

# CHARACTER



Dependability

January 2005

**Dependability: “Believable, reliable, persistent, enduring.”  
“Good men prefer to be accountable.”**

**Michael Edwardes**

“People who need people are the luckiest people in the world,” especially when they know they can count on each other. A wonderful sense of assurance and hope comes from being able to depend on an important person. But being dependable is even better—you get all the assurance and hope, plus the gratification of having done something good. I don’t do it often enough, but when I manage to deliver on a promise to someone else (or to myself), I like how it feels, and that makes me want to do it again.

I have learned much about dependability from my mother. She was dependable as a child, but I think her personification of the trait is largely borne out of having lost two people she depended on when she was a teenager. She was fourteen when the father she adored abandoned his family. Four years later, her new and equally beloved stepfather was killed. Since those anguishing and unstable years, much of what my mother has done is part of an effort to fortify her life with physical and emotional security—from her choice of a husband to the management of her finances, to her insistence that every roll of tape, pair of scissors, lipstick, and article of clothing be precisely where it belongs at all times. Borrowing her things usually meant big trouble, especially when I forgot to return them. I came to understand why as I learned more about my mother’s life. I think her world is much safer when she knows she can depend on the people and even the things in her life.

One of my mother’s earliest lessons on the value of dependability occurred when she had me memorize our phone number. I was now permitted to venture further out into the neighborhood if I promised to call her from the home of any friend I visited. When I made that first-ever phone call to “check in,” her delight filled me with unexpected elation. Suddenly I was much

more grown up—a person she said she could put her trust in! Ever since, I have relished the feeling of being in the right place at the right time, doing what I’m supposed to do.

Two years ago, Principal Karl Bowman reminded me of the power of that feeling. My husband and I sat in his office at Rocky Mountain Elementary, confounded by our first grader’s behavior problems, and trying to suggest what might help him improve. After listening patiently, Mr. Bowman made his kind, firm, and simple suggestion: what our son needed was to feel what you get to feel when you do what you’re supposed to do. That feeling would lead him to make more and more correct choices. Mr. Bowman was right. When our son behaves well, we ask him how he feels about it. He practically beams his answer to us. “Remember this feeling,” we tell him.

Dependability is much more than a social nicety; it is the mark of a life lived nobly and well. Like my son, recalling the good feeling of being dependable makes me want to experience it again. With that desire, I am more able to overcome forgetfulness, laziness, selfishness, and apprehension and do what is needed. With each subsequent dependable act, I become a stronger, better person.

At a family reunion, my mother described what it had meant knowing that her three uncles were there for her at every important turn in her life, filling in for her two absent fathers. They had been dependable, constantly providing the paternal support, guidance, and love my mother ached for. My current level of progress may not be the most ideal--it’s really not much more than a selfish desire to feel good. But it’s the beginning of an upward spiral that, I hope, will make me more like them, and like her.

Caroline Otto  
Lindon Resident

**“The willingness to accept responsibility for one’s own life is the source from which self-respect springs.”**  
–Joan Didion

“Diamonds are only chunks of coal that stuck to their jobs.”  
–Minnie Richard Smith

“Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”  
–Theodore Roosevelt

## Book List

### Grandfather's Gold Watch

by Louise Garff Hubbard

### Brave Irene

by William Steig

### Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates

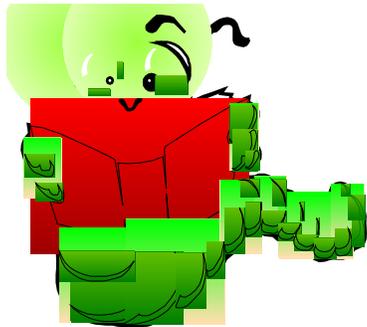
by Mary Mapes Dodge

### Sign of the Beaver

by Elizabeth George Speare

### Sarah Noble

by Alice Dalgliesh



## Family Activities

**-Have each family member see how long he can balance on one leg with eyes closed.** *We depend on our eyes for balance. What else do we depend on to live and play? Who depends on us?*

**-Make a paper chain showing how family responsibilities are linked.** (The baby depends on the mother for food. The mother depends on the brother to answer the phone while she is feeding the baby...)

**-Divide the family into two teams and play balloon volleyball.** *What does having each team member be dependable have to do with winning the game?*

**-John Hancock was born on January 23, 1737.** As president of the Continental Congress, he was the first signer of the Declaration of Independence. However, he did not just sign his name, he used his wealth and influence for the American cause of independence. Today, a person's John Hancock is his signature. It is a binding, visual commitment. *How dependable are we? Can people depend on our word as much as on our signature?*

## Kid's Corner

Someone who is dependable is reliable, trustworthy, honest and unfailing. I sing in the Rocky Mountain Elementary School choir. One day after school, a friend of mine tried to convince some friends and me to go to her house instead of going to choir practice. It sounded like lots of fun, but I knew it wasn't right. Because I chose not to go to her house, one of my other friends also decided to go to practice instead. I feel like I was being dependable.

My mom says I'm dependable because I tend my younger brother so she can run errands, I do what I am asked to do, and I only watch appropriate shows on T.V. She trusts me. I think it is important to be dependable so that others will trust me and I can feel good about myself.

Ashlee Olson  
6th Grade  
Rocky Mountain Elementary

**We, at Character Connection would like to focus on helping parents access character materials this year by using the web site located at [www.thecharacterconnection.com](http://www.thecharacterconnection.com). If you are interested in receiving a monthly reminder of the character traits and access to resource materials, please e-mail your address to [arlainea@isquaredinc.com](mailto:arlainea@isquaredinc.com)**

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