

Life Is So Good Reading Guide Questions

1. There are many reasons to admire George Dawson. What qualities did you notice and admire?
2. George often noticed and took pleasure in ordinary things like the taste of his mother's biscuits, seeing the stars, even the "wait in the station."
What are the ordinary things in your life that bring pleasure?
3. Growing up in the Jim Crow south, George often recalls his wary caution with whites.
Are there ways in which minorities and women still must be cautious in their interactions with society?
4. What factors may have contributed to George's long life span?
5. In chapter 20, George says "I had to work all those years, but I was glad to work. A man is supposed to work and take pride in what he does no matter what the work is." Do you think many people feel this way about work?
6. How does George cope with his illiteracy? How might his life have been different if he'd had the opportunity to go to school as a child?
7. George faced hardships and injustice, he never had much money; yet he still led a successful life.
Did he also have some advantages? Was he "rich" in other ways?
8. Why do you think students in the adult education program and other young students are so drawn to George?
9. In chapter 1, George's father told him "You have no right to judge another human being. Don't you ever forget."
How does this advice effect George's life?
10. How do you think George would answer the question "what makes life worth living"? Why does he think "life is so good"?
11. In Chapter 24, George says "there are some parents these days that are growing children , not raising children."
What does he mean by this? Do you agree with him?

12. Given that George Dawson's life was limited by racism and poverty, it would be understandable if he was bitter about opportunities lost--but he chose not to feel bitter and instead adopted a willed optimism. How did Dawson's attitude effect his life?

13. Have you ever thought of writing a book? If you had a book in you, what would it be?

"Jim Crow" Laws



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From the 1880s into the 1960s, a majority of American states enforced segregation through "Jim Crow" laws (so called after a black character in minstrel shows). From Delaware to California, and from North Dakota to Texas, many states (and cities, too) could impose legal punishments on people for consorting with members of another race. The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep their black and white clientele separated.

Here is a sampling of laws from various states.

Nurses No person or corporation shall require any white female nurse to nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which negro men are placed. *Alabama*

Buses All passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket windows for the white and colored races. *Alabama*

Railroads The conductor of each passenger train is authorized and required to assign each passenger to the car or the division of the car, when it is divided by a partition, designated for the race to which such passenger belongs. *Alabama*

Restaurants It shall be unlawful to conduct a restaurant or other place for the serving of food in the city, at which white and colored people are served in the same room, unless such white and colored persons are effectually separated by a solid partition extending from the floor upward to a distance of seven feet or higher, and unless a separate entrance from the street is provided for each compartment. *Alabama*

Pool and Billiard Rooms It shall be unlawful for a negro and white person to play together or in company with each other at any game of pool or billiards. *Alabama*

Toilet Facilities, Male Every employer of white or negro males shall provide for such white or negro males reasonably accessible and separate toilet facilities. *Alabama*

Intermarriage The marriage of a person of Caucasian blood with a Negro, Mongolian, Malay, or Hindu shall be null and void. *Arizona*

Intermarriage All marriages between a white person and a negro, or between a white person and a person of negro descent to the fourth generation inclusive, are hereby forever prohibited. *Florida*

Cohabitation Any negro man and white woman, or any white man and negro woman, who are not married to each other, who shall habitually live in and occupy in the nighttime the same room shall each be punished by imprisonment not exceeding twelve (12) months, or by fine not exceeding five hundred (\$500.00) dollars. *Florida*

Education The schools for white children and the schools for negro children shall be conducted separately. *Florida*

Juvenile Delinquents There shall be separate buildings, not nearer than one fourth mile to each other, one for white boys and one for negro boys. White boys and negro boys shall not, in any manner, be associated together or worked together. *Florida*

Mental Hospitals The Board of Control shall see that proper and distinct apartments are arranged for said patients, so that in no case shall Negroes and white persons be together. *Georgia*

Intermarriage It shall be unlawful for a white person to marry anyone except a white person. Any marriage in violation of this section shall be void. *Georgia*

Barbers No colored barber shall serve as a barber [to] white women or girls. *Georgia*

