



The **7** Principles
That Shaped
His Life and Will
Change Yours

*"Coach Wooden didn't
just teach basketball—
he taught life."*

TONY DUNGY

COACH WOODEN

PAT WILLIAMS

with JIM DENNEY

Foreword by TONY DUNGY

“I urge you to read this pertinent book—and in Coach Wooden’s words, ‘discipline yourself so no one else has to.’”

Joe Maddon, Tampa Bay Rays manager

“I only spent three years at UCLA while Coach Wooden was still coaching, but I received a lifetime of positive influence from being around him. I leaned on what I learned from him many times throughout my career. Being able now to pick up Pat Williams’s new book, *Coach Wooden*, and refresh my memories of all the conversations I had with Coach Wooden is very stimulating to me. I’m positive that you will find this wonderful book as valuable and powerful as I have. Thank you, Pat Williams!”

Dick Vermeil, former Philadelphia Eagles, St. Louis Rams,
and Kansas City Chiefs head coach

“John Wooden has had more influence on my coaching career than any other person. I have always admired the fact that John could tell you not only what he did as a coach but also why he did it and why it was important to do it that way, better than any other coach I have known. He will be remembered for his tremendous coaching accomplishments on the court but even more for his faith, his character, and the influence he had on so many other lives. I highly recommend Pat Williams’s book.”

Tom Osborne, University of Nebraska athletic director

“This book is about the early years of the greatest basketball coach who ever lived. John Wooden not only taught his players about basketball, he taught them how to live and appreciate life. He was a hero not just to basketball fans but to everybody. I respected John Wooden as a great coach but more importantly as a great man.”

Tommy Lasorda, former Los Angeles Dodgers Hall-of-Fame manager

“We can never agree on who was the greatest player or coach in any sport, except for basketball. It’s Coach Wooden, hands down. Even better, he was the best of all the great ones off the court. He had no equal, as you’ll learn in this fascinating new book by his friend Pat Williams.”

Jim Boeheim, Syracuse University head basketball coach

“Coach Wooden had retired from coaching before I was born, yet he is one of the coaches whom I have most admired and studied. He left a long-lasting mark, not only on the game but on all of us striving to be better leaders. This book will explain how he did it.”

Brad Stevens, Butler University head basketball coach

“Coach Wooden has had a positive effect on my life, and after reading this book you will thank Pat Williams for keeping alive his philosophy and success principles.”

Lou Holtz, former Notre Dame University and
University of South Carolina head football coach

“Coach Wooden’s coaching philosophy has played a major role in my basketball career. Now you can learn about the foundation of his life in this important book by Pat Williams. Drop everything you’re doing and start reading.”

Mike Krzyzewski, Duke University head basketball coach

“Pat Williams has done a great job in capturing the essence of John Wooden—both the coach and the man. I enjoyed this book and you will too.”

Sparky Anderson, former Detroit Tigers Hall-of-Fame manager

“Pat Williams has spent a lifetime studying the success principles of his friend John Wooden. This new book is loaded with Wooden wisdom that will deeply impact all of us.”

Bill Parcells, Miami Dolphins executive
vice president of football operations

“I have read a lot of Coach Wooden’s work, and it just makes so much sense to implement many of the principles that he has taught while he was coaching and during his retirement. This book may be the best of all.”

Mark Richt, University of Georgia head football coach

“I have an enormous admiration for Coach Wooden and his coaching philosophy. This book adds great depth to the legend of Coach. You will enjoy it immensely.”

George Karl, Denver Nuggets head coach

“Along with my father, Dr. Lee Tressel, John Wooden truly has been the inspiration of my life. Every person, especially every coach, will be touched by the words and lessons of the great John Wooden.”

Jim Tressel, Ohio State University head football coach

“John Wooden represented all the good qualities coaches are always teaching their young athletes. Coach Wooden was a master of getting people to perform at their maximum. This text will define why he was the greatest leader ever to grace the sidelines.”

Dick Vitale, ESPN college basketball analyst

“I have known both Pat Williams and Coach Wooden for a number of years. No one could tell the story of the greatest coach of all time better than Pat.”

Jim Calhoun, University of Connecticut head basketball coach

“Get ready for a terrific book based on the man who personified greatness and goodness. I loved Coach Wooden and you will too after reading this account of his life.”

Dick Enberg, Hall-of-Fame sports broadcaster

COACH WOODEN

The **7** Principles That Shaped His Life
and Will Change Yours

PAT WILLIAMS
with JAMES DENNEY



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Foreword

A Fine Legacy

The year was 1965, and Cazzie Russell and the Michigan Wolverines faced the UCLA Bruins in the NCAA finals. At the tender age of nine, I was a rabid Michigan basketball fan, and I thought Cazzie was invincible. I didn't know anything about UCLA or the Bruins coach, John Wooden, even though the Bruins had won their first NCAA title the previous year.

Well, Coach Wooden unleashed his Bruins, led by Walt Hazzard and Gail Goodrich. My dad and I listened to the game on the radio, and I couldn't believe what I heard: The Bruins crushed my beloved Wolverines 91–80, winning the NCAA championship for the second season in a row.

Over the years that followed, the legend of Coach John Wooden grew and grew. The Bruins not only won an incredible string of championships, but Coach Wooden's teams also produced scores of marquee players who went on to stardom in the NBA. My own college and pro career took me into football instead of basketball, but I continued to be

fascinated by Coach Wooden's phenomenal success at UCLA. Each year, his roster would change and star players would graduate, yet the Bruins remained consistently successful. What was the *single* factor that *never* changed?

Coach John Wooden.

Whenever I read about Coach Wooden or saw him interviewed on TV, I could tell that there was an added dimension in his coaching style and his personality. He didn't just coach teamwork and preparation and strategy. He coached character and attitude and ideals. I remember being impacted by a little three-line poem my high school coach gave me, which was ascribed to Coach Wooden. Though Coach Wooden doesn't claim to have authored it, he certainly popularized it. The poem read:

Talent is God-given: be humble.
Fame is man-given: be thankful.
Conceit is self-given: be careful.

