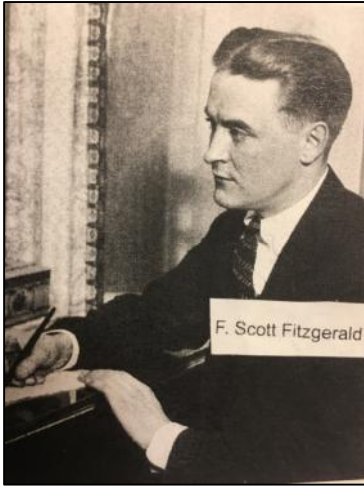


THE DAUGHTER

By John F. Hall

When I was a teenage soldier taking a night course at Austin Peay College in Clarksville, Tennessee, my literature professor gave the class a reading assignment.

It was a story written by F. Scott Fitzgerald. Once I finished the assignment, I began to read some of the letters that Fitzgerald wrote to his daughter, Frances. I became enamored by his letters to his daughter, he called her “Scottie.” He gave her the usual father—daughter advice that is still relevant today: “Don't worry about popular opinion. Don't worry about the past. Don't worry about the future. Don't worry about anyone getting ahead of you. Don't worry about triumph. Don't worry about failure unless it



comes through your own fault.” I thought that if I had a daughter one day, I would share some of Fitzgerald's advice with her. The closest that I came to having a daughter is through my granddaughters Andrea, Heather, Skyler, Jade, and Lexie. One thing about that night college course that I never forgot is what the professor told me as I was leaving his classroom. At that time, I was detailed at the 101st Division Headquarters as the driver for a Colonel. It might have been a boring assignment, but it gave me the opportunity to read the literature text book while waiting for the Colonel to drive somewhere. To be honest, on the night of the final exam, I thought I failed. After I turned in the test booklet, answer sheet and pencil, I started out the classroom door. I was the last student to

finish the test. The professor said to me, “John, don't give up!” I never forgot those words. I made a “C.” If I would have failed, I would not be the writer that I am today.

F. Scott Fitzgerald tried to shelter his daughter as much as he could. His wife, Zelda spent a good part of their marriage in hospitals trying to find a cure for her chronic depression. He lived away from Zelda and his daughter, Scottie. It was through his letters that he wanted to teach Scottie all that he could so that she may, in her own life be spared the pain that he endured. He slipped into abject poverty and died at the age of 44. He did not live to enjoy the financial success that his book, “The Great Gatsby” would bring after his death.

In Fitzgerald's letters to his daughter, he tries to pass on all the wisdom he has about his art, about his craft, and about his life. He wants her to be a writer. At the same time, he truthfully tells her, “I am not going to encourage you about it, because after all...you have your own fences to jump and learn from experience. Nobody ever became a writer by wanting to be one. If you have anything to say...you have got to feel it so desperately that you will find a way to say it that nobody has ever found before, so that the thing you have and the way of saying it blend as one matter.”

Fitzgerald warned his daughter about what he experienced as a writer. He wrote, "It is an awful lonesome business... I never wanted you to go into it, but if you are going into it all I want you to go into it knowing the sort of things that took me years to learn." There is one thing that Fitzgerald wrote to Scottie (he also called her Pie), that is still relevant today. He wrote, "Nothing is as obnoxious as other people's luck... Everything you are and do from fifteen to eighteen is what you are and will do through your life" I like what he wrote in one of his letter,"You have got to devote the best and freshest part of your energies to things that will give you a happy and profitable life. There is no time but now." Fitzgerald urges his daughter not to smoke.

If I had a daughter, there are a few things that I would teach her. The first is that you cannot change a person nor should you change yourself like a chameleon to try to suit your boy friend. Just be your self. One thing is to try figure out what you want and have the courage to go after it. Another thing is to be self-sufficient. Become, as soon as you can, financially self-reliant. Don't need a man's money for anything. Don't pick a man with the most money rather than a man you care the most about. Car maintenance make a daughter more independent. Know where the antifreeze, oil and windshield washer fluid is located as well as how to check and refill them. Learn how to change a flat tire. Don't buy a car that does not have a spare tire. That will put you at the mercy of a tow truck. Accept responsibility when you are wrong. Admit the mistake and don't repeat it. Know that perfection is a big myth. There is no such thing such as having a perfect body, perfect career and perfect family. No one has to be perfect to be loved. I would tell her to do her best and that I am there for her and will love her no matter-what she does. More importantly, I say it over and over and over again to Skyler, Jade, and Lexie, keep Christ in you life. Pray for others and make it to church on Sunday.

Fitzgerald is correct that "nobody became a writer by wanting to be one." In my situation, I just started to write stories that were distributed to three churches in far Western Kentucky. That began 42 years ago. I don't claim to be a good writer, more like a work in progress. Fitzgerald was a poor student and an atrocious speller. He had a penchant for cutting classes during his time at Princeton University. He dropped out of college during his junior year to join the Army. Fitzgerald told his daughter: "Some of the professors teaching poetry really hated it and didn't know what it was all about. I got in a series of scraps with them, so I finally dropped English altogether." English was his favorite subject. He spent more time working on English and writing than he did any other subject.

His daughter, Frances graduated from Vassar University and became a journalist and a historian.

John F. Hall

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