

Practicing Diversity, Conscience and Integrity

It's one thing to practice diversity and inclusion when it's easy or a corporate "mandate." It's far different to uphold diversity when it costs you personally. That's when the conscience of an individual is tested. But if you still have a conscience in this time of human devolution, you follow it—not because it's right or fashionable, but because you can't imagine doing anything else. My father was like that.



Vincent J. Collins, "The Comforter," from Life Magazine, August 25, 1952, Cornell Capa, photographer.

Vincent Joseph Collins was one of the early pioneers in anesthesiology. At the height of the Great Depression, he attended Marietta College on scholarship. It included room but not board, so he got himself on the football team, which meant he could eat for free at the team's training table. He wasn't big or tall, but he was certainly determined!

Brown University graduate work led to Yale Medical School. And in the early years of World War 2, he was secretly whisked away from New Haven to a submarine waiting just offshore in the Long Island Sound to perform the anesthesia for an operation on US Army General Omar Bradley. Even though the operation wasn't life-threatening, no one could know about it: Bradley was a top general and the government feared any whisper of Bradley being ill could undermine the war effort. "Son," the commander who briefed Vince on the way to the submarine said, "don't f*** this up."

In the 1950s, Vince worked at several New York City hospitals, and served as head of anesthesiology at St. Vincent's—at the time, a cushy, luxury, private hospital run by the Catholic Church. (Elizabeth Taylor gave birth to Liza Todd there, a day after my mother gave birth to Maryclaire, her seventh.) At one

point, Vince was conducting a search for a new member of his team and he told his decision to the nun who ran St. Vincent's.

"You wanted me to find the best candidate possible, correct?"

The nun answered, "Absolutely."

"Well then, here's the man I want to hire."

The nun looked at the full application, and the photo of the candidate. "Oh.... Doctor Collins.... I'm afraid we cannot hire him. We just can't. Our patients wouldn't...feel comfortable."

That top candidate was Black.

"Well, Sister, if he can't work here, neither can I." Vince walked out that day.

His decision was quite costly—and perhaps surprising, since he was a devout Catholic. Vince did get another job quickly, but at Bellevue—a public hospital that paid far, far less. With seven children, Mom may not have been overjoyed, but she completely agreed and supported his decision.

For several decades after that, Vince trained countless interns, residents and nurse anesthetists at Chicago's Cook County Hospital and Northwestern Medical School. Diversity reigned in his classroom and department. Many of those doctors and nurses returned to their home countries to develop and improve anesthesiology departments at hospitals in Mexico, Italy, Brazil, India, China, Egypt, Pakistan and elsewhere. Dad's right-hand man was wheelchair-bound ever since I can remember. With every one of his colleagues and students, Vince saw the hard work, dedication and brilliance of the doctors they either were or could become.

Music was not a forte for my father. He was essentially tone deaf, but he could recognize the opening of Beethoven's 5th Symphony because it was the same rhythm as the Morse Code for the letter V, for victory. Despite his lack of vocal skills, he did try to teach us a smattering of French by singing "Alouette, gentille alouette"—an oddly gruesome children's song about plucking a lark before cooking it! At Christmastime, we'd only let him join us in singing "Good King Wenceslas," which couldn't be damaged by his one-note rendition, although he insisted we do every verse.

My postings typically offer an imagination exercise with music to help engender particular modes/moods of beneficial behavior. Rather than Beethoven...or the poor little French lark, I'll offer a short part from the 4th movement of the Brahms Symphony #1.

The Nobility and Worthiness of Conscience

[Brahms, Symphony #1, C minor, mvt.4](#), Berlin Philharmonic, Herbert von Karajan, 1973 (32:49 – 34:00)

It is often supremely difficult to stand with your conscience instead of sinking with what CG Jung termed the Collective Shadow. But there's another Collective that can support your efforts at integrity. It's the

Collective of the Honorable through History—those who, in large and small ways, chose to be of service rather than to be served. The short, 70-second excerpt from the Brahms embodies that Collective of “the better angels of our nature.”

Let your Being and your conscience drink in this music, imprint this music and feel the uplifting force of the many people who chose to practice honor, wisdom, compassion and conscience, rather than closing their inner sight and drifting complacently along in the paths of least resistance.