After my playing career with the Pittsburgh Steelers, I went into coaching and became a student of Coach Wooden's coaching philosophy. I read everything that was written about him. I was impressed by the fact that Coach Wooden didn't just teach basketball—he taught *life*. He taught the fundamentals of good character, integrity, a strong work ethic, and teamwork—all the qualities necessary to success in life. He taught as much by his example as by his words. Though he was demanding and put his players through rigorous workouts, he was never personally demeaning, he never disciplined in anger, and he never used profane language.

Coach Wooden proved that you don't have to intimidate a player to motivate him or correct him. And while you are training your players' minds and bodies, don't forget to speak to their hearts. I was convinced that if the most successful coach in college basketball could be that kind of coach, then

I could find success in coaching football by remaining true to my values and my Christian faith. And that's what I set out to do.

I feel a great affinity with Coach Wooden. Like him, I was raised by parents who instilled in me the values and character qualities I needed for success—and like him, I was raised in the Christian faith. I'm the man I am because of my father, Wilbur, and my mother, Cleomae, both of whom were educators. Dad always taught me, "You don't have to do things the way other people do. If you go out and do it a different way, you'll become a leader."

A lot of people doubted that my style of coaching could win championships—but all of that changed after Super Bowl XLI. I thank God that I got the chance to prove it could be done—and I thank God for Coach Wooden, who led the way.

It has been fascinating to read this book by Pat Williams and to learn more about the seven-point creed that Joshua Hugh Wooden taught to his son Johnny so many years ago. These are the same values and principles my parents taught me in my formative years. It's instructive to see how John Wooden's father distilled these truths down to a seven-point creed, which continues to shape many lives today. By taking those seven truths and exploring them in depth, Pat Williams has performed a great service. Through interviews with dozens of John Wooden disciples, he has revealed scores of hidden facets of these seven great truths.

Like the rest of the sports world, I was saddened in June 2010 when I heard that Coach Wooden had passed away. He lived a long and full life, yet he was such a great soul that we wished we could keep him among us forever. Though he retired from basketball, he never stopped teaching, mentoring, and shaping lives. He continued living out those seven principles right to the end of his life.

John Wooden has left us, but the truths he taught us—and the truths his father taught him—still go on. That is a fine legacy for any man to leave.

Tony Dungy,
Super Bowl–winning NFL coach and author of *Quiet Strength*, *Uncommon*, and *The Mentor Leader*

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Hearty thanks also go to Andrea Doering, senior acquisition editor; Twila Bennett, senior director of marketing; and the entire Revell team for their vision and insight, and for believing that we had something important to say in these pages.

And, finally, special thanks and appreciation go to my wife, Ruth, and to my wonderful and supportive family. They are truly the backbone of my life.

Introduction

Well Done, Coach

During the first week of June 2010, my writing partner, Jim Denney, and I were preparing to put the finishing touches on this book. The chapters were mostly complete, and we were looking forward to finishing the final edits over the weekend. But on Wednesday of that week, my phone rang and I heard the voice of Coach Wooden's daughter, Nan.

"Pat," she said, "I wanted to let you know that my brother, Jim, and I have put Daddy in the hospital. We don't expect him to come out."

"Oh, Nan," I said, "I'm so sorry. I'll certainly be praying for Coach and for your family."

"Thank you. We just want him to rest comfortably and to be where he feels loved. He's very weak and frail. We're praying for him to go peacefully to be with Mother."

We talked for about twenty minutes about her father and about her grandfather Joshua Hugh Wooden and his

seven-point creed. She shared with me a few memories of her grandfather.

“I left Martinsville when I was thirteen,” she told me. “That was in 1948, when Daddy came to coach at UCLA. That was the last time I saw my grandfather, but I remember him well. There was always a comfort in my soul when I was with my grandfather. When I was small, he would read to me and rub my back.

“He had a strong faith in God, just like Daddy. My grandfather had high ideals, and he lived by them. He didn’t preach at you; he just lived out his faith. I never heard him say an unkind word, and when you see someone live that way, it inspires you. It makes you want to be like him. I suppose that’s why Daddy was so much like him.”

Nan told me about Coach’s first great-great-grandchild, who was not yet born. Little Charlie was due in August, and Coach had hoped to be on hand for Charlie’s arrival. The lineage goes like this: Nan’s daughter is Caryn; Caryn’s daughter is Cori; Cori’s son is Charlie—and Cori really wanted Coach and Charlie to meet each other.

But it was not to be. Coach went to be with the Lord—and with his beloved wife, Nell—on Friday evening, June 4, 2010. He is survived by his son, Jim; his daughter, Nan; his seven grandchildren; his thirteen great-grandchildren; and one soon-to-be-born great-great-grandchild.

A number of Coach’s players and friends got to visit him in the final hours before he left us. One was Jamaal Wilkes, who went to see Coach on Thursday. After his visit, Jamaal reported, “Coach wanted to get up out of bed and shave. He said, ‘I’m getting ready to go see Nellie.’”

The Sunday evening after Coach passed away was Game 2 of the NBA Finals between the Lakers and the Celtics in Los Angeles. At halftime, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Bill Walton talked about Coach Wooden’s impact on their lives and their last good-byes with him.

“His impact was huge,” said Kareem, who cut short a trip to Europe and flew home to see Coach one last time. “We thought he was teaching us the fundamentals of the game. But he was really teaching us life skills. He wanted us to be good citizens. He wanted us to be good parents. He wanted us to leave the university with a degree and to go out into the world and do meaningful things. He was such an effective teacher that it’s hard to put that into perspective.

“I was really blessed that I made the choice to come to UCLA and have Coach Wooden mentor me and teach me during such an important part of my life. . . . Coach even taught me how to be a better parent. When I had children and I wondered how to deal with them, I would think back to how Coach would challenge us as players.

“When I went to see him at the hospital, he was under sedation, so I could only talk to him internally. But at least I got to see him and be with him, and he was still alive. He died only some three hours after I left him. But just to be in the same room with him and feel the family thing that was still happening around him—his children and grandchildren were there—it reminded me of what so much of my life has been about.”