Burial The officer in charge shall not bury, or allow to be buried, any colored persons upon ground set apart or used for the burial of white persons. *Georgia*

Restaurants All persons licensed to conduct a restaurant, shall serve either white people exclusively or colored people exclusively and shall not sell to the two races within the same room or serve the two races anywhere under the same license. *Georgia*

Amateur Baseball It shall be unlawful for any amateur white baseball team to play baseball on any vacant lot or baseball diamond within two blocks of a playground devoted to the Negro race, and it shall be unlawful for any amateur colored baseball team to play baseball in any vacant lot or baseball diamond within two blocks of any playground devoted to the white race. *Georgia*

Parks It shall be unlawful for colored people to frequent any park owned or maintained by the city for the benefit, use and enjoyment of white persons...and unlawful for any white person to frequent any park owned or maintained by the city for the use and benefit of colored persons. *Georgia*

Wine and Beer All persons licensed to conduct the business of selling beer or wine...shall serve either white people exclusively or colored people exclusively and shall not sell to the two races within the same room at any time. *Georgia*

Reform Schools The children of white and colored races committed to the houses of reform shall be kept entirely separate from each other. *Kentucky*

Circus Tickets All circuses, shows, and tent exhibitions, to which the attendance of...more than one race is invited or expected to attend shall provide for the convenience of its patrons not less than two ticket offices with individual ticket sellers, and not less than two entrances to the said performance, with individual ticket takers and receivers, and in the case of outside or tent performances, the said ticket offices shall not be less than twenty-five (25) feet apart. *Louisiana*

Housing Any person...who shall rent any part of any such building to a negro person or a negro family when such building is already in whole or in part in occupancy by a white person or white family, or vice versa when the building is in occupancy by a negro person or negro family, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine of not less than twenty-five (\$25.00) nor more than one hundred (\$100.00) dollars or be imprisoned not less than 10, or more than 60 days, or both such fine and imprisonment in the discretion of the court. *Louisiana*

The Blind The board of trustees shall...maintain a separate building...on separate ground for the admission, care, instruction, and support of all blind persons of the colored or black race. *Louisiana*

Intermarriage All marriages between a white person and a negro, or between a white person and a person of negro descent, to the third generation, inclusive, or between a white person and a member of the Malay race; or between the negro and a member of the Malay race; or between a person of Negro descent, to the third generation, inclusive; and a member of the Malay race, are forever prohibited, and shall be void. *Maryland*

Railroads All railroad companies and corporations, and all persons running or operating cars or coaches by steam on any railroad line or track in the State of Maryland, for the transportation of passengers, are hereby required to provide separate cars or coaches for the travel and transportation of the white and colored passengers. *Maryland*

Education Separate schools shall be maintained for the children of the white and colored races. *Mississippi*

Promotion of Equality Any person...who shall be guilty of printing, publishing or circulating printed, typewritten or written matter urging or presenting for public acceptance or general information, arguments or suggestions in favor of social equality or of intermarriage between whites and negroes, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and subject to fine or not exceeding five hundred (500.00) dollars or imprisonment not exceeding six (6) months or both. *Mississippi*

Intermarriage The marriage of a white person with a negro or mulatto or person who shall have one-eighth or more of negro blood, shall be unlawful and void. *Mississippi*

Hospital Entrances There shall be maintained by the governing authorities of every hospital maintained by the state for treatment of white and colored patients separate entrances for white and colored patients and visitors, and such entrances shall be used by the race only for which they are prepared. *Mississippi*

Prisons The warden shall see that the white convicts shall have separate apartments for both eating and sleeping from the negro convicts. *Mississippi*

Education Separate free schools shall be established for the education of children of African descent; and it shall be unlawful for any colored child to attend any white school, or any white child to attend a colored school. *Missouri*

Intermarriage All marriages between...white persons and negroes or white persons and Mongolians...are prohibited and declared absolutely void...No person having one-eighth part or more of negro blood shall be permitted to marry any white person, nor shall any white person be permitted to marry any negro or person having one-eighth part or more of negro blood. *Missouri*

Education Separate rooms [shall] be provided for the teaching of pupils of African descent, and [when] said rooms are so provided, such pupils may not be admitted to the school rooms occupied and used by pupils of Caucasian or other descent. *New Mexico*

