

Wisdom's ways

By George Tombs
NC News Service

Wisdom? We're more likely impressed by computers that can perform millions of operations a second.

News reports say that scientists now are creating "artificial intelligence" — machines that "think," machines that correct and even reprogram themselves.

Could wisdom ever be put on a microchip? The question sounds bizarre, since most people agree that only a person can truly be wise.

In everyone's life there is an encounter with a wise person. It is a rare and cherished moment — when we get a look of understanding while going through hard times or when we receive some advice that goes straight to the heart.

For me it was an unforgettable week I spent with my grandfather. He was in failing health and the family asked me if I could go down to Philadelphia and be with him.

When I arrived in his apartment I could see that he wasn't well. Yet his eyes lit up, because he knew we would be able to share a lot during the next week.

We cooked together each day and after lunch we would often sit down on the sofa to talk. Out the window, spring had finally come after a long winter and life was reappearing everywhere.

He asked me about my plans. At 17, I wasn't too sure what I wanted to do. At the end of high school all I wanted to do was take off somewhere — anywhere.

And even when I didn't feel I was making any sense, my grandfather understood what I was talking about. "Before you decide what you want to do," he said, "you have to decide who you want to be." It sounded pretty good to me, so I laughed.

We sat talking. Suddenly he pointed out the window. "Look at the birds on the telephone wire!" "Where?" I said. "I don't see anything."

"They're sparrows. There are quite a few of them that come and sing everyday outside my window."

It was as though a bunch of birds made his day. Something so small, so trifling. Then he asked me if I would read to him. I think the book was "A Treasury of Great Poems." One of them ended: "Beauty is truth, truth is beauty — that is all you know on earth and all you need to know."



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I couldn't say why but I was beginning to feel strange. Then my grandfather suggested I read from the Bible, anything I wanted to, my choice.

I flipped through the New Testament and came to the Beatitudes. "How blessed are the poor in spirit: the reign of God is theirs. Blessed too are the sorrowing; they shall be consoled."

I continued reading to him, but I felt as if something was rising in my chest, something I couldn't stop.

I looked around the apartment and realized I would not be coming back here. After all, my grandfather wasn't well. Time was short.

Why couldn't we have more time, more than a week, to talk about life?

The strangest thing was that even though he was in his 80s he

looked on life with a lot of simplicity and clearness. For him goodness wasn't just an idea. It was something to put into practice.

After the week was over I returned home, bringing along a book he had given me about the Bible. On the first page he had written something: not "For you to read," but "For you to live."

I suppose that is a good indication of who is wise: the person who wants to live the things that count and not just to read about them.

When the telephone call came a month later that my grandfather had passed away, I felt a tremendous loss. But I'll be forever grateful for that last, wonderful week we shared.

(Tombs is a free-lance writer in Montreal, Quebec.)

Learnin

By Cindy Liebhart
NC News Service

Wisdom would not make the top-10 list of dinner-table conversation topics.

People probably don't think about wisdom very much. Certainly most people would deny they possess it.

The word conjures up images of extraordinary individuals whose austerity and age enable them to see things as they really are — people like the firm but gentle grandfather in the movie "Heidi."

But is wisdom reserved for only a few?

"I'd rather be wise than smart," said Dr. Anthony Moore, assistant dean of the School for Summer and Continuing Education at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

Wisdom helps people to make judgments, to know what really counts, Moore said. It enables people to sift through the often contradictory messages they hear.

Perhaps the beginning of wisdom is the recognition that these value judgments have to be made at all, he said.

Each individual is a mixture of wisdom and what the Greek philosopher Plato referred to as "common opinion — that which is sometimes built on illusion or on false, superficial values," Moore said.

He believes there are different stages of wisdom, and that it is important for people to recognize "there are times when I've been more wise and less influenced by

By Father John Castelot
NC News Service

Corinth in St. Paul's times was a bustling, wealthy city. A cosmopolitan center of government and commerce, its population included Roman officials, business leaders, merchants and sailors from all over the Roman Empire.

In a pagan world known for its tolerance of sexual license, Corinth stood out. It has been said that the phrase "to live like a Corinthian" came to mean "to live a dissolute life."

Into this city of contrasts, Paul brought his message of Christian wisdom, a wisdom that some Corinthian converts chose to misinterpret. Considering themselves highly sophisticated, they prided themselves on their wisdom.

But it was shallow wisdom. Wisdom is that intellectual virtue which enables a person to "get it all together," to organize knowledge and experience into a practical system for happy living.

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