

## The Report Card by Jerry Woodfill

PERSONAL HABITS	1	2	3	4	5	6
I keep my hands nails and teeth clean I comb my hair and wash my face often.	S	S	S	S	S	S
I use my handkerchief and cover my mouth when I cough.	S	S	S	S	S	S
I keep things out of my mouth.	N	N	N	N	N	N
I take off and put on my own wraps.	S	S	S	S	S	S
SOCIAL HABITS	1	2	3	4	5	6
I am still and listen when others talk.	N	N	N	N	N	N
I follow directions and signals.	S	N	S	N	S	N
I work and play well with my friends and share with them.	S	S	S	S	S	N
I am friendly and polite.	S	S	S	S	S	N

  

WORK HABITS	1	2	3	4	5	6
I make nice things and try to be neat.	S	S	S	S	S	S
I think of things to do and make by myself.	S	S	S	S	S	S
I keep trying and finish everything I start.	S	S	S	S	S	S
I take care of school things. I put them away.	S	S	S	S	S	S
GROWTH IN SELF CONTROL	1	2	3	4	5	6
I use my soft voice in school.	N	N	N	N	N	N
I go to school every day unless I'm ill.	S	S	S	S	S	S
I arrive on time.	S	S	S	S	S	S
I obey safety rules.	S	S	S	S	S	S
MUSIC AND RHYTHMS	1	2	3	4	5	6
I like music I keep time and do what the music tells me.	S	S	S	S	S	S
Rhythm	S	S	S	S	S	S
Singing	S	S	S	S	S	S

*Jerry has talked very, very much.*

(Note: The letter “N” equates to an “F”, the lowest grade possible.)

Here it is...the report card of a potential felon. You be the judge: In the PERSONAL HABITS Category – I keep things out of my mouth – F, I am still and listen when others talk – F, I follow directions and signals – F, I work and play well with my friends and share with others – F, I am friendly and polite – F. In the GROWTH IN SELF CONTROL Category - I use my soft voice in school, – F. And then the final indignity, a note to my Mom

“Jerry has talked very, very much.”

Shep would have classed that last one as a “Double-Dogged” *very*, the depth of failure. Actually, to my credit, I passed the category of – I take off and put on my own wraps. Had I failed that I surely would have been on my way to the reformatory. Putting on other children’s wraps was tantamount to stealing them.

With the luxury of fifty years to reflect, I must admit, in part, to having honestly earned some of those F’s. In fact, I continue to fail in them, especially, *keeping things out of my mouth* (I chew my fingernails.), and *using my soft voice* ( Numerous times I’ve been asked by groups I’ve addressed to speak more quietly. In fact, rarely is a PA system needed when I speak.) Likewise, concerning my failings in *I am still and listen when others talk*, I continue to make low marks.

But a trio of those F’s is wholly unjustified, to the extent that I’d like to have my record expunged by an attorney whose special gift is litigation in matters of wrongful grading. “I want a pardon, my grade changed, the records corrected.” There is ample evidence that *I do follow directions and signals*, that *I do work and play well with my friends and share with others*, that *I do act friendly and polite*. These injustices rank with officials giving the Soviet

basketball team extra time to defeat the Americans in the 1972 Olympics.

Regarding following directions, I need present but a single evidential exhibit - *a marriage which has lasted 41 years*. No husband who fails to follow directions could hope to sustain marital bliss for more than four decades. “Expunge my record, in regard to following directions immediately, your honor!” Indeed, I have been graded unjustly by that elementary school judge, my third grade teacher.

Furthermore, I submit to the court that there is not one engineering graduate of Rice University who would fail the category of *following directions and signals*. It is an impossibility for such a person to earn an engineering degree. Following directions is the stuff, that thing which makes an engineer. Additionally, I not only followed directions but composed them in designing the Moon Lander’s warning system. Had I not followed directions, Neil Armstrong might not have landed successfully at *Tranquility Base*. Nevertheless, had the *Eagle* landed, a directionless warning system engineer would have Armstrong and Aldrin still awaiting liftoff, 37 years later. “Likewise, stenographer of this court write this down in your proceedings. ‘No recipient of a college basketball scholarship can fail to follow directions.’ ”

“Your honor, do you not know of a facet of the game known as the *play*? The *play-book* is a carefully orchestrated listing of *directions* for scoring baskets. I followed its directions so artfully that I received a basketball scholarship.”

“Additionally, members of the jury, the charge is that I likewise failed to follow signals, an impossibility for a motor vehicle operator of some fifty plus years who has never been ticketed for ignoring a traffic signal. Indeed, a grade of F in following signals is wholly unjust. I insist the court provide restitution. Rectify this wrong.”