Textbooks Books shall not be interchangeable between the white and colored schools, but shall continue to be used by the race first using them. *North Carolina*

Libraries The state librarian is directed to fit up and maintain a separate place for the use of the colored people who may come to the library for the purpose of reading books or periodicals. *North Carolina*

Militia The white and colored militia shall be separately enrolled, and shall never be compelled to serve in the same organization. No organization of colored troops shall be permitted where white troops are available, and while white permitted to be organized, colored troops shall be under the command of white officers. *North Carolina*

Transportation The...Utilities Commission...is empowered and directed to require the establishment of separate waiting rooms at all stations for the white and colored races. *North Carolina*

Teaching Any instructor who shall teach in any school, college or institution where members of the white and colored race are received and enrolled as pupils for instruction shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof, shall be fined in any sum not less than ten dollars (\$10.00) nor more than fifty dollars (\$50.00) for each offense. *Oklahoma*

Fishing, Boating, and Bathing The [Conservation] Commission shall have the right to make segregation of the white and colored races as to the exercise of rights of fishing, boating and bathing. *Oklahoma*

Mining The baths and lockers for the negroes shall be separate from the white race, but may be in the same building. *Oklahoma*

Telephone Booths The Corporation Commission is hereby vested with power and authority to require telephone companies...to maintain separate booths for white and colored patrons when there is a demand for such separate booths. That the Corporation Commission shall determine the necessity for said separate booths only upon complaint of the people in the town and vicinity to be served after due hearing as now provided by law in other complaints filed with the Corporation Commission. *Oklahoma*

Lunch Counters No persons, firms, or corporations, who or which furnish meals to passengers at station restaurants or station eating houses, in times limited by common carriers of said passengers, shall furnish said meals to white and colored passengers in the same room, or at the same table, or at the same counter. *South Carolina*

Child Custody It shall be unlawful for any parent, relative, or other white person in this State, having the control or custody of any white child, by right of guardianship, natural or acquired, or otherwise, to dispose of, give or surrender such white child permanently into the custody, control, maintenance, or support, of a negro. *South Carolina*

Libraries Any white person of such county may use the county free library under the rules and regulations prescribed by the commissioners court and may be entitled to all the privileges thereof. Said court shall make proper provision for the negroes of said county to be served through a separate branch or branches of the county free library, which shall be administered by [a] custodian of the negro race under the supervision of the county librarian. *Texas*

Education [The County Board of Education] shall provide schools of two kinds; those for white children and those for colored children. *Texas*

Theaters Every person...operating...any public hall, theatre, opera house, motion picture show or any place of public entertainment or public assemblage which is attended by both white and colored persons, shall separate the white race and the colored race and shall set apart and designate...certain seats therein to be occupied by white persons and a portion thereof, or certain seats therein, to be occupied by colored persons. *Virginia*

Railroads The conductors or managers on all such railroads shall have power, and are hereby required, to assign to each white or colored passenger his or her respective car, coach or compartment. If the passenger fails to disclose his race, the conductor and managers, acting in good faith, shall be the sole judges of his race. *Virginia*

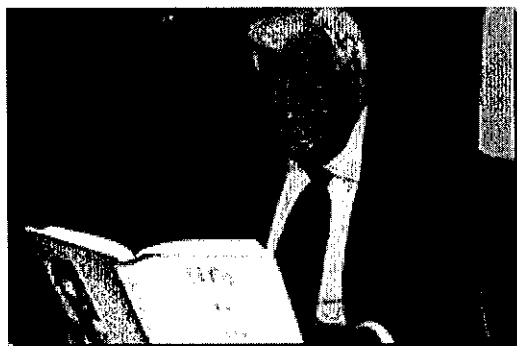
Intermarriage All marriages of white persons with Negroes, Mulattos, Mongolians, or Malaya hereafter contracted in the State of Wyoming are and shall be illegal and void. *Wyoming*



Last Updated: January 5, 1998

http://www.nps.gov/malu/documents/jim_crow_laws.htm

Created by Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site Interpretive Staff

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Dawson Bronze with Sculptor Johnny Bryant - By Monica Mendoza * Star-Telegram

About his life

George Dawson, the grandson of a slave, was born in a log cabin in Marshall, Texas, on January 18, 1898. When he was just 8 years old, he began working to help support his family. He never went to school or learned to read. He married in 1926 and became a father in 1927.

