

REALITY CHECK

AUGUST 1998

Last October I received a gift from my Dad after the death of my Grandfather. It was a book by Richard Carlson entitled "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff." This book is apparently very popular being a *New York Times* Bestseller; however it is a great stretch from my usual material, which usually consists of Non-Fiction History to an occasional Tom Clancy thriller. I am by nature highly competitive and a little high strung and more or less of a control freak, so I can understand why my father who is pretty much the most laid back person ever, would purchase me such a book. However being stubborn as well, I considered some of the aforementioned traits as assets in the financial world, and quickly shelved the book. My mother and father however did not give up on me reading the book so easily and they continued to remind me on a daily basis their desire to have me read the book. They went as far as to also purchase me Richard Carlson's next two follow up books. Eventually I ran out of excuses and decided to read all three. I have to say that Mom and Dad were right; I recommend Richard Carlson's books to everyone. There is a chapter in his second book, "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff With Your Family," entitled *Treat Your Family Members As If This Were The Last Time You Were Going To See Them*. The message in this chapter took on a whole new meaning after an event that transpired this past month.

This past month our family got a real scare when my youngest brother Joe got into a terrible car-accident. Joey, a student at Green Mountain College was returning to his summer job in Vermont, when he fell asleep at the wheel and slammed into an eighteen-wheeler. By some act of God, he walked away from the accident without a scratch. I found out about the accident with a call from my Mother. When told about the circumstances of the crash, I, along with the rest of my family were convinced that we as a family were the recipients of a miracle.

This whole incident shook me up quite a bit. I started playing the "What if" game inside my head and didn't like the scenarios being spit out. I had a rude awakening on how fragile life really is. I took a long hard look at what really is important in life. In Richard Carlson's book he suggests that you treat family members as if this were the last time you were going to see them. He asks the reader on what frequency do we take for granted the people we love and count on the most. He states, "Most of us seem to operate under the assumption that we can always be kind later, that there's always tomorrow." I myself, like most people have been guilty of this behavior in the past. Richard Carlson ends this chapter and the book with his solution to this bad habit that most of us are in. His solution simply is to imagine that the good-bye you are giving is your last. He states, "Imagine that, for one reason or another you won't see your family member ever again after this meeting." When thinking in that frame of mind and acting in such a manner, much of the unimportant issues that cloud our relationships with loved ones seem to fade away, and our focus on what is really important becomes much clearer.