Bill Walton said, “Coach made me the player I was and the person I am. He was tough, he was firm, he was demanding, he was challenging—but he was fair and he made it fun. We could not wait to get to practice each and every day. What a grand celebration of life it was. He never came to practice and said, ‘What do *you* guys want to do today?’ He was the man in charge.

“The day I truly realized what Coach had meant in my life was the day I walked out of there. We had the pyramid of success, we had the seven-point creed, we had the two sets of threes, we had all the maxims and Woodenisms like, ‘It’s a game of skill, timing, and position. It’s not a game of size and strength.’ But when I walked out the door, after

losing and failing and flopping in my senior year, he wrote a special maxim to me: ‘Walton, it’s the things you learn after you know it all that count.’ I still have that to this very day.

“I had said my good-byes to Coach three months earlier. We both knew. But I had to see him one last time, so I went to the hospital on Tuesday to see him. He winced and said, ‘Oh no, it’s not you again!’ And we laughed, and I told him one last time, ‘Coach, thank you. I love you, and I’m sorry for all the consternation I caused you.’”

“Of Gentle Disposition . . .”

This book was written in the final year of Coach John Wooden’s life. Only this introduction, the foreword, and the epilogue were composed after he passed away. That is why, throughout the pages that follow, I talk about him in the present tense. That is why all the players and friends I interviewed speak about him in the present tense. Coach was still living when these chapters were written.

I’ve decided to leave this book in the present tense. I made the decision not to go back and rewrite this book as if Coach were no longer with us. And part of the reason for that decision is something that one of Coach’s players, Andy Hill, said about him. Andy told me, “He won’t die. I’ve got him. Bill Walton’s got him. We’ve all got him. He’s not going anywhere.”

And it’s true. I’ve got him too. And so have you. I’m not going to write about him in the past tense, because he’s still with us.

We’ve got his integrity. Coach was the same man, regardless of circumstances. He was consistent. His walk matched his talk. As one of Coach’s former student managers told me, “Here’s the deal with John Wooden: There was only one of him. The John Wooden on the practice floor was the same

John Wooden in the locker room. The John Wooden in the locker room was the same John Wooden on the campus. And the John Wooden on the campus was the same John Wooden at home.”

We’ve got his wisdom, all the things he said and wrote and taught over the years. We’ve got his famous maxims, called “Woodenisms,” which appear as sidebars throughout these pages, and which are collected in the appendix at the end of this book. We’ve got his example of faith, prayer, humility, gratitude, and caring for others. We’ve got him. He’s not going anywhere.

Although I became personally acquainted with John Wooden only in the last decade, I first became aware of him in 1962, when I was a senior at Wake Forest and a catcher on the baseball team. That was the year our basketball team, with Len Chappell, Billy Packer, and Coach Bones McKinney, advanced to the Final Four. And that was also the first time Coach Wooden’s UCLA Bruins made it to the Final Four.

Wake Forest lost to Ohio State in the national semifinal, then faced UCLA in the consolation game. (The Bruins had been defeated by eventual champion Cincinnati.) Wake Forest beat UCLA, but that game was Coach Wooden’s last NCAA tournament loss for a long time. Over the next dozen years, Coach Wooden became the most successful coach in college basketball history, collecting eighty-eight consecutive wins, ten NCAA championships, and thirty-eight consecutive NCAA tournament victories.

Coach Wooden retired after the 1975 season and faded from public scrutiny for the next two decades. So many people in his position would have parlayed a record like his into a lucrative media and speaking career. But Coach Wooden’s humility kept him out of the limelight. He didn’t want to upstage any other coaches—and besides, he didn’t think anybody really wanted to hear what he had to say.

I wish I had known. I wish I had looked him up and befriended him during those twenty years of quiet semi-obscure. I wish I had sought him out and asked him to mentor me and influence me as he had influenced so many people like Kareem and Bill Walton and Andy Hill and all the rest.

But fortunately for us all, while Coach was in his midthirties, a publisher sought him out and encouraged him to write a book. That book was *The Essential Wooden*, and with its publication, Coach Wooden and his ideas became wildly popular once more. As I studied Coach's wisdom, I was inspired to write a book called *How to Be like Coach Wooden*. Out of that project came my friendship with Coach, for which I will always be grateful.

I always looked forward to my visits with Coach Wooden. Every time I left his presence, I felt as if my soul had been scrubbed clean. I had the same experience in Coach's presence that Nan Wooden said she felt in the presence of her grandfather Joshua Hugh Wooden: There was always a comfort in my soul when I was with Coach.

After spending time with Coach Wooden, I always wanted to take my "game" to the next level. After being with him, I always wanted to ratchet up my faith, my prayer life, my integrity, and my wisdom. I wanted to be more like Coach. I wanted him to be proud of me. I wanted him to know how much he meant to me and how much he had impacted my life.

Coach Wooden and I lived three thousand miles apart, yet he has been a part of my life every day for years. I have studied his life, memorized his maxims, and interviewed hundreds of people who knew him. I can't get enough of Coach Wooden and his wisdom. And I can't get enough of his father, Joshua Hugh Wooden—a man so wise and so rich in insight that he formulated these seven life principles:

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Help others.

3. Make each day your masterpiece.
4. Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible.
5. Make friendship a fine art.
6. Build a shelter against a rainy day by the life you live.
7. Pray for guidance and counsel, and give thanks for your blessings each day.

While I was working on this book, my friend Elmer Reynolds of Martinsville, Indiana, located a sixty-year-old copy of the *Martinsville Daily Reporter* from Wednesday, July 5, 1950, and faxed it to me. There on the front page was the obituary of Coach Wooden's father. The headline read, "J. Hugh Wooden Dies; Rites Today." The article spoke of his death after an illness of three weeks and said, "His four sons have been with them since the early part of his illness." The article also said, "For about fifteen years he had been employed at the Homelawn Sanitarium and was still there at the time he became ill."

