



Someone will depend upon the care  
with which all our work is done.

Someone will need the kindness  
with which all our words could be spoken.

Someone will be fulfilled by the love  
which all our acts might manifest.

— *Dr. George Ball, Commencement, May 21, 1978*

# An Open Letter to the Whitman College Tennis Teams

From Dr. George Ball – January 1998

Teachers often get so used to talking that they often do not know how to stop. That's all too true of me. Aware of this, I cannot resist the temptation to offer a few ideas to you, the members of Whitman men's and women's tennis teams whom I have come to know and enjoy.

For 37 years I have maintained a close relationship with Whitman's tennis players, and it pleases my soul to say that I have rarely seen bad or even poor sportsmanship. Thus the following remarks are general, totally lacking of any personal reference.

To me, the tennis court is not simply a place for an athletic event. It is a stage on which a large part of what is to be the theme of one's life is acted out. It is almost certain that what you are on the tennis court is what you will be as a friend, as a husband or wife, and in your professional life.

It is on the tennis court that one creates or exhibits a response to danger and defeat, to tiredness, to surprise or bad luck, and also to bad behavior as one confronts it in a cantankerous opponent. All of these experiences have their precise parallels in ordinary life. One is similarly tested as to his or her capacity to care for the welfare of the team instead of being absorbed in one's private progress. The care and self-discipline that one employs in preparation for the tennis match is likely to be the same that will be used in getting ready to face life's larger roles.

To be specific, it is my hope that anyone whom you play against would finish the match having enjoyed playing with you (regardless of the outcome), because of the way you treated him or her. There are some people whom you will not like to play against, but that feeling never relates to the score but to the manner in which the opponent is or is not sensitive to your feelings. The relational component of the match can often get a good start at the time you are introduced to your opponent, when you could take a few moments to learn about him or her (hometown, year

in college, major, perhaps a little about the family). It also helps to build a relationship to be able to compliment the opponent on an exceptionally good shot with a racket clap or a quiet "Good shot." All human encounters are opportunities for relationship. One is never good with the big ones unless he or she is good with the little ones.

Obviously, there is an assumption here: that you create and are created by and for relationships. Some will disagree, but I think it is true. Your life will largely be defined by the nature and quality of the relationships you are part of and to which you contribute.

When you are on the court it is always your character that is being created and tested. If the opponent is nasty, it is wise not to get angry in return. Rather, feel sorry for that person for that person is bound to have an unhappy time with the other relationships which will constitute his or her life. If you let yourself get angry, you hand the opponent a kind of psychological victory. The victory you can win over yourself in this respect is far more important than any victory represented in the score.

I do indeed look forward to your season this year with almost unmanageable expectations which relate to considerably more than the score. But I am also capable of elation, of singing and dancing (at least internally) when the score itself comes out in your favor.



ON LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS

“Your life will largely be defined by the nature and quality of the relationships you are part of and to which you contribute.”

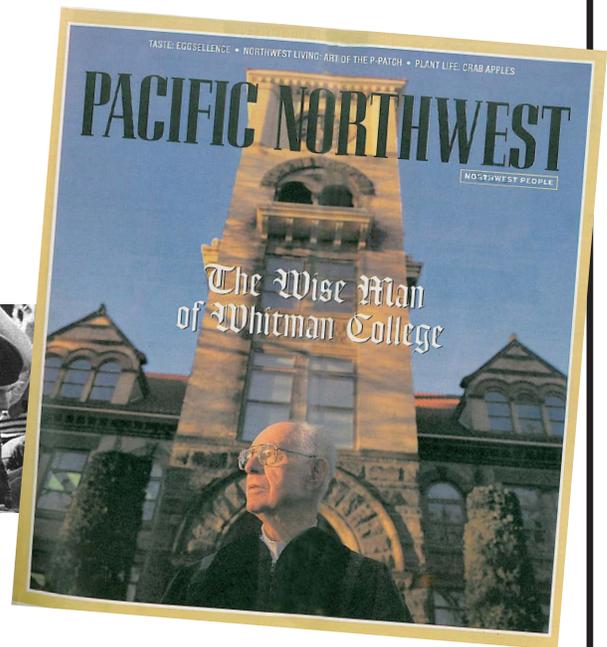
— Dr. George Ball, “An Open Letter to the Whitman College Tennis Teams,” January 1998



ON SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

“We have reached the point in the unfolding of the scroll of evolution where all great change can only be conscious. Change now requires the voluntary gift and sacrifice of those who see that change cannot come without such gift and sacrifice.”