Now, lest my account appear unfair, biased in my favor, there is a posthumous witness for the prosecution, my Mom. Her testimony likely would deal with the unhappy destruction of her cherished 22 cubic foot Westinghouse refrigerator. Her testimony could equip the prosecutor with valuable cross examination questions proving that my third grade teacher’s judgment was just.

“Mr. Jerry Woodfill, regarding the tragic incident of your mother’s newly purchased \$350 refrigerator and your hapless destruction of the same, I have a few questions.”

“What has this to do with following instructions?” I’d be wondering.

“Sir, did you not stab its delicate aluminum freezer lining with an ice pick, thereby causing its demise.”

On the defensive, I would respond,

“Your honor, I meant no harm. I was simply trying to remove an ice tray held in place by frost deposits.”

“But Mr. Woodfill, wouldn’t one, so erudite as your grades would indicate, have read the operator’s manual for said refrigerator?”

Then, the assertion would come from the DA,

“Your honor, may I approach the bench?”

I’d be watching as he presented a document, actually a pamphlet, for the judge’s perusal. His honor’s response would be...

“Yes, we shall include the operating manual as exhibit A, page 1, especially noting the stated instructions – *Read the directions carefully before attempting to remove frost from refrigerator. Be careful never to use a sharp object such as a knife or an ice pick to remove frost. Use of sharp tools may puncture the Freon lining and void the warranty.*”

“Mr. Woodfill, did you follow these directions?”

“No, your honor. I did not.”

“Then, the prosecution rests its case...”

With respect to that charge, the jury would be out only briefly, I’d have lost the case. That teacher was justified in failing me with respect to following directions. Ugh!

Doubtless, I’d fare better with failing - *I work and play well with my friends and share with others*. Surely, I could prove the injustice of failing this category. I’d employ character witnesses in my behalf. Hadn’t I been voted the first student council president of Highland High School. Such an honor is impossible for one who does not work well with friends.

Why, I’d never failed to assist an academically challenged classmate deal with homework. I’d shared my mental acumen generously, patiently, and without prejudice. Indeed, my benevolent-gratis tutoring might have classified me as a Brantwood United Fund provider. And, for this, I’m deemed a selfish malevolent playmate? This is a grave injustice. My record must be expunged, immediately.

And what about the athletic arena? That’s where a spirit of selfishness, is, at once, revealed. The youth, whose flawed persona, earns the title of “ball-hog” might fail the “plays well with friends” category but not me. Hadn’t I always thrown the ball to the “snow-bird” who lagged behind on defense, hoping to grab an easy basket after I’d rebounded an opponent’s missed shot? By all rights of pugilistic round-ball combat, I was entitled to fast break and enter a basket beside my name in the scorer’s ledger. Instead, I’d always lofted a long pass to that selfish snowbird. I did the work. He got the glory. Nathan Hale would have been proud of such philanthropic demeanor.

“Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I have been the victim of report card abuse. Right this wrong. In this regard I rest my case.”

However, the prosecution had been at work, uncovering hard evidence that my propensity to share and team with others was suspect. The cross examination was exceptionally revealing. I would rather omit its content, except that some kind of psychological cleansing might free me of those dark thoughts accompanying it.

“Mr. Woodfill, you’ve said, you were an unselfish team player. Is that right?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Why, then, did you violate your coach’s rule, not to ice skate during basketball season?”

“Did you not know, your punishment would lead to the team’s loss because you were benched? I would hardly call what you did teamwork. It was the height of self-indulgence. Not only did you fail to share the spirit of teamwork, you did not play fairly in behalf of your coach, your classmates, and your school. Indeed, you are among the most loathsome of traitorous felons. Not since Benedict Arnold betrayed our nation, has Lincoln Grade School experienced such treachery.”

“Your honor, I stand naked before you, i.e., with regard to my evil act. I implore the jury to be merciful in my behalf. Yes, I confess. My failing mark in sharing and playing with friends is just.”

What puzzles me, more than a half century later, is that failure came the final six weeks of the school year. For the previous six months, though not a sterling performance, I was, at least, mediocre in deportment. Why, the descent into the pit of social depravity?

Then, I remembered, a particularly nasty incident. It was unforgettable, simply by virtue of its intensity, a slashing, open handed blow to the right side of my face, catching me unawares. I’d been talking, actually more

like loud whispering, at an inappropriate moment. Because my accomplice was seated behind me and with limited peripheral vision (less than 180 degrees),

I failed to see the pugilistic pedagogue's stealthy advance within lethal striking distance. I liken it to the actuation of a executioner's guillotine, the pulling of the electric chair's knife switch, the blow which decked Jersey Joe Wolcott, Bill Vuckovich's fatal crash at Indy, and, perhaps, Gene Autry's disarming of a range rustler by fisticuffs rather than gunplay. It was devastating!

