

The Dream

Let me tell you of the most beautiful dream I awoke from not long ago. It was so beautiful. It was so practical it could have been real. I will tell you the dream, but I can't tell you the ending because that part was not clear. But the rest of it was very clear--sometimes I wonder if it were real. Who can say? I leave you to be the judge of that for yourself.

Let me tell you the dream. There was a family that had a lot of wealth. They had been well off for as long as anyone could remember. They were prudent and carefully tended their money, almost as if it were a crop. They watched over it, and made sure it grew. Some years it grew more than others. They dared not invest in their own country because it was too corrupt, too unstable.

Frequently one heard of a new political threat. Was more unrest coming to the country? The problem was worsened because the masses were uneducated and gullible. They were often swayed by whoever last spoke and promised them something—something in return for their vote. The promises never got delivered, the politicians stayed corrupt and the masses stayed ignorant and gullible. No one else the family knew was investing in the home country. "Why take a risk?" they all would say. "Go where the economy is stable and there is a proven track record for investors to earn profits." So the family was careful. They put their money to work (at a handsome rate of return) in other countries. But one day something strange, very strange, happened.

Word has it that the old grandmother of the wealthy Perchevana [Per-chev'-a-na] family awakened one morning to find an owl sitting on the sill of her window.

"What do you want?" she asked, not really expecting the owl to answer.

But to her surprise, the owl said, "It is time you stop thinking of just your own family. You have enough money already. You should think of the whole country as your family. In the eyes of the Creator, all people are your family—the human family. It is time to help your human family—it is time to

help your country." The owl cleared his throat, as owls are not used to talking this much.

"What must I do?" asked the old woman.

"Invest in your own country!" exclaimed the owl. "Can't you see that the people cry out for jobs? Can't you see many bright minds go uneducated? Can't you see that many of the people barely know how to sign their name or how to do basic math skills--let alone being able to practice political awareness?!" And the owl cleared his throat again. This was a lot of talking, for an owl. When owls do talk they say wise things, but it still makes their throats feel scratchy.

The old woman, the oldest person in the Perchevana family, said: "I need to take a minute to think about this." She closed her eyes and sat there in her bed and thought. She thought for a long time. Finally, just when she was ready to say "Yes, I will do it," she heard the flutter of wings! Quickly she opened her eyes and looked toward the window—but there was nothing there, nothing but the curtains swaying slightly in the breeze. There was no owl, nothing but the open window. But she noticed a good feeling in her heart, and pleasant warmth. The warmth grew. Soon it felt as if her entire heart was glowing. She felt really good. She had not felt this good in a very long time!

It was not long after the owl visit that she noticed how hard her gardener, Maurice, was working. There was really too much work for one person. She hired an extra gardener to help Maurice. She told the man who kept her stables he could hire some extra help too—and she specified it should be someone who really needed a job—perhaps someone with a family to feed. When her granddaughter's friend, Katiana, mentioned she had lost her job, Grandma told Katiana to come around, maybe they could use her in the kitchen. And of course, as you probably guessed—Katiana was hired too. Grandma Perchevana liked creating jobs so people could earn a living.

But Grandma Perchevana worried that even though she had the money and could afford it, she couldn't keep making up jobs for people, not real jobs, not productive jobs. She simply didn't need any more help. She was wise enough to know that responsible people want to earn their keep, as the

saying goes, not just be given a hand out. She knew it wouldn't work to give them money for doing nothing.

Not long after that her gardener, Maurice, told her his son Jean was going to go to the United States to work in a furniture making factory. The son was good at making things with his hands, and he needed a job badly. The economy was good in the States and people there were buying furniture. Of a sudden an idea came to her!

She blurted it out! "Maurice, tell Jean to stay here in our country! We'll start a furniture making factory right here. We will ship it to the States for sale—since there is a demand for furniture there!"

Maurice's eyes lit up! "Marvelous!" he cried. "I did not want Jean to have to go so far away. He is very precious to me."

"Ok", she said. "Do you think you can fix up the old barn for a place to start building the furniture?"

"Of course I can! And I will get Jean and his friends to help me."

The barn was made ready and within 30 days simple pieces of furniture were being turned out by Jean and his friends, who were good with their hands too. Jean and Grandma spent several evenings making phone calls to set up plans to have the furniture sent to a wholesaler in the States. He would pay, up front, 30% of the negotiated price for the furniture. He would pay another 30% upon arrival at his warehouse and he would pay the final 40% when he sold the furniture to retailers.

