

THE STATESMAN

Volume 10 Issue 6 June 2006

On Campus Seminars:

- Jun 5-30 [From Scholar to Depth](#)
Jun 8-10 [Statesman Retreat](#)
Jun 22-24 [Statesman Retreat](#)
Jun 26-28 [Shakespeare at GWC](#)
Jul 10-11 [Third Annual Liber League Summit](#)
Jul 10-29 [The Mountain Seminar](#)
Jul 13-15 [Statesman Retreat](#)
Aug 1-25 [Mathematics](#)
Aug 11-12 [The Writings of Montesquieu,
Part II](#)
Aug 15-16 [Shakespeare at GWC](#)

2007

Jun [European Field Experience](#)

For the complete list of all GWC on campus Seminars [click here](#).

For a Face to Face with Greatness seminar in your area, [click here](#).

For a Statesmanship Seminar in your area, [click here](#).



By Steve Palmer

Have you ever thought about what stories you'd like your great-grandchildren to tell about you?

I once stood in the cemetery where several of my ancestors have been laid. In a deeply sentimental mood I thought to myself, "How many stories cry from the ground here? How many hopes and dreams, joys and sorrows do these cold headstones represent? Can we even begin to comprehend all that these people went through for us to enjoy our freedom today?" I quietly listened to my father as he told fascinating stories of these mysterious people I had never met. I began to feel an intimate bond with these faceless Pioneers. The realization sank deep into my soul that we stand on the shoulders of Those Who Have Gone Before. But have we become Those Who Have Forgotten? It is critical that we remember our heritage; the future of our nation depends on it.

Allow me to help us remember by sharing a story about my own great-grandfather.

George Leo Palmer's father was shot and killed by a member of the Butch Cassidy

For more newsletters, [click here](#).

Gang when George was 11 years old. This left him, the oldest of 11 children, as the man of the house. To care for his family, he took a job herding sheep year-round. In the winter he would wrap his feet in burlap sacks because he had no money for shoes.

As an adult he was a fiercely independent coal miner. By all accounts he never missed a day of work in 42 years. The mine he worked at was some 20 miles from his home. His truck broke down one morning, and although his own son lived in the same town and worked in the same mine as he, he didn't want to depend on anyone to get to work. So rather than ask his son for a ride, he told no one of his truck and instead, he arose at four o'clock every morning for several days to ride his tractor 20 miles to be on time to work.

This simple story speaks volumes about the way that my great-grandfather viewed life and his place in it. He didn't whine or complain when his truck broke down. He didn't lobby the government for "free" transportation, or go to a psychologist to validate his self-esteem. He quietly and steadfastly figured out a solution, instead of being a burden on anyone else. In fact, I'm sure he would be surprised that my generation even finds this story worth noting; to him personal responsibility was all in a day's work, and he wouldn't have expected anything different from anyone else.

Now contrast that attitude with a recent news story with the title "Ailing Man Sues Fast-Food Firms." The lead plaintiff was quoted as saying, "There was no fast food I didn't eat, and I ate it more often than not because I was single, it was quick, and I'm not a very good cook. It was a necessity...my doctor said it was killing me, and I don't want to die." I wonder how much sympathy George Leo Palmer would have had for this "victim" of fast food. In 2005 we witnessed the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast. Our citizens in New Orleans and the surrounding areas suffered more than I can imagine, yet I couldn't help but wonder why many of them

seemed so helpless. It's hard to swallow the idea that George Washington fought and suffered so that our people could become so dependent.

Consider this account from the Revolutionary War, condensed from the book *The Real George Washington*.

On December 26th, 1776, Washington's exhausted troops prepared to battle Hessian troops in Trenton, New Jersey. 2400 men would have to cross the Delaware River, fighting a heavy storm and sub-zero temperatures. Ice floated down the river, smashing against the boats and threatening to dump the passengers into the river. Washington hoped to have the crossing completed by midnight, but the stormy weather and ice-choked river slowed the movement. It wasn't until four in the morning that the army was ready to march. The men then had a 9 mile march ahead of them, traveling on slick, icy roads. Lowering their heads and pulling their wraps tight against the storm, the men forged ahead. Jagged ice on the road cut through worn-out shoes and threadbare stockings. The next day, soldiers coming behind could follow their route by the bloodstains in the snow. As the soldiers marched, a worried report came to Washington that the sleet was wetting their muskets. Washington's determined reply was, "Use the bayonet. I am resolved to take Trenton." The soldiers continued to Trenton where they surprised and beat the large Hessian army, mostly using their bayonets.

When Washington's men faced impossible odds, they didn't sit at home in front of a warm fire complaining about the unfairness of Britain, or whine that they didn't have enough resources. Facing impossible odds, they left their blood on the ice and snow, rose to the task and got the job done. Now let me clarify something here. Many of the soldiers did complain, and some even deserted the cause. But the point is that they aren't the ones we remember. We don't tell stories about Those Who Gave Up. We

remember those who sacrificed their immediate comfort in order that we, their posterity, might enjoy a better life.