Then, near the end of the obituary, there was this wonderful statement about the life of Joshua Hugh Wooden: "Of gentle disposition, Mr. Wooden had made many friends, and had always followed with great interest the athletic and teaching careers of his sons." What a great one-sentence eulogy for a life well lived. It speaks of the man's character, the esteem in which he was held, and his loving relationships with his sons. Of his father, Coach Wooden himself once wrote:

Joshua Hugh Wooden died long before the University of California—Los Angeles (UCLA) won a men's college basketball championship. Do I wish he'd lived to see me coach a team to a national title? Yes, but it wouldn't have mattered so much to him.

His priorities were different. Material things and public notice meant little. Education was important. Family was important. Outscoring someone in a basketball game, even

for a national championship, had much less significance. Dad lived long enough to see me accomplish what was important to him. Nevertheless, he was responsible for the things that happened to me as a coach. Therefore, it surprises people that I received hardly any basketball instruction from Dad—no tips on jump shots, free throws, or anything else. He seldom attended games and was only slightly interested in results. His concern and guidance were deeper.¹

And that statement about Joshua Hugh Wooden tells us a lot about Coach John Wooden and the impact he had on so many lives. The world celebrated this coach because of his victories and championships. But Coach's priorities were different. Material things and public notice meant little to Coach. Education was important. Family was important. His concern and guidance went far deeper than the game of basketball.

Like his father, Coach Wooden was a man of gentle disposition. Over his lifetime, he made many friends. And he always followed with great interest the lives and careers of the many young "sons" he mentored and coached. Like father, like son.

A Very Good Day

Saturday morning after Coach passed away, the mood was overcast at VIP'S Family Restaurant in Tarzana. The booth where Coach had breakfast every morning for the past fifteen years was empty. Somebody had placed flowers, a menu, and an 8 x 10 photo of Coach on his usual table. Even though the restaurant was full, no one sat at Coach's table. A sign marked the table reserved.

Things will never be the same at VIP'S.

But Coach wouldn't want his friends to be sad. He's right where he wants to be. He's home with Nell at last. He once wrote:

I was never preoccupied with dying. But perhaps like most people, I feared it. Losing Nell has cured me of any fear of death because I believe that when I'm called, when the Good Lord beckons according to His plan, I will go to heaven and be with her. Knowing this gives me peace.

Mind you, I'm in no hurry to leave, but I have no fear of leaving. When the time comes, it will be a very good day—Nell and I will be together again. In the meantime, each day of the journey is precious, yours and mine—we must strive to make it a masterpiece. Each day, once gone, is gone forever.

My father's words and deeds—his wisdom—taught me that and more.²

Coach Wooden's last appearance before an audience was in June 2008. He sat on the stage of the Nokia Theatre in Los Angeles with sports announcer Vin Scully and *L.A. Times* sports columnist T. J. Simers. During the evening, someone asked Coach, "When you get to the gates of heaven, what do you want to hear St. Peter say to you?"

In reply, Coach said simply, "Well done."

Well, Coach, you made it. That "very good day" has come. Thanks for all you taught us. Thanks for a life well lived.

God bless you, Coach. Well done.

1

A Common Man, a Leader's Leader

In July 2009, a blue-ribbon committee of sports experts helped the *Sporting News* rank the fifty greatest coaches of all time, in all sports. Number one on that list was John Wooden, the legendary head coach of the UCLA Bruins. His ten NCAA National Championships over twelve years is a record unmatched by any other coach in history. Even more amazing is the fact that seven of those championships occurred consecutively, and those seven championship seasons include an eighty-eight-game winning streak and four 30–0 undefeated seasons.

One of the great privileges of my professional sports career was to become personally acquainted with Coach. The more you study John Wooden, the more you realize that he is not only a *great* man—he's a *good* man. John Wooden is a man of character, wisdom, self-discipline, faith, integrity, honor, humility, and compassion for others.

There have been many books written about the life and philosophy of Coach John Wooden, but this is a book about

the *foundation* of Coach's life—a simple seven-point creed. For well over a decade, I have been intensely studying the life of John Wooden. Like the Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León in his search for the fountain of youth, I have been searching for the wellsprings of this man's greatness as a leader and a human being.

I've become convinced that both the greatness and the goodness of John Wooden can be traced to his father, Joshua Hugh Wooden. In fact, I believe the character and achievements of John Wooden can largely be traced to a piece of paper his father gave him on the day he graduated from the eighth grade at a little country grade school in Centerton, Indiana. Joshua Hugh Wooden was not a rich man, so the only gifts he could give his son that day were (as Coach later recalled) "a two-dollar bill, and a small card with a poem on one side and seven rules for living on the other."¹ The poem was a verse by Henry Van Dyke:

Four things a man must learn to do
 If he would make his life more true:
 To think without confusion clearly,
 To love his fellow-man sincerely,
 To act from honest motives purely,
 To trust in God and Heaven securely.²

The seven rules that Joshua Hugh Wooden wrote on the other side of the paper were:

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Help others.
3. Make each day your masterpiece.
4. Drink deeply from good books, especially the Bible.
5. Make friendship a fine art.
6. Build a shelter against a rainy day by the life you live.
7. Pray for guidance and counsel, and give thanks for your blessings each day.

As Joshua Wooden handed that piece of paper to twelve-year-old Johnny, he said very simply, "Son, try to live up to this." John Wooden placed that piece of paper in his wallet and has kept it with him throughout his life. Not only that, but he even kept the two-dollar bill his father gave him. Decades later he handed it down to his own son, Jim Wooden.

Denny Crum, a former UCLA assistant under John Wooden and longtime basketball coach at Louisville, told me, "Coach has carried the original piece of paper with the seven-point creed his whole life. I've seen him take the paper out of his wallet, where he's kept it safe for going on ninety years. The paper is almost impossible to read because it's been folded for so long. It's a slip of white silky paper and looks almost like a piece of parchment. It's amazing to think that the little document his dad gave him is still around."