It looked like, if he knew about it, the old owl, would be happy. Maurice would get to keep his grandson in the country. Jean and his friends were working at real jobs and they would need to hire others as the business grew. The stores in the village benefited as Jean and his employees spent part of their new salaries for things they needed and wanted. Grandma was glad to be creating jobs and receiving interest on the money she lent to the business for start up. Who knows? Maybe the owl did know....

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Things developed quickly. Soon there were 8 employees working for Jean. The freight man who handled the shipping hired a part time person to help him with the increased shipping. He liked having more freight to ship because he made more money. His wife and children enjoyed getting to shop for items they could never afford before their business increased.

But a problem was developing in the factory—if you can call a converted barn a factory. Some of the men making the furniture couldn't read, write or do basic math, at least not without a major effort. As the little factory got busier, Jean wanted to leave written instructions for the men. But because they couldn't read, trying this plan caused lots of confusion and slow downs.

Jean also wanted them to count up about how many of each of the various furniture parts they would need for the upcoming week and to give him a written request for parts. For example, how many yards of leather, how many small wooden legs, how many large wooden legs, how many braces, how many wedges, how many upholstery tacks, and etc. This would bring helpful organization to the work and allow them to produce with fewer delays. And by ordering in advance, Jean could get better prices on the parts needed. This made the entire operation more efficient, more profitable. He explained to the workers that they would get a share of the increased profits.

All the workers liked the idea and understood that it made sense. But, with some embarrassment, the ones who had trouble reading, writing, and doing basic math explained why they could not carry out Jean's new plan.

Jean thought about this long and hard. The people were good workers; they merely lacked basic academic skills. They were uneducated. He discussed this with his father, Maurice. After a lot of discussion, they hit upon an idea. They really liked their new idea. They agreed to present it to Grandma Perchevana the next morning!

The next morning, Maurice began hesitantly. "You know, Ma'am, if we ever needed more space for something, here in this agreeable climate, all we would really need is to put up support poles, roof trusses and put on a roof.

It would not be a lot of trouble. It would cost very little and not take a lot of time to build it."

"That's right," Jean chimed in. "If we needed a place to teach, you know, sort of a school. Well, it would be easy to build." He was about to say more, but Grandma interrupted.

"I think you men want me to say it's okay to build a school here on Perchevana land. I think you want me to sponsor it and be its benefactor!"

When they dared look up to see her face, they saw her grin! Then all three were grinning.

"It is a great idea," she said. "But in case anyone questions our reasons for it, can you tell me exactly WHY we are going to do it?"

They explained in detail to her about Jean's idea for improving organization and efficiency in the little factory.

He wanted the men to be able to read, and also to write some—but without struggle. He told how the men needed basic math skills too, so they could add, subtract, multiply, divide, and in general, work with numbers.

He also explained his thoughts about the need for education in personal and in public health practices. Diseases could be prevented if good sanitation and health practices were taught and adopted. He mentioned hand washing, toilets that don't use water and deal with human waste scientifically and the importance of wells and clean water supplies.

He went on to explain that by using a friend's computer he had learned on the internet how some people are drilling their own well in many parts of the world simply using pressurized water and a few pieces of inexpensive equipment. It involved a gasoline engine powering an air compressor and several barrels of water that one re-uses many times in the drilling process—going down anywhere from fifteen to ninety feet. If the well tested okay people could drink the water. But regardless, they could use it for drip irrigation in their gardens. He thought if people would learn basic

gardening skills and plant nutrition they could both save money and be healthier by growing more of their own food.

He finally stopped talking.

In her usual wisdom, Grandma, after hearing them out, summed it up thusly. "In other words, if the work force is educated and is healthy, they, and all the rest of us too, will benefit." She was right, when the workmen had more skills, everyone associated with the business would benefit. And having them be more healthy just seemed obvious!

"I like it. Let's do it," she said. As she walked away, probably happy herself, both Maurice and Jean were very happy.

But the next morning when Grandma visited the factory and told Jean they needed to have a talk, he grew concerned. What if she had changed her mind!

As it turned out she did have some changes in mind. She wanted to educate not only their adult workers, but also the children in the community whose parents could not afford to send them to private schools! Wow! This was a great idea. Educate everyone.