Dawson survived a decade of hard work, chopping wood, working in a sawmill and building levees on the Mississippi river with the aid of a mule. He laid ties for some of the first railroads in East Texas. He swept floors, cleaned for white people, and for most of his working life - 25 years - ran the machines that pasteurized milk at Oak Farms Dairy. While working at Oak Farms, Dawson once lost a chance at a promotion because his boss asked him to sign his name and he marked an X instead.

Dawson outlived four wives, four siblings and two of his seven children. For much of his life, Dawson had to endure the segregation of the South, and he continued to deal with racism throughout his lifetime.

Dawson learns to read at 98

Dawson got by without reading for 98 years. He trusted the people who paid his wages, he had no need for books or bank accounts, and his wife read the bills. He still wrote X's for his signature and could not read. Then, when he was 98 years old, Dawson started attending school.

On a winter day in 1996, Carl Henry was filling in for another teacher in an adult basic literacy class when George Dawson walked in. Henry, retired after 33 years as an educator in the Dallas school system, asked Mr. Dawson if he knew the alphabet. "No, son," was Dawson's reply. Over the weeks, months and years that followed, Carl Henry taught Dawson to read.

Richard Glaubman meets Mr. Dawson

In 1998, elementary school teacher Richard Glaubman read an article about a Texas man who learned to read and write at age 98. Inspired and intrigued, Glaubman arranged to meet him. Eventually the two men collaborated to write the award-winning book *Life Is So Good*. The book tells the story of George Dawson's remarkable life, showing us the entire 20th century through his eyes and detailing his determination to become literate after nearly a century of life.

Richard Glaubman has appeared on CBS Sunday Morning, Good Morning America and many other programs. *Life Is So Good* was favorably reviewed by The New York Times, Christian Science Monitor, USA Today, Washington Post and many others, and has been a selection of both the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Literacy Guild. Glaubman was awarded a Doctorate of Humane Letters for "outstanding achievement in the service of humankind" and won the Christopher Award for writers whose work "affirms the highest values of the human spirit."

Life is so good!

What makes a happy person, a happy life? In his remarkable book, George Dawson reflects on the philosophy he learned from his father - a belief that "life is so good" - as he offers valuable lessons in living and a fresh, firsthand view of America during the 20th century.

Born in 1898, the grandson of slaves, Dawson tells how his father, despite hardships, always believed in seeing the richness in life and trained his children to do the same.

As a boy, George had to go to work to help support the family, and so he did not attend school or learn to read; yet he describes how he learned to read the world and survive in it. "We make our own way," he says. "Trouble is out there, but a person can leave it alone and just do the right thing. Then, if trouble still finds you, you've done the best you can."

At 98, George decided to learn to read and enrolled in a literacy program, becoming a celebrated student. "Every morning I get up and I wonder what I might learn that day. You just never know." In *Life Is So Good*, he shares wisdom on everything from parenting ("With children, you got to raise them. Some parents these days are growing children, not raising them") to attitude ("People worry too much. Life is good, just the way it is").

Richard Glaubman captures George Dawson's irresistible voice and view of the world, offering insights into humanity, history and America - eyewitness impressions of segregation, changes in human relations, the wars and the presidents, inventions such as the car and the airplane, and much, much more.

While living, George Dawson also received two Doctorates of Humane letters from Texas Wesleyan University and New School of New York City. In 2002, George Dawson Middle School was named in his honor in Southlake, Texas. Throughout his story, George Dawson inspires us with the message that sustained him for more than a century: "Life is so good. I do believe it's getting better."

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## Life is So Good

*Life Is So Good* the major work of the two. At about 100,000 words, it is five times the length of the Hutchinson book. Above all, it is a page-turner, rushing forward like a well-written novel, and breathing with authenticity. The editor preserves Dawson's voice whenever possible, purposely not correcting the unschooled grammar. Examples: "It would of been a home run if we had fences" and "Most always we was supposed to look down on the ground when a white man was talking."