I'm reminded of that carnival test of strength, having a mallet-like hammer strike a catapulting target actuator, shooting a projectile upward to ring a bell. My face, head, and body became the actuator, projectile and bell with the angry feminine educator's arm and hand, the hammer-like mallet swung with awesome whipping velocity. The blow jacked me airborne from my seat, my head became a yoyo's body, my slight physical frame, the taunt string in tension, my chair, the gripping hand of the yoyo virtuoso.

The sting I felt would have sent a North Korean torture meter off-scale high-end. The shock and surprise must be akin to what one experiences in an auto-accident, when the air-bag actuates. No words came from my punisher's lips. Like one who administers vengeance from the visceral deep, the act was swift and decisive. In this the 2006 era of enlightened corporal-less punishment, such would have that pedagogue incarcerated in the Joliet prison, once home to John Dillinger. In the 1950s, **I got what I deserved.**

Likely, my dismal failing grades were assigned by that teacher as a result of that blow. Those Fs further inflicted pain. The woeful marks were a case of report card vengeance, final parting blows of satisfaction dealt Jerry Woodfill, and, of course, my parents. No retaliation would be forth coming from the Woodfill clan.

It was the summer recess! The sins and iniquities of the prior year were forgotten, except that my permanent record was besmirched forevermore. My final six weeks' grades were those of an elementary school hellion.

So I will continue to argue for restitution, especially, with regard to failure to be friendly and polite. I guess it had to do with who one was *friendly and polite to*... Had I learned early in life, a technique which future colleagues called *smoozing*, I might have reached lofty management levels career-wise. Later, I discovered there was a biblical basis for the error of my ways, "a fool is one who talks before he thinks." This is my paraphrase of a Proverb I'd often broken, one that ordained a work-life as a governmental journeyman.

Perhaps, this is the source of future occupational anguish. A *teacher's pet* persona does not always cease on departure from Lincoln School. It may continue on to the highest levels of industry, government, politics, and, yes, even ecclesiastical circles. I was never able to escape it insidious influence. Only when victory or defeat hung in the balance did I prevail over those who possessed the talent.

Unwarranted favoritism is discarded by its practitioners when athletic victory is in jeopardy, a business is about to go bankrupt, astronauts are about to be lost in space, an election is in jeopardy, or a church faces extinction. But, this third grader, knew nothing of the eternal truth. Such might have spared me that hand-ax-like-swinging-slap of an angry teacher. However, my classroom transgression had been too grave for a winsome smile and flattering apologetic words to have aborted. That single act of idle conversation destroyed months of achievement. "Where is the God of mercy?" I wondered.

"Members of the jury...yes, I was loud, never using my soft voice in school. I am helpless, at my voice's mercy. To this day, my speech has but one volume setting...LOUD!"

Again, I cite that report card: Note the string of failing marks assigned

to *using my soft voice*...an F every six weeks for the entire school year. This is the measure of a genetic flaw, not a willful abuse of friends or an act of nefarious selfish hoarding of a teacher's candy jar offerings. Indeed, it is, likewise, the reason for failing the category - *I am still and listen when others talk* five out of six periods.

It is a case of LVS, Loud Voice Syndrome, a disease which requires a ten step program for deliverance. I am a potential enrollee in a LVS anonymous program. Only through testimony, prayer and fasting does one overcome this malady. But don't ascribe character stains to my account. I am friendly. I am polite. I do share. I follow directions. I do play well with friends.

"Before closing, I implore the court's mercy in considering how I have applied my syndrome for the good of all mankind." The Highland High School 1960 Homecoming game stands out among my beneficent use of LVS.

The contest, played on our opponent's gridiron, (*Highland High School had no football field.*) needed a play-by-play announcer. By state rules, the home team had to provide such a person: "Whose loud voice, knowledge of the combatants, and speaking expertise could meet such a challenge among the HHS student body?"

An added challenge was the lack of an announcer's "sky-box". Having a "bird's eye view" was a prerequisite for sports-casters ever since those days Roman gladiators wielded weapons of carnage before thousands of sadistic citizens. But our borrowed field had none, at least not until Lester Twillinger, the team trainer, yelled, "Hey, look...there's a tall light pole at the 50 yard line with kind of a place to sit near the top for changing the light."