— Dr. George Ball, speaking to a Walla Walla crowd gathered for a community demonstration following civil rights violence in Selma, Alabama, in March 1965



ON RELIGION

“The act of accepting with love the gift of life is the initial and essential religious act.”

— Dr. George Ball, “Faculty Views,” *The Pioneer*, October 12, 1961



## ON CELL GROUPS

*“What started as a simple group for airing ideas has become an extended family...To me, these kids are a microcosm of what the world could be if all of us just worked a little harder to come together.”*

— Dr. George Ball, *Whitman magazine*, July 2011





## ON WHITMAN COLLEGE

Among the many graduation ceremonies attended by Dr. Ball, as he is affectionately called, was the 1974 Commencement that included his daughter, Sarah Ball Teslik '74, an education and history major. He still recalls the pride of seeing his daughter graduate from the college that had so warmly welcomed him and his young family nearly 15 years before. That same year, he also was honored to give the Baccalaureate sermon.

“My memories of Whitman Commencements are all good. Some have been better than others, but I can't think of a single one that was 'a bust,'" he said.

— *Dr. George Ball, Whitman magazine, July 2011*



# ON DR. GEORGE BALL

Today, I am immensely thankful to have spent four years at Whitman. I feel much like our own, retired Dr. George Ball who, at 95, still has an office in Memorial and believes that coming to Whitman was his “ultimate break” in life. When I visited his office last month, he reflected on his decades at Whitman and explained to me, “There’s nothing I’d like to change in my life.”

I hope I can someday say those words, like Dr. Ball, with complete calm and wisdom.

— *Commencement Speech, May 23, 2010*  
*“Pink shorts and idealism,” Seth Bergeson '10*

The spirit and energy that Dr. Ball has so freely given of himself during his tenure has weaved its way in no small measure into the fabric of the Whitman community. What we often describe as the unique “Whitman experience” has been quietly but profoundly shaped by Dr. Ball’s presence and tireless dedication for decades, and it is only fitting that we honor his contributions by ensuring that his legacy continues to reverberate into the future.

— *Trevor Neal '97*  
*Messages to Dr. Ball celebrating the establishment of the Ball Chair in the Humanities*

I’ll very much miss this meeting in the coming weeks as we prepare for our spring campaign and even more so the helmet clad rider on his blue cruiser making his way through the campus where he taught, mentored and stimulated greatness for so many years.

— *“Remembering Dr. George Ball,”*  
*A blog post from women’s tennis coach John Hein*

One of the last times I saw George out in the front yard, he was helping Nancy clean up after she had raked leaves into the street. I watched him as he ever so slowly, ever so carefully, bent down to pick up a few remaining leaves, first one, and then another. This is what George liked to call, in his self-deprecating way, “making small gestures.” He made a million of them in his life, a lifetime of “small gestures” that added up to a miracle of love, compassion and faith in the human community.

— *John F. Desmond,*  
*Mary A. Denny Professor Emeritus of English, Whitman College,*  
*and neighbor of George and Nancy Ball*

During my time at Whitman, I developed a sense of what an extraordinary man he was: a sensitive, patient, passionate, gentle lifelong mentor who always had time to listen to his students — whether or not they had ever taken a class from him — and guide them with warmth and thoughtful focus. All this I know from being around those who knew Dr. Ball, as I only met him once. What a gift to shine so brightly through the many people whose lives he touched.

— *Laura Bauer Learned '99*  
*Via Facebook*

...A great Whitman teacher and spiritual and ethical sounding board to many Whitman students over the past 50 years, including me.

— *Jim Fogle '72*  
*Via email*



# ON WHITMAN COLLEGE

...As Ball looked back on his career at Whitman, he found the best part to be the "sheer joy of being invited into the lives of a whole lot of people." The crux of the matter is, Whitman students also feel joyful at having been invited into the life of Dr. Ball.

— "Dr. Ball Converts to Counseling," *The Pioneer*, February 24, 1982