Even more amazing is the impact of that little document on John Wooden's life. "That seven-point creed," Denny added, "has served as a guideline for Coach his entire life, and he honors those guidelines to the best of his ability. They really are a way of life for Coach. I've never seen him do anything that would dishonor his father or his family. He had a world of respect for his dad. Joshua Wooden was the big inspiration in Coach's life."

In my own study of John Wooden's life, I had come to the same conclusion. In fact, I am convinced that much of Coach Wooden's amazing success as a coach, a leader, and an influence on young lives can be traced to the simple words his father wrote on that piece of paper so many years ago.

My Introduction to Joshua Hugh Wooden

I've long been familiar with central Indiana because I attended Indiana University from 1962 to 1964, while working on my

master's degree. During those years, I fell in love with these wonderful people who call themselves "Hoosiers." I loved the small towns and the farmlands and the scenery of Indiana, but I had never visited Martinsville, the hometown of the greatest coach in sports history.

One of my favorite Hoosiers is a lifelong resident of Martinsville named Elmer Reynolds. He is a huge admirer of Coach Wooden, and he became an enthusiastic supporter of the book I was writing at the time, *How to Be like Coach Wooden*. He invited me to Martinsville and said, "I'll take care of all the details."

So in 2004, I flew to Indiana. With Elmer's help, I gathered everybody available who had known Coach Wooden—old-timers, distant relatives, friends, and neighbors. It was an eclectic group, and we met in Poe's Cafeteria, Coach Wooden's favorite little restaurant in Martinsville. We spent the better part of the day together. The good people of Martinsville shared hundreds of memories of John Wooden and his family, and I wrote down every detail. It was a marvelous day.

At the end of that session, I said to Elmer, "Is there anything else I should do in Martinsville before I leave?"

"Oh, yes. Let me round out the rest of your itinerary."

So Elmer and I left Poe's Cafeteria, and he took me to the historic high school gymnasium where John Wooden played basketball in the late 1920s. The building had been slated for demolition in the late 1970s, but wiser heads had prevailed and the town had restored and renovated this red-brick basketball palace instead of tearing it down. I remembered what Coach Wooden had said about Indiana basketball in those days: Hoosiers were just crazy about the game. Back when Johnny Wooden played high school basketball, a sign at the edge of town proclaimed the population of Martinsville to be forty-eight hundred people. Well, that old gymnasium seated

fifty-two hundred—the entire population of Martinsville plus four hundred more.

Next, Elmer and I drove out to the suburbs of Martinsville, to the farm where Coach grew up. The Wooden family farmhouse is still there. It is very small but in good repair (a brick porch has been added since Coach lived there), and it is surrounded by fields of tall green corn. The narrow dirt lane that used to pass by the Wooden family farmhouse is now Centerton Road, a wide, paved, two-lane road.

I stood on the side of that road in front of the house where John Wooden once lived, and Elmer snapped pictures. The house is probably wired for cable TV and the Internet today, but when Coach lived there, the house didn't even have electricity, running water, or indoor plumbing. I looked but could see no sign of the old outhouse that used to stand behind the house. (Coach called it a “three-holer,” so it must have been a truly deluxe privy!)

Next, Elmer took me to the cemetery where Coach Wooden's parents were buried. There we found the gravesites of Joshua Hugh Wooden and Roxie Anna Wooden, Coach's father and mother. Elmer and I stood there for several minutes, reading and touching their headstones, thinking about the life these two people had built together, the children they had brought into the world—four strapping sons, plus two daughters who had died very young, one in infancy, one at age two. And now they were at rest under the Indiana soil, beneath a brilliant blue Indiana sky.

It was an odd feeling, standing so close to John Wooden's parents yet separated from them by the decades. It put everything into perspective. There was a working farm next to the cemetery, and Elmer and I could hear the hubbub of farm activity going on. Looking over the fence, we saw a potbellied pig giving birth right next to the cemetery.

I thought to myself, *In all these years, a lot has changed—yet nothing has changed. It's an internet world, yet farm life*

is still farm life. The world keeps turning. The old values, the old principles, are still true. They'll always be true.

That was my introduction to Joshua Hugh Wooden, Coach Wooden's father. At the time, I thought it was the closest I would ever come to this man. But I was wrong.

I couldn't even imagine that, just a few years later, I would have the opportunity to talk to people who actually knew and remembered Joshua Hugh Wooden, the man who wrote the seven-point creed that shaped John Wooden's life.

Thousands of people carry a copy of those seven life principles on a little plastic card in their wallets. Years ago, Coach had them printed up and began handing them out to people, especially young people who needed a guiding hand in their lives.

I've always been fascinated by the unique relationship John Wooden had with his father. I've never seen any other famous person honor his father as John Wooden has honored Joshua Hugh Wooden. Those who know Coach and have worked alongside him make the same observation.

Jay Carty spent three years with John Wooden as a UCLA graduate assistant coach and has also written books with him. Jay told me, "I've always been impressed by the way John Wooden honored the two most important people in his life—his father and his beloved wife, Nell. From what Coach Wooden tells me, his father was firm but gentle. Coach never wanted to let his dad down."

Coach still lives by the seven precepts that his father, Joshua Hugh Wooden, gave him so many years ago. That is quite an amazing legacy for a father to pass down to his son and for that son to bequeath to the world.

My goal in this book is to show you how to apply these seven principles and build them into your daily life. If you memorize this seven-point creed and apply the principles for a lifetime, as John Wooden has done, you can't help but succeed in life.

“Success Is Peace of Mind”

If you are what you eat, then Coach Wooden is made of oatmeal.

He once told me that he and his three brothers—Maurice, Danny, and Billy—ate oatmeal for breakfast almost every morning when they were growing up on the farm near Centerton, Indiana. It seems to me that oatmeal is to John Wooden what spinach is to Popeye—and if all that oatmeal played a part in getting Coach Wooden close to his hundredth birthday, then I want to be made of oatmeal too!