What followed reminded me of a scene from the 1962 movie *The Longest Day* about the World War II invasion of Normandy. My Rock 'n Roll idol Paul Anka played an army ranger. We needed such a volunteer ranger to lead the charge? Lester's revelation was responsible for what happened next... Every member of the team, along with the coaches, cheerleaders, home-coming queen's court, even the snotty nosed siblings of our Highland Trojan army of invaders looked at me. Yes, I was to be the one in harm's way that evening.

I'd always feared playing football, knowing the ever present threat of injury. That night I'd rather have been a 147 pound lineman than sit atop that thirty foot pole risking certain death should I fall from my perch.

Nevertheless, bravely, I climbed skyward, roster lists in hand. Even a lineman for the Northern Indiana Public Service Company had a safety strap, a belt tied to the waist to avert a fatal fall. Instead, my providers hooked a PA microphone onto my belt. No Everest adventurer had such a handicap, a 50 foot extension cord wired into the amplifier beneath the scorer's table. Yet, I succeeded in scaling the summit, reaching the two foot square servicing platform, adorned in my basketball lettermen's sweater, corduroy slacks, and white-buck-suede shoes.

(As student council president, I was to crown the home coming queen at halftime.) This was the meddle of a proud Highland Trojan, the inner stuff which led to that victory at Normandy, the pathos and passion which Paul Anka belted out his hit *I Did It My Way*.

And that's when, my handicap became a gift. Yes, Loud Voice Syndrome conquered the handicap of a wholly inadequate PA system. Though all rose for the *Star Spangled Banner*, I refused to follow-suit, tucking the microphone under my armpit and placing my hand over my rapidly beating heart. And then...switching the mike on, I carefully spoke with a moderately-controlled Jack Brickhouse voice, as though I was the famed Cubs sportscaster. At once, I heard the murmuring three stories below, "Louder...louder...we can't

hear you!"

Then it happened: I felt a quivering warmth arise from *out of my belly* as Scripture speaks of the supernatural gift of the Holy Spirit. It had to be the endowment of Samson's power from on high funneled through my loins, lungs and larynx. I opened my mouth and let it fly into the void below. LVS marvelously filled the stadium such that for the ensuing two hours, many of the patrons, cuffed their ears, listening to the booming shout from above.

Some might have mistaken it for that which Scripture predicts, a mighty shout from Heaven on that last day. Others said it was a supernatural blast of articulate cogent sports *announcery* heard from Griffith to the shores of Lake Michigan even among the swarthy denizens of the East Chicago steel mills and beyond.

Yes, that night *Jerry talked very, very much*. Likewise, *he used his loud voice in school*, and lastly, *he was not still listening to others*. For which your honor, ladies and gentlemen of the honor, and my dear teacher, I request a pardon, an expunging of my report card. And, somewhere, above, in the heavens, where I believe my pedagogue, Mom, and Dad now dwell, some quiet voices whisper.

"We understand."



The above is a generic 1951 third grade class photo. There are 28 seats arranged in seven rows from the blackboard. The seat of my crime was row four, seated next to the window. My attacker approached from the window aisle behind my desk, catching me unawares with a slashing open-handed check-slapping decapitating chop to my face.

**The Report Card Comprehension Questions**  
**(Enter answers on the line to left of each question.)**

PERSONAL HABITS		1	2	3	4	5	6
I keep my hands nails and teeth clean I comb my hair and wash my face often.		S	S	S	S	S	S
I use my handkerchief and cover my mouth when I cough.		S	S	S	S	S	S
I keep things out of my mouth.		N	N	N	N	N	N
I take off and put on my own wraps.		S	S	S	S	S	S
SOCIAL HABITS		1	2	3	4	5	6
I am still and listen when others talk.		N	N	N	N	N	N
I follow directions and signals.		S	S	S	S	S	S
I work and play well with my friends and share with them.		S	S	S	S	S	S
I am friendly and polite.		S	S	S	S	S	S

  

WORK HABITS		1	2	3	4	5	6
I make nice things and try to be neat.		S	S	S	S	S	S
I think of things to do and make by myself.		S	S	S	S	S	S
I keep trying and finish everything I start.		S	S	S	S	S	S
I take care of school things. I put them away.		S	S	S	S	S	S
GROWTH IN SELF CONTROL		1	2	3	4	5	6
I use my soft voice in school.		N	N	N	N	N	N
I go to school every day unless I'm ill.		S	S	S	S	S	S
I arrive on time.		S	S	S	S	S	S
I obey safety rules.		S	S	S	S	S	S
MUSIC AND RHYTHMS		1	2	3	4	5	6
I like music I keep time and do what the music tells me.		S	S	S	S	S	S
		S	S	S	S	S	S

