great men and women sharing their love, advice, faith, and humor, then signing so sweetly, "With Tenderest Affection, Daddy" (or mommy). The letters weren't all sweet, however, many also were harsh reprimands. I enjoyed the introduction bios just as much as the letters. It was interesting to find out about their accomplishments along with their personal lives and the circumstances surrounding the letters.

My complaint is that the letters were not all great. Some were so profound and packed with treasures of wisdom. Others were interesting as you got a glimpse into their lives or were written with so much love that it would have moved me to tears (if I were the crying type). But there was also a fairly big chunk that made me wonder why they were selected for this book.

My very favorite letters were:

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1890) on the fruits of love

Sherwood Anderson (1926) with advice

N.C. Wyeth (1944) on generous minds, and more...so good, this is probably my favorite

Carl Sandburg (1921) short, love filled letter written to his ten year old daughter in a sanatorium

Abigail Adams (1780) on the blessings of trials

W.E.B. Du Bois (1914) with advice

Barbara Bush (1993) with advice

Bethany Geffken says

An intriguing peak into the lives of people who had great impact on American culture. I find it interesting that many of these writers are imploring their own children to listen to their advice which is so easily followed in their positions of power or influence. My favorite letters are by George and Barbara Bush and Eddie Rickenbacker.

Lhawkins says

I really appreciated this book, not only as a unique way to understand American History, but also as a way to introduce young people to using primary sources. And within the history, what you are learning about, is not the events, but rather the people who lived those events. It is a view right into their hearts as individuals. I am a firm believer that history is best looked at in personal way, and this makes it highly personal. This is both a history book and a writing book. These are personal letters of famous people to their families. It would make a terrific compliment if you have been discussing letter writing specifically, or writing in general.

John says

It's an anthology, and, as such, the quality is uneven. Each reader will have his or her personal favorites. For me, Ansel Adams to Michael Adams (p. 14) was the most touching. If ever I can write a sentence with so perfect and beautiful an image, then my writing life will be complete: "I am wondering, in the afternoon of my life, just what your day will be." Not far behind on my scale of enjoyment was N.C. Wyeth to Nat and Caroline Wyeth about his grandson Newell (p. 35). I appreciated the practical wisdom of John D.

Rockefeller, William Carlos Williams, Oscar Hammerstein, and a handful of others. In our increasingly post-Christian age, I took special notice of great Americans who chose to write to their children of faith: not "faith" as an amorphous, feel-good, self-improvement technique, but faith in God as revealed in scripture: from Anne Bradstreet, to Jonathan Edwards (of course!), Daniel Webster, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Anne Bradstreet, Benjamin Rush, Eddie Rickbacker, all the way to Barbara Bush. For me, the letters range from a rare five-star and several four-stars, counterbalanced by several two-star pieces and, every so often, a one-star, so I'll give the collection three stars overall.

Danica says

This is such a great collection of letters. I love writing and receiving letters and believe that it is becoming a lost art. This book demonstrates why it shouldn't.

Sharman Wilson says

This compilation of letters gives us a glimpse into the hearts and homes of some very public figures. Some of them were wonderful parents, others not so much. Some were very close to their children, others had little contact with them. My impression is that all of these parents, sooner or later, realized their responsibility toward their children, and that the bond between them was precious.

Reading these personal letters made me nostalgic for the time when our thoughts were carefully written on a sheet of paper, placed into an envelope, and after the stamp and back of the envelope was licked, placed in the mailbox, all with love. I have saved pretty much every letter anyone has sent to me, and I still take some out to reread. Should I sift through old emails, FB posts, and texts, and store them in an organized digital repository? I'm having a hard enough time keeping up with the photos! Don't get me wrong, I love word processing too much (except for auto-correct ?) to go back to the old ways, but we always leave some good things behind when we move on.

Amor says

I accidentally deleted this book from my list. What?!

This is the perfect book for a person with the desire to start reading biographies. It is organized by subject which is nice because the letters needn't be read in order. Also, it isn't filled with the minutia which can be

intimidating to some readers. Each letter is preceded by a brief history about the person writing and the person receiving the letter; the history also provides a backdrop to the letter and offers the reader a glimpse as to why it was written.

The subjects included in the book range from topics like money management, family and love. I'm so glad I was introduced to this great book.

Nikie Elwood says

Another Book Club book. I love David McCullough so I was excited to read something by his daughter. It took me a little while to get into reading a book in letter format--and I did find a few of the letters to be a little boring--but on the whole, I loved it. The letters range from funny, to ironic--Thomas Jefferson lecturing his daughter on the evils of debt--to touching and tragic. A great book.

Dot says

Great mix of past and recent historical figures. Some very surprising insights to people you think you knew.

Rachelle says

Loved this book. George HW Bush has the best letter near the end. Shows the value of letters and the relationships between great and their children.

Angie Bollard says

This is a beautiful book that gives a rare glimpse of the lives of great Americans. Just about every subject is raised. Character, money management, aging, family relationships. In short, everything that regular Americans experience. Some of the insights into the lives of these people that surprised me are as follows:

*General Pershing lost his wife and three daughters in a fire in 1915 and the only child living was his son Warren whom he chastized about his grades (He was worried he wouldn't make it into West Point). Warren did not make it into West Point but became a stock broker and was the pride of his father's life.

*George H.W. Bush has a sense of humor.

*The contributions that the Rockefeller Family made to the betterment of the country. Like millions of dollars to create Arcadia National Park in California and the Teton National Park in Wyoming.

Jenn says

This kind of book is best read slowly, when you have a little time here and a little time there. I read it for book club so felt an urgency to finish it quickly. I don't think it's meant to be read quickly. I didn't know or had never heard of A LOT of these "Great American's" some of them were poets and artists and most of them came from the 1700's and 1800's. The general theme was that these people **ADORED** their children, even expressing that kind of adoration when they were significantly older. Most of them had very long absences from their children. My favorite letter was from Mark Twain to his 3 year old daughter Susie pretending he was Santa Clause. I will never think of Jack London in a positive light ever again after reading his horrible and verbally abusive letters to his 12 year old daughter basically telling her she needed to choose between him and his "small in every sense of the word" ex-wife.
