

PREFACE

This little booklet has developed in response to a challenge thrown my way by my older son. Last Christmas he phoned: “Dad, next summer you will be turning sixty. That is an important birthday—one of Life’s watersheds, so to speak. I want to come to Topanga to help you celebrate. You have been around six whole decades so you have probably learned something worth passing on to the rest of us. When we get together to celebrate, why don’t you get it together and share with us what you consider to be the most important things you have learned in your first sixty years on this globe.”

At first I took this as just a nice compliment, the same sort as he had given me when he was eleven and asked me one day, “Dad, are you the secret chief editor of Mad Magazine?” Then, I began to see this was something more than a compliment. It was a challenge—a challenge to prove whether I had really in all this time learned anything worth passing on. Being a Leo, I accepted the challenge, and the chips were down.

As I thought more about this idea of getting something really worthwhile together to pass on, two notions began to overwhelm me. The first was, ‘What is worth doing is worth doing well,’ but I have always favored the version, ‘What is worth doing is worth doing to excess.’ This seemed to imply that something more than a few notes on odd scraps of paper was called for, and the idea of a pamphlet emerged. After further thought, it became evident that the name of this game was *distillation*. I had to condense into a few ‘golden words’ anything I had to say. I recalled Goethe’s apology to a friend: “Please forgive my writing you a long letter—I did not have time to write you a short one.” And this led to the second notion that began to overwhelm me: If I

am going to get it together by next July 28, then I should have had a little more warning—something like an additional 59 years. But here I was beginning to take the task too seriously. After all I should not mistake a good humored compliment for an election to the office of Sage of the Age.

Nonetheless, the idea is a good one, not just for me at sixty, but for everyone at key birthdays throughout life. We prepare wills bequeathing our material goods, but is it not just as important that we prepare testaments passing on to our friends whatever nonmaterial wealth we may have accumulated. I prepared this pamphlet as a paradigm, urging all of my friends and relatives to follow suit—get your testaments together too and share your treasures.

Finally, in view of its history, I dedicate this booklet to its progenitor, Arthur Seymour Wilson.