*Jerry has talked very, very much.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Jerry Woodfill was a felon.  
 (T)rue or (F)alse
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The story is about \_\_\_\_\_.  
 a. A high school report card  
 b. A grade school report card  
 c. A driver's license exam  
 d. An intermediate school report card
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Jerry's grade in \_\_\_\_ was awful.  
 a. arithmetic  
 b. neatness  
 c. using his soft voice  
 d. completing his work
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The teacher liked how Jerry's talked.  
 (T)rue or (F)alse.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Jerry's evidence of following directions did not include. \_\_\_\_.  
 a. A marriage lasting 40 plus years.  
 b. He graduated as an engineer.  
 c. He had learned basketball plays.  
 d. He had memorized the Lincoln Lions' school song.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Jerry's evidence of sharing did include. \_\_\_\_.  
 a. He'd shared his jelly-roll.  
 b. He wasn't a "ball-hog" on the team.  
 c. He loaned a friend his Captain Video decoder ring.  
 d. He took the blame for a friend's *yelping* in class.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What was Jerry's punishment for unauthorized talking in class.  
 a. forced to stand in the corner.  
 b. writing *I will not talk* a thousand times on the blackboard  
 c. an vocal apology to the class  
 d. a slashing/slap across the face
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. To what did Jerry attribute his teacher's dislike of him?  
 a. She liked the girls better than the boys.  
 b. He was too loud and never still.  
 c. He had body odor.  
 d. She hadn't had her morning coffee.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. What did not Jerry compare a blow to?  
 a. an executioner's guillotine  
 b. Korean War torture  
 c. a boxer's knock-out punch  
 d. being whipped by the Merciless from the Flash Gordon matinee movie

- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. How did Jerry think he might have won the teacher's favor?  
 a. being quiet in class  
 b. applying the technique of *smoozing*  
 c. wishing her car on weekends  
 d. buying her a lavish gift
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Why did Jerry volunteer to be the announcer at the football game?  
 a. He liked heights.  
 b. He feared getting hurt playing.  
 c. He wanted to impress the girls.  
 d. He had a loud voice and everyone wanted him to volunteer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. What does the acronym LVS mean?  
 a. Liver Vine Strawberry  
 b. Loser's Vote Strong  
 c. Loud Voice Syndrome  
 d. Leslie Veronica Stringfellow
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Why did Jerry refuse to stand for the National Anthem?  
 a. He was unpatriotic.  
 b. He had not memorized the words.  
 c. He couldn't place his hand over his heart.  
 d. He was frightened he would fall.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. What was the skybox compared to?  
 a. Empire State Building  
 b. Mount Everest  
 c. Paul Anka  
 d. the Astrodome
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. What did not Jerry wear?  
 a. letterman's sweater  
 b. white-buck-suede shoes  
 c. corduroy slacks  
 d. Chicago Cubs hat

- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Jerry made N's in \_\_\_\_\_.
- personal hygiene
  - being still and attentive
  - neatness
  - finishing what he started

- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. What was the "double-dooed" teacher's note?
- "Jerry is an idiot's idiot!"
  - "Jerry is a potential felon."
  - "...talked very, very much."
  - "Jerry is an angel's angel."

- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Jerry's punishment was not like...
- being seated apart from the class
  - a race car crash at Indy
  - being "fried" in an electric chair
  - a carnival's test of strength

- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Jerry makes his case by \_\_\_\_\_.
- speaking to an imagined court
  - listing only his achievements
  - having friends vouch for him
  - showing his teacher's prejudice

- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Jerry compares his punishment to
- Cold War torture
  - tossing a yo-yo
  - a boxer's knockout punch
  - being crushed by an earthquake

### The Report Card Vocabulary List

<u>Word</u>	<u>Synonym</u>
1. felon	criminal
2. tantamount	of equal value
3. expunge	delete, remove
4. litigation	a legal court contest
5. erudite	learned, informed
6. acumen	discernment
7. pugilistic	combative
8. philanthropic	benevolent
9. inappropriate	unsuitable
10. pedagogue	instructor, teacher
11. persona	character, role
12. genetic	inherited, hereditary
13. pathos	sympathetic pity
14. syndrome	condition, disorder
15. articulate	eloquent, fluent, lucid
16. cogent	forceful, credible
17. beneficent	helpful
18. carnage	gore, butchery
19. sadistic	cruel, brutal, ruthless
20. ecclesiastical	churchly, religious