Why did they sacrifice? Did they bleed and die with nothing but the thought of retirement in their minds? Did they serve their time expecting to cash in on their pension? Did they fight tyranny in order to secure a right to “alternative” lifestyles and “free” health care? No. Our ancestors suffered because their vision of the future was more important to them than their suffering. They knew that their accomplishments would benefit their posterity more than it would themselves. And that’s precisely what made it tolerable and worthwhile for them. They knew the importance of Going Before.

Webster’s 1828 Dictionary defines the word pioneer as, “One that goes before to remove obstructions or prepare the way for another.” The word pioneer originates from a French word meaning “pickax.” So another definition is, “In the art and practice of war, one whose business is to march with or before an army, to repair the road or clear it of obstructions, work at entrenchments, or form mines for destroying an enemy’s work.” Our Pioneer Forefathers used the “pickax” of their vision to hack through obstructions of war, slavery, disease, and poverty to pave the way for us. They formed the “entrenchments” of Constitutional government. They destroyed tyrannical enemies so that we could be free.

We owe Those Who Have Gone Before an incalculable debt of gratitude and respect. How can we repay this debt? I suspect that Those Who Have Gone Before would answer, “Honor what we did by becoming One Who Goes Before in your own life.” We pay them back by paying the debt *forward* and preparing the way for *our* posterity to follow *us*.

What’s needed in our nation is a rebirth of the spirit of Going Before. Going Before is a spirit of knowing that you have a unique mission to perform that you alone can do, and that others will suffer if you don’t fulfill that mission. It’s a feeling of dedication to a cause greater than yourself. It’s the spirit of asking not what your

country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. Becoming Those Who Go Before means that everything we do is designed to lighten the burden of those who follow us. It’s leaving things better than how we found them.

I remember when I was growing up I often saw my father picking up garbage that other people had left on the ground. I used to think that it was unnecessary and actually kind of stupid for him to clean up what others left behind, but now I realize that that was a perfect expression of the spirit of Going Before. My father was quietly doing what he knew that someone would eventually have to do, and he figured that it might as well be him. He had the spirit of Going Before.

When we catch the spirit of Going Before we don’t sit around waiting for someone else to fix problems or clean up messes; we roll up our sleeves and go to work, even if it means cleaning up after irresponsible people, or doing things that are not our unique ability. And I’m not talking about being a martyr; I’m simply talking about being a humble and willing servant. I’m talking about doing our part in bridging the gap between what *is* and what *should be*. Becoming Those Who Go Before means that the world is a better place because we lived in it.

My fourth great-grandfather, Thomas Sirls Terry, wrote in his journal an admonition to his children that perfectly expresses the mentality of One Who Goes Before. He tells of a difficult period of his life in the winter of 1850, and then writes,

“You will see by reading the past that I have been thrown into various circumstances in life. Being of poor parentage, but yet honorably so, you will see that in all of my ups and downs in the world that I had the spirit of perseverance. In my travels through life, when misfortune seemed to press down hard upon me, I always pressed forward the harder and would accomplish that which I undertook to do. And when famine and starvation stared me in the face, and hunger had so weakened my mortal frame, that when at labor I would have to sit down to rest in

order to gain strength that I might perform my day's work, still I hung on to my faith and integrity in the Lord...Therefore, my dear children, let nothing of an evil nature persuade you from a righteous course through life, and carry out your righteous decrees and be firm in your determinations."

How will we be remembered by future generations? Will we be a source of pride, or embarrassment to our posterity? Will we leave legacies, or liabilities? What stories will our great-grandchildren tell about us? More to the point, what stories do we *want* them to tell about us?

In 1775, an anonymous author wrote these words in a New England newspaper: "Never was a cause more important or glorious than that which you are engaged in; not only your wives, your children, and distant posterity, but humanity at large, the world of mankind, are interested in it; for if tyranny should prevail in this great country, we may expect liberty will expire throughout the world. Therefore, more human glory and happiness may depend upon your exertions than ever yet depended upon any of the sons of men." These words are more true now than they ever were. The freedom of our nation in centuries to come—and quite possibly the freedom of all mankind—will largely be determined by us right here and right now.

It is time for We Who Have Forgotten to remember the sacrifices of our ancestors and to follow their example in becoming Those Who Go Before. I, for one, vow that my posterity will not suffer because of carelessness on my part. I'll study the lives of Those Who Have Gone Before in order to know what it takes to become One Who Goes Before in my own life. I will become a 21st Century Pioneer, and this will be the beginning of the next American Revolution and the rebirth of liberty in our nation!

So, who's with me?