Because Dawson was not influenced by newspapers, books, or historical events as they happened, his story is his alone, and acts as a mirror to the times in which he lived. The book has a timeless quality that will make it good reading a century from now. It brings to mind two classics — Alex Haley's *Roots* and Ralph Ellison's autobiographical novel, *The Invisible Man*. Except for a structural flaw — the unnecessary insertion of Glaubman himself into the body of the story, which disrupts the narrative flow — this book could become a classic in its own right.

Glaubman, an elementary school teacher in Washington state, was so moved by reading about Dawson in the newspaper that he traveled all the way to Dallas to meet him. Then, realizing the literary potential of Dawson's life story, he persuaded the older man to let him move into his house, so that he could record his story on tape. Glaubman deserves a great deal of credit for making the book possible, and editing it so well. But he would have done better to tell about his involvement in the project only in the introduction, and leave the rest of the book for Dawson. Perhaps he will consider doing this in a second edition.

The book resembles *Roots* in its breathtaking detail about everyday life dating back to slavery. For this, Dawson relies on his own memory. He recalls the stories he heard directly from his grandmother, who was a slave during her childhood, and his great-grandmother, born in 1812, who was still alive during Dawson's early years. His account of their stories, like many parts of the book, is riveting.

Like the main character in *Invisible Man*, Dawson recounts his experiences in traveling from place to place, working at a great variety of jobs, while trying to maintain dignity in the face of overt racism. Many parts of *Life Is So Good* are as vivid as Ellison's great novel.

But unlike Ellison's character, who was educated, Dawson had the burden of hiding his illiteracy from his employers, and even from his own children. It numbs the mind to think that *Invisible Man* was published 48 years ago, yet Ellison was actually 16 years younger than Dawson. Such is the miracle of extreme old age.

When I first read in an article that Dawson had learned to read at the age of 98, I didn't believe it. By the time I got to the end of his book, I believed it.





Life Is So Good.(book by George Dawson, who learned to read at age 98)(Brief Article).  
*Reading Today* 18.4 (Feb 2001): p44.

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### 103-year-old author learned to read at age 98

Not many authors can claim to have lived in three different centuries. Fewer still can say that they had their first book published at age 102. And probably only one could add to those statements the fact that he didn't learn to read until he was 98.

*Life Is So Good*, written as a collaboration between newly literate George Dawson and elementary teacher Richard Glaubman, explores the life and philosophies of a man who has seen almost unbelievable technological, political, and cultural changes during the course of his long life. The book was published by Random House in February 2000, and already has sold more than 100,000 copies.

Born January 18, 1898 in Marshall, Texas, the grandson of slaves, George Dawson tells how his father, despite hardships, always believed in seeing the richness of life, and trained his son to do the same. "Life is so good," his father said. "I do believe it's getting better."

But better didn't mean easy. As the eldest child in a poor family, Dawson began working to help support them at the age of four, while his younger brothers and sisters had the opportunity to attend a school for black children. In Dawson's voice, with help from Glaubman, the reader learns how he was hired out to white farmers at the age of 11, how he learned to survive by spotting trouble and going the other way, how he explored the world, and how he decided, at the age of 98, that it was time to learn to read.

Dawson has seen many changes during his lifetime, but probably none more dramatic than the changes in opportunities for black people. He recalls the struggles involved in growing up in rural Texas in the early 1900s, where the Ku Klux Klan was very active and where he saw one of his childhood friends lynched for being accused of being with a white girl. All through his life, even into his retirement years, Dawson has experienced prejudice in many forms. Through it all, however, he has maintained his dignity and his basic optimism that "life is good."

### Learning to read

But all through that good life, Dawson had one secret: he couldn't read. "I always had a dream that I would learn how to read," he recalls in his book. "It was my secret, that I couldn't read. There was nothing I couldn't do and my mind was as good as anyone's. That's just how it was. All my life, I had been just too busy working to go to school."