I imagine that the oats Johnny Wooden and his brothers ate every day were grown right there on that Indiana farm. Joshua Hugh Wooden was a hard-working farmer, and though he rarely realized much profit from the crops he grew and the livestock he raised, his family never went hungry, because he raised practically everything they needed to live on.

Coach has described his father as a man who was physically powerful, morally upright, and intellectually curious. He was truly a gentleman, and more than that, he was a *gentle man*. Of his father, Coach Wooden once wrote, “Joshua Hugh Wooden was a farmer—honest, hard-working, and fair. I never heard him speak an unkind word about another person, even on those occasions when he had every reason to. Dad came as close to living the golden rule as anyone I’ve ever known. He was strong enough to bend a thick iron bar with his bare hands, but he was also a very gentle man who read poetry to his four sons at night. He loved his family deeply.”³

Joshua Hugh Wooden was a sports enthusiast who encouraged a love of sports in his four boys. He couldn’t afford to buy a regulation hoop and basketball for his sons, so he cut the bottom off an old Van Camp tomato basket and put it up inside the barn, nailing it to the hayloft. Johnny’s mother stuffed old rags inside a worn-out pair of black cotton hosiery and sewed it up by hand in the approximate shape of a

basketball. It wasn't much for dribbling, but it passed, shot, and drained like a regulation basketball.

At night, the four boys slept two to a bed. On cold nights, Joshua Wooden would heat bricks on the wood stove, then wrap towels around the hot bricks and place them under the quilt at the foot of each bed. Only a truly gentle and loving father would take the time to make sure his boys' beds were warm and toasty on a wintry night.

Looking back, John Wooden realized that his parents had a hard life. They never had enough money. They had inherited the little sixty-five-acre farm upon the death of Roxie's father, and it always operated on the razor edge of insolvency. Yet John and his three brothers were never aware that their family went through hard times. In John Wooden's memory, he had an idyllic boyhood. "For my brothers and me," he recalled decades later, "growing up on that little farm in Centerton was almost perfect."⁴

The idyll ended in the late 1920s, while John Wooden was in high school. Joshua became concerned that the farm was not diversified enough. If any of the farm's crops failed, the Wooden family could be in trouble. So as a hedge against crop failure, Joshua Hugh Wooden took out a mortgage on the farm to buy a passel of hogs. To ensure the health of the hogs, he bought a batch of cholera vaccine, but the vaccine was tainted and all the hogs died. That same season, a drought wiped out the crops.

The Wooden family was financially ruined. When Joshua couldn't make the mortgage payments, the bank took everything. It was a hard blow. Not only had Joshua Hugh Wooden lost all he had worked for, but he had also lost his wife's inheritance. Many men would have been bitter. John Wooden recalls that his father never said one word of complaint about his circumstances, never blamed the man who sold him the tainted vaccine, and never expressed any bitterness toward the bank.

Joshua Wooden used those tough times to impress life lessons on his four sons. “Blaming, cursing, hating doesn’t help you,” he told them. “It hurts you.” It was also during this time that he taught his four sons what he called “the two sets of threes”: “Never lie, never cheat, never steal,” and, “Don’t whine, don’t complain, don’t make excuses.”⁵

The family moved into the nearby town of Martinsville, which was famed for its mineral springs. Joshua Hugh Wooden took a job as a masseur, giving massage therapy at the Homelawn Mineral Springs Sanitarium. “I know his spirit was absolutely crushed by what had happened,” Coach later recalled, “and his heart ached for what had been lost, yet he lived by the advice he had always given to his sons whenever we fussed about

something beyond our control: ‘Don’t whine, don’t complain, don’t make excuses. Just do the best you can. Nobody can do more than that.’”⁶

Young people are keen observers of their parents’ reactions during times of stress, and a teenager named Johnny Wooden was no exception. He recalled that watching his father stick to his principles through hard times “had a most powerful effect on me. That’s where I came to see that what you do is more important than what you say you do.”⁷

Johnny noticed that his father accepted hardship without blaming or complaining, and his father’s example taught young John Wooden a valuable lesson. He wrote, “It was in that lesson, I believe, that my own personal definition of success began to take shape years before I ever wrote it down: ‘Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of

Adversity is the state in which man most easily becomes acquainted with himself, being especially free of admirers then.

self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best of which you are capable.”⁸

Who Was Joshua Wooden?

When Joshua Hugh Wooden moved into Martinsville, he apparently quit going by his first name. When I asked Martinsville old-timers about Joshua Wooden, they didn't know who I was talking about at first. Then they said, “Oh, you mean *Hugh* Wooden?”

One of those Martinsville old-timers was Harry Stultz, who had worked as a bellhop at the Homelawn Mineral Springs Sanitarium. He knew Coach's father well, having worked alongside him for about ten years. “Hugh was one of the nicest people I knew back then,” Harry told me. “He had a truly gentle spirit. He was a quiet, straightlaced fellow. After his farm went under, Hugh needed a job to earn money to help educate his four boys. He rented a small apartment in town, and that's where they lived. Hugh's wife worked too, and she was a gentle, quiet lady.”

*Things turn out best
for the people who
make the best of the
way things turn out.*

I asked Harry what kind of man Hugh Wooden was. “Physically, Hugh was fairly tall and slender,” he said. “Working in those hot baths would keep you slender. Hugh would walk to work. It was a seven-block walk from his apartment to the sanitarium. He'd come in at 5:45 in the morning and would work till

4:15 or so most days, six days a week. Then he'd walk home.”

What did Hugh Wooden do for enjoyment? “Checkers,” said Harry Stultz. “He loved to play checkers. Some days, I'd be waiting for him with a checkerboard, and we'd play

checkers for an hour or so until the guests would come down. In all those years, I never did beat him.”

I also had the privilege of talking to ninety-two-year-old Harry Johnson of Martinsville. He and his wife, Barbara, have been married for seventy years. Harry worked as a CPA until his retirement in 1989. But retirement hasn't slowed Harry down. He still works every day at his computer in his home office, managing his investments. Harry remembers Coach Wooden's father very well. “Hugh Wooden and I both worked at the Homelawn Mineral Springs Sanitarium during the 1930s and 1940s,” he told me. “There were eleven mineral springs sanitariums around town, but Homelawn was the most prestigious. The sanitariums all closed down when the mineral springs went dry around 1967.

