

LETTER OF '61 REVEALS CIVIL WAR SPIRIT
Letter to Daniel Nash from his father on date of enlistment

The following letter given the RECORD by one of its readers, will prove interesting to many Burton Heights folk. A great many people here are familiar with the sterling character of the Nash pioneers and their descendents, and to those who may not be fortunate enough to know these people, the letter will carry to them a message of helpfulness and earnest advice that is only too often lacking with many of the present day parents.

The letter reads as follows:

To Daniel L. Nash

My Dear Son:-

I received your kind letter written at Grand Rapids the 27th of September in which you spoke of -your enlistment, to gather with an appeal for my being reconciled to it. You thought I had better not write you at Grand Rapids as you might not be there sufficient time to get one from me. I cannot bear the thought my dear son of your going away to engage in the fearful struggle now raging in our country, while I am so far away, and thus deprived of seeing you—of giving you that parting council and instruction you very much need, and which only a parent can give, and of saying "Fare-you-well".

This thought brings a tear to my eye. Being thus deprived of saying verbally what I would wish to, you will indulge me in penning down some of my wishes and thoughts, trusting that you will have an opportunity of getting them.

It is not because I am not possessed of feelings of patriotism sufficient to give one son, or two if need be, to my country. Nor is it because I do not feel that the cause for which we are contending is just and sacred, that I would object to your enlistment; but on account of your age and slender constitution, I had wished that here this your desire might abate.

Nor can I forget that you are greatly endeared to your parents by the fact that you were to us as one from the dead; nor the years of anxious and watchful care necessary to preserve your life. When this is remembered, together with the consideration of your age and yet not robust constitution, it becomes a hard matter for me to overcome my opposition. But when I remember my own military order and pride in my youthful days—the evidence of inheritance has its influence—and when I remember the pleasure and liberality of my father in seeing my advancement, and in assiting in my complete and respectable equipment, my feelings prompt me to do likewise.

The feelings of gratitude I then, and have ever since felt towards that father for the performance of his part towards the little military knowledge and praise I ever had, leads me to hope that if I try in my feeble manner and limited means to follow his example, my son will not be behind his in feelings of gratitude, and a fixed determination that such favors should not be bestowed in vain. Those days, however, were not days of danger and dread like the present; nor the glory attained of that character that may be, and is, in many cases under circumstances like the present.

But the danger of the loss of life or limb, with the other dangers accompanying a camp life often makes the least renown to be dearly purchased. A soldier is so completely surrounded by everything that is calculated to debase the mind and debauch the character, that but few of those that return alive are ever after a pride to themselves, their friends, or society. This fact, more than the danger of life on the field of battle, causes me to shudder and tremble for your safety. You are young and have had no opportunity ever before to mix with the world—to customs and manners of life, nor the ten thousand arts and ways to beguile and entrap the unsuspecting or to lead you in such a course of profligacy, and to form habits that will be a disgrace to yourself and to your parents and friends.

Let me counsel you then as a father that loves you, to keep clean hands and pure heart in these things. Let not your conversation be mixed with profanity, nor your lips utter lies. Let card playing entirely alone, remembering that no good ever came of it, but rather that thousands thereby have been led to ruin and crime. As far as possible regard the Sabbath day and attend the services of that day when an opportunity is given. Most studiously avoid all broils or altercations with any and everyone, but let your language be respectable and not filthy or abusive.

When asked to partake of the intoxicating drink, give a quick and decided refusal. No person of good manners will urge or ask a second time a person to drink that gives a decided refusal. Let your principle on this point as well as the others be understood at the start and you will have no difficulty. My son, I am extremely anxious about these things, believing as I do that you have for companions, those that would exult in enticing a child of mine into sin and shame. In behalf, then, of the love and affection I have for a child, and that child one who has ever demanded much care and tenderness, I make my appeal to you to give heed to my council. For the sake of the high hopes your parents have entertained for the integrity of character you would exhibit, I appeal For the sake of the family to which you belong, which yet stands uncorrupted by vice and crime, I entreat you not to be the first to break the charm. In the name of numerous friends both in Michigan and here who esteem you much, and have strong desires for your welfare, I entreat you not to disappoint them. Above all, for the sake of the Christian profession I make, and the anxious desire I have for your eternal good; for the sake of the Christian instruction you have received, and the prayers that have been offered and will be offered for my children at the throne of grace, I beseech you to give heed to my council.

In view of the obedience you have ever manifested, and the denial of self gratification often exhibited for my sake, I have confidence to believe that you will ever hold in sacred remembrance, these my wishes. And as you go forth to the field of danger put your trust in God; being prepared by faith and obedience to the Divine will for death that may await you. Believing this then, and believing that you will see and understand the self denial I have to make for you under the circumstances and that you will appreciate it, I say: go then, my son, to your country's call and prove yourself worthy of the high calling. And rather than to return, if return you ever should, with cowardice and shame resting upon you, die with your face to the foe. Go! For the soldiers are gathering from near and from far, the trumpet is sounding the call for the war. The conflict is raging, 'twill be fearful and long, so gird on your armour and be marching along.

Write home to your anxious parents as often as you can and in your letters let nothing find a place improper for anyone to read or hear. Be careful of your health and diet and be not presumptuous to expose yourself to uncalled danger.

And may God protect you, my son and return you to the bosom of your parents and your brothers and sisters and friends.

Believing that you will ever hold in grateful remembrance him, who thus addresses you, I bid you adieu, subscribing myself,

Your affectionate father,

A. J. NASH

October, 1861.

Carefully preserve this letter and read it often, especially when tempted to do wrong.

The above letter was written by A. J. Nash in Toy, O., to his son, Daniel L. Nash who enlisted from Bowne township, Kent county, in Sept. 1861, at the age of 17 years. He is now 82 years of age and resides in Elburn, Ill. He is a great uncle of Mrs. Homer Diefenbaker, of Andre-st. who still has in her possession the original letter, written 65 years ago. Mr. Nash was the guest of his niece over Memorial day.