Dawson, who has lived in Dallas for many years, has outlived four wives and raised seven children. He made sure all of his youngsters got a good education. All seven graduated both high school and college. For years the only person who knew he couldn't



read was his first wife, Elzenia. She read the mail and paid the bills.

Dawson's life changed one day in 1996 when a young man came knocking at his door and told him about the adult basic education classes at the local high school. It was the school where his children had gone, and it was just a few blocks from his house.

So off to school went Dawson at the age of 98. With the help of a retired schoolteacher named Mr. Henry, Dawson gradually learned to read. By the time he turned 100, he was reading on a third-grade level.

When asked if he was afraid that he would fail at learning to read at such an advanced age, Dawson replied, "I always thought I could drive a spike as good as any man and cook as good as any woman. I just figured if everybody else can learn to read, I could too."

A book is born

A local newspaper ran a story about Dawson in 1998, and the Associated Press picked it up and distributed it to papers everywhere. As a result, hundreds of inspired readers wrote him cards and letters.

One reader, elementary teacher Richard Glaubman from Washington state, was fascinated by Dawson's story and flew to Dallas to visit him. He asked if he could write a book about Dawson's life, and Dawson agreed. After that, he visited Dawson often.

Glaubman initially wanted to write a children's book but soon realized he had too much material, so he began work on an adult version as well. The children's book was never picked up by a publisher, but Random House published the adult version, which has gone on to sell more than 100,000 copies.

Although the publication of *Life Is So Good* has made Dawson somewhat of a celebrity, appearing on television with Oprah Winfrey and doing book signings in New York City and elsewhere, he hasn't changed his lifestyle. "I keep it simple," he says in the book. "There's no need to worry that way."

**RELATED ARTICLE:** George Dawson's advice for a long and happy life

"Be happy for what you have. Help somebody else instead of worrying. It will make a person feel better. It's good to be generous. It doesn't take much to make a difference. Even the poorest man can just take the time to say hello; that can be a help. Have some sympathy for someone's hard-luck story. It's not about money. Give what you can. And if you have nothing, at least pray for somebody. Have good thought."

**Named Works:** *Life Is So Good* (Book) Authorship

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**Centenarian - George Dawson***"1898 - 2001"*

What did Dallasite George Dawson, 103, who joined the Centenarian Club on January 18, 1998, have in common with the venerable Spanish painter? Well, for one thing, they both lived in the 19th century – Goya died in the early part, 1828, and Mr. Dawson was born in the latter part, 1898. But more importantly, Mr. Dawson, perhaps unknowingly, epitomized Goya's now famous painting of a stooped, old man whose kyphosis and arthritis are most obvious. Walking with the aid of two canes, the old man depicted below was another of Goya's self-portraits. He entitled this one *Aun Aprendo*, which translates to "I am still learning." This was significant in that Goya painted this at age 80 while developing the then new technology of lithography – he numbered and signed these works. Thus, "I am still learning" has become a motto for productive aging and lifelong learning. (Read our piece about **Lifelong Learners**.)



You see, George Dawson -- grandson of a slave and born in a three-room log cabin in Marshall, Texas -- spent the first 98 years of his life learning all sorts of things, but could not read and write. Somehow, he got by. But in 1996, someone knocked on his door. It was a recruiter for the Adult Basic Education Program at the Lincoln Instructional Center associated with the Dallas County Adult Literacy Council. This man, who had signed his name with an "X" for almost a century, went to school. In short order, Mr. Dawson, showed a keen intellect by learning his ABCs and being able to sign his name. He can read, and still attends classes daily. Read this fascinating story by Larry Bingham and photo by Carolyn Bauman, both of the Fort-Worth Star-Telegram.

Mr. Carl Henry, Mr. Dawson's teacher, in Dallas, and Mr.