“Mineral water has a heavy feel to it, and it smells terrible, like rotten eggs. The water was reported to have healing powers, and, in the old days, some of the quacks would bottle it and sell it, claiming it was good for everything that ails you. But the Homelawn Sanitarium provided honest medical care, according to the medical knowledge at that time.

“Homelawn had about 100 regular employees and up to 150 during the busy season. There were dietitians and medical personnel on duty, including health care experts in many fields. I was a CPA, so I worked in the back office. Hugh Wooden lived about a half mile away and would walk to work like the rest of us. The Woodens lived at 159 South Jefferson in a brick house across from the Carnegie Public Library. The house is still there today.

“Hugh was in charge of the men's bath in the east wing of the sanitarium. He had a staff of workers and had very little contact with the other departments. No one wanted to go back to the baths unless they absolutely had to, because it was very hot and steamy back there. Hugh oversaw the bathtubs, which were huge—as big as battleships. Hugh would work back there practically all day. He'd never leave there. They'd

fill these tubs up with mineral water and then keep them at around 90 or 95 degrees. It was stiflingly hot.”

As Harry Johnson described the mineral baths, I thought I could hear a shudder in his voice. Even after all those years, it seemed that the heat and steam and sulfur smell of the mineral baths were fresh in his memory. “After the men finished their baths,” he said, “they would go for the various kinds of rubs available—salt rubs and so forth. Hugh would do the massages himself or assign his staff. He had five or six clients who tipped him well and requested him every year. The guests at Homelawn came from nearby states—Illinois, Ohio, and Kentucky. Some came from as far away as New York City.”

I also heard about the baths from my host, Elmer Reynolds. Though he was too young to have known Hugh Wooden, he had known all four Wooden boys and was well acquainted with Homelawn Mineral Springs Sanitarium. “Around Martinsville,” he told me, “we are still proud of long-ago visitors to Homelawn. We had three presidents as guests here: Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland, and Franklin Roosevelt. And Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne would come to Homelawn, as well as Al Jolson, the singer and movie star. Jolson was a heavy drinker, and he would come to Martinsville to dry out from time to time.”

Harry Johnson, the Homelawn CPA, remembered when Joshua Hugh Wooden died. “Mr. Wooden passed away in 1950,” he told me. “His four boys all came to my office to get their dad’s final paycheck. I remember how big the four of them seemed to me. They filled up my office. That was the last time I saw Johnny Wooden.”

I asked Harry what the people of Martinsville thought of Joshua Hugh Wooden. He replied, “Hugh was a fine man, but he wasn’t recognized at all in our community. He didn’t have a huge impact, and he had very little contact among the town’s movers and shakers. I guess you could say he was almost invisible.”

Who was Joshua Hugh Wooden? He was a farmer who lost his farm—but never his integrity or his faith in God. He was a hard-working man who would take any job, even working long days in the steaming mineral baths amid the reek of rotten eggs, so that he could earn enough money to send his four sons to college. He was a humble man who lived by the Golden Rule, who never had an unkind word to say about anyone. He was strong yet gentle, a man of the soil and a lover of literature. Above all, he exemplified character, faith, and honor to his sons.

“I never knew Hugh Wooden,” Elmer Reynolds told me, “but I have heard about him and thought a lot about him, because of the influence he had on Johnny and his three brothers. Here was a shy, withdrawn man who was never wealthy, famous, or successful in the world’s eyes. Yet the wisdom he passed along to his sons is valuable beyond measure and still as relevant today as it was almost a century ago. It’s timeless wisdom that never goes out of style, no matter how the world keeps changing. The people who follow Hugh Wooden’s wisdom will still be making a positive difference in the world a hundred years from now.

“From everything I’ve heard, Hugh Wooden was an intelligent man who was reserved and quiet by nature, not because he was uncomfortable around other people but because he was totally comfortable with himself. He wasn’t like so many people today who have to be always busy or always talking or always entertained because they can hardly stand their own company. People who knew him say he was comfortable being alone with his thoughts or alone with God.

“Above all, he was a humble man. I think that’s where John Wooden learned the quality of humility that marks his life, including his life as a leader and a teacher. You don’t usually think of humility as a quality most coaches possess, yet humility is probably the most striking feature of John Wooden’s character. I think that may be the key to his success in the

sports world. And it all started with his father, who was a role model of humility.

“Joshua Hugh Wooden was a farmer, but when he lost the farm, he didn’t hesitate to humble himself and go to work at the local sanitarium. It was a lowly occupation, being a bath attendant. It was unpleasant. I wouldn’t call it a menial task, exactly, but neither was it an occupation of great prestige. Johnny’s dad had to demonstrate a servantlike attitude every single day, year after year. The example he set shaped the character of his four boys.”

Coach John Wooden would certainly agree with Elmer Reynolds’s assessment of his father. A few years ago, Coach wrote, “Dad was the best man I ever knew, the one who set the course that guided me through life—what I believe, what I do, and how I do it. In so many ways he made everything happen. And he did it by teaching us in word and deed that the simplest virtues and values were the most important ones.”⁹

Who was Joshua Hugh Wooden? He was an absolutely common man—never wealthy, never famous, completely unknown and unheralded. And he was also a leader’s leader. He was the leader who led John Wooden, the leader who shaped the life and the values of the greatest coach, the greatest sports leader of all time.

He was a role model for us all.

A Flame in the Soul

There’s one more facet of Joshua Hugh Wooden’s life that needs to be underscored: He was a *teacher*.

Coach Wooden’s father taught him and his brothers a love of literature and poetry, a love of the Bible and prayer, a love of nature and animals, a love of ethics and character, and a simple love of one’s fellow human beings. Joshua Hugh

Wooden was very intentional and proactive in the way he taught his sons. He deliberately set aside time for reading good literature and reading the Bible with his family.