Jean said, "Well, I can see that, just as it helps with our factory, it will help lift up the entire community if our people are educated because ..."

But she cut him off, "because when people are educated they go on to help raise the standard of living for everyone. All boats rise with the tide! Not only do they learn basic skills, like we need here, but their creativity is stimulated, so they can develop their natural talents. That way, the world will get the best they have to offer. Also, they become more politically aware and corrupt government officials can't lead them around blindly. Educated people are better equipped to demand better government from their leaders." Then she stopped talking. Those seemed to be her final thoughts.

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After awhile she spoke again. "You know, Jean" Grandma Perchevana said, "Mr. Hotshot Cigario would really get a big surprise the next time he comes to the community to buy votes if people we educated enough to see through his old political tricks."

"Right you are," Jean said.

"Dad, how long has Mr. Cigario been buying up the votes around here—and how has he gotten away with it for so long?"

Maurice was glad to share light on this. "That Mr. Cigario, he has been promising these people the moon for so long I can't remember!"

"Has he ever delivered?" asked Jean with a twinkle in his eye, knowing full well he hadn't.

"You know what I mean, not the real moon—but stuff the people want. Instead he comes up with excuses like budget cuts, new regulations; the other party won't support him, etc. etc."

"Surely they know he is a fake, a fraud, don't they?" asked Grandma.

"Well yes, sort of," said Maurice. "But he turns around and buys a bicycle for a poor family, gets a new bell put in the church and so on." Maurice explained that the people just didn't know how to go about finding out what was true and what was not.

"Got a way to educate them to not vote for Hotshot Cigario?" asked Maurice.

Grandma and Jean exchanged knowing glances. Jean spoke first, sensing that Grandma would agree.

"We can't educate against one specific person Dad. But what we can do is teach people to do political analysis on politicians and political situations." Grandma was smiling.

Jean continued by stating the obvious. "What you do is FOLLOW THE MONEY. See who is paying for certain ads, bankrolling campaigns, who are granting very special deals on the fancy car the politician is driving. WHO will benefit from laws being proposed? Will it be the people or some wealthy private interest group?"

"So, you mean you just learn to ask these questions and they lead you to see which politicians are a fraud?" asked Maurice, still skeptical.

"He is right," Grandma said. "Teaching people to ask the questions about money, who benefits, how are opposition rivals treated, and others too. Some politicians are wonderful and some are crooks. Oh yes, don't forget to check their wealth levels before they entered office and now, or when they left. Check on their tax returns—what did they report? And how much tax do they pay? Also, there is timing—especially if so called 'news releases' had an effect upon other events. Why announce the item at this time? What else is, or is not, going on in politics—often the timing of announcements is strategic."

"And I should imagine, check their record and see what they are saying they believe now and compare that to what they said they believed in the past. Do they have a consistent record or does it jump all over the place." said Maurice. "I have to get back to work, but I am glad something really useful is going to be taught in our public schools! How to spot the political crooks!" Maurice left.

Grandma and Jean knew they had just developed an idea for the school that was really good.

"You know," Jean mused. "This could become a real game changer!"

"That's right," Grandma said. "If we start creating lots of jobs around here, and get kids to learn how to analyze political situations and politicians, that—that will be a big deal."

As if taken by a noble idea, they each got quiet. It is as if they were profoundly amazed as to the far reaching effects of what they had just discussed.

In the hush that followed her strong and wise words, Jean thought he heard something ... something like the flutter of feathered wings ... perhaps an owl. Yes, that must be it ... an owl, somewhere far off in the distance ... an owl ... and the sound of its fluttering wings ... carried on the wind.

In a bit, Grandma broke the unplanned silence that pulsed around them.

"Did you just hear something?"

Softly Jean replied.

"I kind of think so, but I can't be sure."

Then they both fell silent again, in that pulsating silence, listening to hear if the wind would bring them another gift...the blessed sound of owl wings fluttering from so far away that it seemed to come on the winds of a distant magic world.

*This story illustrates the importance of 1) **Investments** [leading to jobs], 2) **Education** [basics in reading, writing, math, personal and public health] and 3) **Political Awareness** [understand how politics work] in raising the standard of living, usually simultaneous with developing a middle class, in 3rd and 2nd world societies. Author: Jerry Dean Epps, Ph. D. 2012