Dawson were our guests on April 7, 1998, when the HCOA celebrated its 10th Anniversary. In the audience were many other luminaries – Michael E. DeBakey, M.D., noted cardiovascular surgeon and medical statesman, who, at age 94, still serves Baylor College of Medicine as our Chancellor Emeritus and consults with patients around the world; Senator/Astronaut John Glenn, who at age 77 became the oldest person to circle the earth; and Mrs. Helen Thomas, Senior White House Correspondent, who has queried more presidents than any other journalist. But Mr. Dawson upstaged our speakers. And why not? He had the distinct possibility of living in three centuries – born in the 19th, had then lived 98% of the 20th, and hopefully would live well into the 21st. Mr. Dawson has not only made it, he has now published a book. That from a man who only learned to read a little over two years ago! So, he has become yet another of our teachers. Thus, I hope each person reading this piece can say, like Goya did at age 80 and Mr. George Dawson said until his death in July 2001, "I am still learning, still writing." Is this a great time to be alive or what?

## Lifelong Learning

The title of this presentation was inspired from the work of art entitled "Aun aprendo," which translates "I am still learning," an inscription on a black chalk drawing of an aged man walking with the aid of two sticks by the famous Spanish painter Francisco de Goya (1746-1828) when he was 80 years old.

My objectives for each of you are 1) to be able to answer to this question: "What is the relevance of Goya's inscription to health care I teach and provide on my service?" and 2) to perceive yourselves as both lifelong learners and as teachers.

Why is this emphasis on lifelong learning important? In part, the answer lies in the elements of the "demographic timebomb" which are 1) one billion people worldwide in the year 2030; 2) each month = net increase of 1,000,000 people worldwide 60+ years of age now; 3) over 33 million older Americans now; and 4) by the year 2060, as many as 2,500,000 people in the US will be 100+ years of age vs. the fewer than 75,000 centenarians of today. The impending explosion of the demographic time bomb begs this question: "Who will take care of these people?" The answer is you and people that you teach will. The other reason we must be lifelong learners and teachers is simply that changes are inexorable in 1) the health status of the population, 2) research findings affecting clinical practice, and 3) such new educational technologies as those afforded by the World Wide Web.



As learners, each of us must continuously increase 1) our own funds of knowledge and 2) our teamwork skills. As teachers, regardless of clinical roles and titles, we must not only 1) teach students who will be future caregivers; but, as well, 2) teach our "student" colleagues; 3) teach the "student" patient; and 4) teach those "students" who are family members of your patients.

Pedagogy and andragogy are terms relating to the education of children and adults, respectively. Andragogy (Knowles, 1981) deals with the independent adult learner who has his or her own goals and is interested in learning for a specific task or problem. By contrast, geragogy (John, 1988) alerts us to the unique areas of teaching older people who are less independent and who may not necessarily have a set of goals in mind when they come into a learning situation, e.g., no big promotions, salary increases, or rewarding changes in their lives. Furthermore, acquiring information uses psychological energy to perform mental tasks; obviously, not every patient/learner can expend that energy.

Regarding teaching strategies, better teachers assume certain responsibilities: I refer to these as the L03 Model, e.g., better teachers 1) facilitate learning opportunities, 2) ensure that learning occurs; and 3) document learning outcomes. To improve presentational skills, if possible, use videotaped microteaching practice sessions and consider that the anatomy of a lecture reveals three components: the beginning, the middle, and the end, each with a structure and function unique to that particular component. The beginning is where one takes care of the social amenities of thanking the host/introducers, tells the audience why the topic is important or why it was chosen, and tells them what the main points of the presentation will be. The middle is simply the presentation of the main points. The end of the presentation also has three components: the first being a restatement of the main points and their relevance to the audience, the solicitation of questions, and a concluding statement ending with "thank you very much."

The other type of "presentation" health professionals frequently make is being the moderator of a meeting or conference. As the moderator, you are still a teacher; you just aren't the "main speaker" per se. You are the facilitator of learning. To perform this role well, do these things: 1) introduce the speaker with remarks about why the topic was chosen and its relevance to the group, i.e., the learners; 2) keep the speakers on time by telling them in advance that you will sit on the front row and get their eye with a sign on a piece of paper with the number "2" on it, indicating that they have only 2 more minutes; 3) in soliciting questions, always have one or two to pose yourself in case the audience does not have any -- often this will stimulate other questions; 4) in



concluding the session, mention one or two of the speakers' main points to emphasize again the relevance of the topic to the group; then 5) thank the speakers and the audience and initiate the applause by clapping your hands. N.B. Spend a quick post-meeting minute reflecting on how you did and always observe other moderators to pick up additional skills.

