

WHAT WE LEAVE: An Interview with Dr. Lina Privitera, Part 1 *Continued*

David Brooks (b. 1961), *The Road to Character*

Douglas: I liked what you shared with us about David Brooks and *The Road to Character* and how his distinction between what he calls *resume* virtues and *eulogy* virtues helps us think about legacies.

Linda: David Brooks has been on his own journey, and each book that he writes gives you an insight into how he's processing his own spirituality and faith journey. The first book I read was *The Road to Character*. There he introduced this distinction of *resume* and *eulogy* virtues. That distinction got me thinking about obituary notices and how we sum up our life's legacy.

Very often, resume virtues are what you see in the newspaper when somebody dies, or on the web page for the funeral home, e.g. born in such and such a place, parents, siblings, went to school here, worked there, had a degree in whatever. And died. And a resume virtue may have your alphabet soup after your name. And you could look at me and say, "Oh, she's got a lot of degrees and certificates and stuff." But it doesn't tell you what shaped me. Or really who I am. All those degrees may just tell you that I have... curiosity. I'm a lifelong learner, and I will always be a lifelong learner. But it doesn't tell you really anything about my character.

So, when Brooks spoke about eulogy virtues, by contrast to resume virtues—these are the kinds of things that we... hear... during funerals [that may speak to us about character].

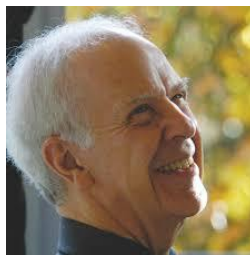
I actually used those two concepts, resume virtues, and eulogy virtues, when I entered a parish in Ottawa, in Canada as a means of introducing myself—because I was from the United States, and they didn't know me. [Thinking along the lines of eulogy virtues] I wanted to tell them about the experiences that had shaped the things that I care deeply about. That led me to talk about the civil rights movement when I was an undergraduate in Richmond, Virginia, and how that had shaped me as did my experiences in hospital settings training as a nurse. My father had died when I was 14, and I didn't know he was dying. And so that led me to do work with hospice, where people would tell the truth. I told them about these experiences in my life so I could give them a sense about how my character had been shaped and what motivated me, how I turned out to be who I am.

Eulogy virtues tell the character, the faith, or the structure, the humanity of the person. The eulogy at a funeral may attempt to give something of the *totality* of a person—failures included (—unless it doesn't). I think of my own life and past. I wasn't perfect. Some of the things that I learned along the way were because of my own lack of understanding, for example. And you often hear stories of people at funerals where... they got bumped off

their track. Like Paul on the road to Damascus, you know, you get bumped, and you take a different direction. And I think that those pivot points are important when we're thinking about the wholeness of a person's life.

It is also wonderful in a eulogy to pay tribute to those who have shaped you and who have helped you become the person you are. One of my bishops (over the forty years of my ordained ministry) was a monk, Tom Shaw, in Massachusetts. And he shaped me. He shaped my priesthood, and he shaped me personally. David Brook's idea of resume versus eulogy virtues is very useful in thinking about legacies.

Parker Palmer (b. 1939),



Douglas: You shared this excerpt from ***On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity, & Getting Old***

"I won't be glad to say goodbye to life, to challenges that helped me grow, to gifts freely given, or to everyone and everything I love. But I'll be glad to play a bit part in making new life possible for others. . . "

"... my mantra. Wholeness is the goal, but wholeness does not mean perfection; it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life... it's a truth that can set us free to live well, to love well and in the end, to die well."

Linda: I chose Palmer because first he's a Quaker. He's acquainted with silence with the inner life. Then he is quite articulate, and has participated in a variety of venues, and he's a poet and I'm drawn to poets.

On the Brink of Everything speaks to all of us who would like to deny our mortality. We spend a lot of time not paying attention. He's paying attention. He's not the only spiritual writer who talks about aging. But it's about more than aging. It's about integrity. He says he is not happy that he's going to die because he doesn't want to leave the people and the things that he loves, and so on. But he then goes on to say, "I'll be glad to play a bit part in making new life possible for others." And I like to think that that's the legacy we leave. Have we made life a bit better for others? And in what way? For Palmer maybe it was his teaching.

Maybe it was his accompaniment for someone in distress. I have no idea. Maybe it's the poetry that he leaves behind or some of his writing.

He says his mantra is—or the goal of his life has been—a wholeness. That's a legacy statement. It doesn't mean perfection. It meant for Parker embracing brokenness as an essential, integral part of life. We understand that we're flawed but also that we do the best we can most of the time. We understand that wholeness incorporates everything that we are. The things that we have failed at, the things that we didn't do well. And what we do with failure has a significance. Yes—what we do with it. Well, part of the integrity and the authenticity of a funeral, or in an obituary, is telling the truth—including failure.

I think of my own life. One marriage failed. The second one did not. I'm grateful for all of the children. And for who they are. I wouldn't have traded that for anything. When I was a young person, I didn't have the skills to do what was required, whether it was in marriage or, or in studying well or whatever. So, I would characterize myself, for example, as a late bloomer. I got my master's when I was forty, and I got my doctorate when I was sixty. I just keep trying... keep learning, don't you? [We keep learning what it is to be human. Palmer is somebody who is chasing his mortality with integrity and trying to share what wisdom he has.

Part 2 continued further in this Newsletter.