As John Wooden later recalled, "There were no athletic scholarships in those days, and Mother and Dad didn't have financial means to help, but all four sons got through college. They worked their way through, and either majored or minored in English, every one of them. Every one became an administrator, all but me. I never became a principal or administrator, but I have a lifetime principal and superintendent's license in the state of Indiana as well as a teacher's license of English."¹⁰ John Wooden once told *Sports Illustrated*, "Oh, I love to teach. I would have been happy being an English teacher my whole life."¹¹

*Learn as if you were
to live forever. Live
as if you were to
die tomorrow.*

Coach Wooden's father inspired a love of learning and a love of teaching in his four sons, and he did so by constantly modeling a love of knowledge. "My father used the immediate to prepare us for the future," Coach once wrote. "That is what effective teachers do—they recognize where you are, and utilize their own knowledge to prepare you for what lies ahead. I don't think it's any coincidence that all four of us boys ended up becoming classroom teachers. A love for learning—whether it was from books or from life—surrounded us from our earliest days, as did a sense of peace that can only stem from true contentedness. These were the lessons my father passed on to his sons."¹²

And just as Joshua Hugh Wooden passed these lessons on to his four sons, his sons have passed these same lessons on to the pupils they have taught. John Wooden has instilled these life lessons into the young players he has coached and mentored over the years. As I have talked to Coach's players,

many of whom are now coaches and leaders in their own right, I have been impressed again and again with the fact that so many of them speak appreciatively not only of Coach Wooden but also of Joshua Hugh Wooden, a man they have never met. They have been introduced to this man through Coach Wooden's books and private conversations.

Bill Walton was a star center for John Wooden's unstoppable UCLA Bruins in the early 1970s, winning three consecutive College Player of the Year Awards. He went on to play in the NBA, was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame, and (with encouragement from Coach Wooden) overcame a stuttering problem to become a successful sports broadcaster for NBC, ABC, and ESPN.

"Coach Wooden was raised in a different era," Bill told me, "yet his father's seven principles are timeless. Our lives today are so rushed and frenzied that we lose track of these valuable life principles. Joshua Wooden took the time to think through these concepts with a sense of preparation of who he wanted his sons to be. I've heard Coach Wooden talk about the hard times his father went through, and the man must have been overwhelmed by life and by all his responsibilities. Yet he took time to analyze and think through what the foundation of our lives ought to be. He did some original thinking, then distilled his thinking into seven life principles and passed them on to his sons.

"John Wooden's greatness as a coach was not the result of luck or happenstance. He was a great coach and a great human being because his father, Joshua Wooden, had so much foresight and so much insight, and he took the time to teach those values and principles to his sons."

Dave Meyers played forward for Coach Wooden's Bruins and was on the teams that won the NCAA Men's Division I National Championship in 1973 and 1975. Dave has appeared on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* and went on to play for the Milwaukee Bucks. "Coach Wooden lived his dad's

seven-point creed,” Dave told me. “I don’t remember him talking about it to us when I played at UCLA. We were just a bunch of teenagers who wanted to play basketball and become part of the UCLA tradition. I learned about that seven-point creed much later. As I grew older and (I hope) wiser, those principles really began to register with me. I can still hear John Wooden’s voice in practice, planting those wisdom principles in our minds. I’ve been a teacher for many years, and I catch myself teaching my students the same principles Coach taught us.”

Keith Erickson was a member of Coach Wooden’s 1964 and 1965 NCAA Championship teams. Coach once said that Keith Erickson was the finest athlete he ever coached. Keith told me, “Coach Wooden may have spoken about his father back when we were at UCLA, but none of us was listening. We were focused on playing time, studying, winning games, and girls.

“Over the last ten years, I’ve gone to visit with Coach more and more, and I’ve been asking him about the influence of his father. He told me that, at night, his dad would gather the four boys and read to them by candlelight. Joshua Hugh Wooden was not formally educated, but his wisdom came through books and practical life experience. Some of that life experience was very painful. The Wooden family actually had six children, but two daughters died very young. I once heard Coach say, ‘Losing those two daughters broke my mother’s heart.’ Experiences like that teach us things we could never learn from books.

“Coach’s father was self-educated, so the seven-point creed came from years of thought and study. There was no Barnes & Noble in Martinsville in 1910. The books of Napoleon Hill, Dale Carnegie, and Zig Zigler hadn’t been written yet. But Joshua Wooden spent a lot of time absorbing the wisdom of Solomon and Moses and Jesus. He spent a lot of time thinking about those seven principles that he wanted to pass

along to his boys. I can just hear Mr. Wooden say, ‘Johnny, if you’ll just follow these principles for the rest of your life, you’ll do just fine.’ We never know when something we say might spark a flame in someone else’s soul. That’s what those seven principles did in Coach Wooden’s soul.

“One day I was visiting Coach’s condo, and I noticed a picture of his mother and father on the wall of his den. That prompted me to ask him, ‘Coach, how would you like to be remembered at the end of your life?’ Without a moment’s hesitation, he said, ‘I would like to be remembered as a man who came as close as possible to being like my father.’ Coach has always viewed his father as being above all men.”

Coach Wooden himself wrote of his father, “He had many misfortunes in regard to material things; but he never complained nor compared himself with those who seemed to be more fortunate. In my opinion he came as close to living the philosophy of The Golden Rule as any person that I have ever known. I attribute my emotional balance, which I feel is critical to playing and coaching success, to my father.”¹³

One of the greatest privileges of my life has been the honor of knowing Coach Wooden in a personal way—of being invited into his home, sharing meals with him, and drawing from the deep well of his wisdom. He is truly one of the most admirable human beings I have ever known. Like so many people who have met Coach Wooden, I want more of the traits he has. And those traits were instilled in him by a man whom history has largely hidden from view: Joshua Hugh Wooden.

In the next seven chapters, we will explore the seven life principles Coach John Wooden has carried in his wallet throughout his life. These are the principles that shaped his life. These are the principles that are changing my life even now.

Turn the page, my friend. They are about to change yours.