Also, better teachers "hook " their students' interest by pragmatically using anything that works; e.g., the psychodrama employed by Mr. Keating, the new English teacher portrayed by the gifted actor Robin Williams in the 1989 Oscar-nominated film "Dead Poets Society," can work. Exhort your students, colleagues, and patients and their families to, as Mr. Keating did his English students, "carpe diem boys-- seize the day and make your lives extraordinary."

I hope that each of you will exhort your students, colleagues, and patients and their families to, as Mr. Keating did his English students, "carpe diem boys -- seize the day and make your lives extraordinary." I hope that when each of us is 80 years old, we can be like Goya and say, "Aun aprendo....I'm still learning, still teaching."

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## Onyx reviews: *Life is So Good* by George Dawson and Richard Glaubman

If George Dawson had not been at home the day the man came by handing out flyers, he would likely have missed a major opportunity. Even if the advertiser had left the brochure, Dawson would have discarded it, since he could not read it. The flyer advertised adult literacy classes at a nearby school. At the age of 98, Dawson took his first steps away from illiteracy.

His story drew national attention. School teacher Richard Glaubman was intrigued by this man whose life spans the entire 20th century and traveled from Seattle to rural Marshall, Texas to meet Dawson. The two became fast friends. Glaubman, recognizing in Dawson a chronicle of the last hundred years from a totally different perspective, decided to get Dawson to tell his story. Their main goal, in addition to capturing this life on paper, was to try to raise enough money to help Dawson patch his leaky roof.

Dawson remembers listening to his grandmother talking about the day that they found out that the south had lost the Civil War, ending their lifetime of slavery. Life did not automatically become easy for them, however. The family had to stay on for nearly a decade to earn out the debt that their owner -- now their employer -- calculated he had due to him.

The Dawson family trekked from Mississippi to east Texas looking for work. There they claimed the forty acres and mule that had been promised to every freed slave family. Dawson's story tells of how his family prospered, acquiring additional acreage and becoming self-sufficient through perseverance and endless hours of hard work.

Dawson had little by way of a childhood. As the eldest of five children, he worked long hours when he might otherwise have been attending school. At the age of 12, he was sent away to work for and live with a white family. His earnings were sent back to his parents, who also benefited from having one less mouth to feed, while he slept in a shed in the back yard. He ate his meals alone. Other than giving orders, no one spoke to him during those four years except during his infrequent visits with his family.

Co-author Glaubman helps bring the story into context using articles chronicling important events during Dawson's life. Articles that until recently Dawson could not read. Many of these national events, even World War I, had little impact on the Dawson family. They were too busy with the daily struggle of keeping the family alive and fed.

Dawson's story is also a real-life history of prejudice and segregation, the matter-of-fact way in which colored people (that is how Dawson refers to himself) forced themselves to adapt to a life under the Jim Crow laws. If there was no colored water fountain, they went thirsty. When a restaurant would not even sell his baseball team sandwiches to take away and eat on the roadside, they went hungry.

When he reached his majority, Dawson rode the rails, sometimes paying his way but often stealing rides on freight cars, crisscrossing the US, traversing Canada and exploring parts of Mexico. He was amazed to discover that there were places where a black man could ride in the same train car with white people and eat in the same restaurants. Even without this prejudice boundary, though, Dawson had another: he couldn't read.

Dawson returned to his hometown and raised a family, outliving four wives and passing on his drive to succeed to his seven children. Even after he retired from a long career at a local dairy, Dawson continued to seek out work, laboring tirelessly, doing whatever people asked of him.

*Life is so Good* is a thought-provoking, educational and inspiring story. Anyone reading about the hardships of Dawson's life would not blame him if he had called his memoir *Life is so Hard*. But that is not Dawson's philosophy. Hard work is what life is. Even at 102, he never missed a day of school. "Every morning I get up and wonder what I might learn that day," he says. He also understands that he is now a source of encouragement for others who are picking up the pieces of their education. It is a responsibility that he takes very seriously.