

Lessons in Leadership

LGO REMEMBERS DON DAVIS

MIT Leaders for Global Operations

<http://lgo.mit.edu>

January 2011

DON DAVIS CAME TO MIT IN 1988 to contribute to the newly-formed Leaders for Manufacturing program (now Leaders for Global Operations). Having retired as CEO of Stanley Works, he would go on to spend 22 years in “retirement” teaching leadership to LFM/LGO students, without asking anything in return except for a parking pass and access to the MIT squash and tennis courts.

Starting with the first class of 1990, Don’s leadership lessons shaped what Leaders for Global Operations has since become. In giving so much of himself and conveying his “leadership mantras” through his own example, he was an inspiration to our students and alumni.

In the pages that follow, we present memories of Don’s lessons and example as shared by a generation of LFM and LGO students. On behalf of these students and graduates, we offer our heartfelt tribute to Don Davis’ memory and our thanks for his unstinting efforts for the Leaders for Global Operations program.

Tom Allen

Georgia Perakis

David Simchi-Levi

Vah Erdekian

Don Rosenfield



THE LEADERSHIP MANTRAS OF DON DAVIS

Leaders don't choose their followers.
Followers choose their leaders.

Followers choose leaders they trust,
respect, and are comfortable with.

Be yourself.
The number of effective leadership
styles is limitless.

Leaders need a base of power and
authority but the more they use it,
the less there is left.

The best leadership is based on
persuasion.

Leaders set the ethical standards
and tone of their organizations by
their behavior.

Integrity is the bedrock of effective
leadership. Only you can lose your
integrity.

"Selfship" is the enemy of leadership.

Be quick to praise, but slow to
admonish. Praise in public, but
admonish in private.

One of a leader's key responsibilities
is stamping out self-serving politics
when it emerges.

Be sure to know as much as
possible about the people you are
leading.

One manages things,
people lead people.

Diversity in an organization
is not only legally required and
socially desirable, it's effective.

Leadership should be viewed
as stewardship.

Don't make tough borderline
decisions until you need to.
Many will solve themselves
with time.

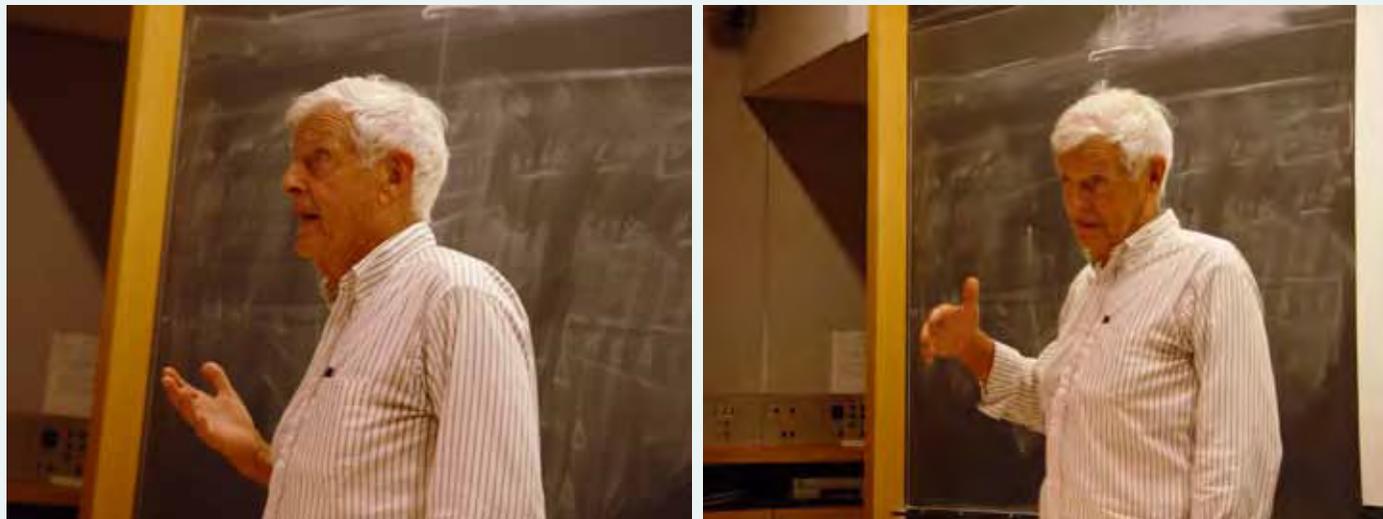
When making decisions about
people, listen to your "gut."

Almost everyone can see through
manipulation and game playing.
Everyone can spot a phony.

Learn to say out loud "I was wrong"
and "I don't know."

If you know a plan or decision is
wrong, don't implement it.
Instead, keep talking.

Each of us has potential to
lead, follow, or be an individual
contributor.



Integrity is everything.

ERIC SOEDERBERG '92



I had a hallway conversation with Don at the LFM Conference at MIT in 2008. I was amazed and flattered by his interest and inquisitiveness regarding my career since LFM, some 15 years after I graduated. He then recruited/implored me to get involved with the alumni participation aspect of the new proseminar course. I was moved by Don's continuing degree of passion for the program, and for the alumni, and for the active emphasis on Leaders in LGO.

MARK MASTANDREA '93



In one of our early seminars, Don told us about overhearing some people discussing the details of a new product being developed by a major competitor of Stanley. This happened while he was eating his porridge for breakfast at the Harvard Club; the people talking about the competitor's product were seated at a table near Don, speaking loudly about what should have been proprietary details, and obviously did not recognize him.

Don asked the class what we would do and a discussion of various alternatives followed. When someone asked him what happened, Don replied that he simply

walked over to their table, handed them his business card and walked out of the restaurant. It was the perfect response: Don made them aware that they had made a mistake, and did so in the spirit of “full disclosure.” Without a doubt, it was doing the right thing in a scenario not of his making.

I have thought of that story over the years since graduating from LFM in 1993, and it has more than once served as a template for my actions. It very simply demonstrated the power of making the right decision in unusual (or uncomfortable) circumstances.

MIKE NOLAN '93



It is important to be an ethical leader.

AMY RENSHAW '93



Don was not a young man when I took his Leadership Seminar many years ago. Don had already lived a full and blessed life when I knew him, and I’m glad that I got the chance to know him. He was a great man. I’m sure the last 17 years have only added more blessings for Don.

When I took Don’s Leadership Seminar, he assigned each of us the task to speak about leadership to the group at one class. It was a very open-ended assignment. I think Koonman read a book called *Young Men and Fire* and he spoke about that. I (who am not very artsy) felt inspired to write a poem about leadership. As I recall, Don really liked it. Of all the work I produced in 24 months at MIT (including my thesis) I think that poem and a large mural I prepared for Shoji Shiba’s class are the 2 pieces of work I’m most proud of from my days at MIT.

MIKE KIRSCH '94



I remember Don talking about the flood of “urgent” but unimportant decisions that show up on the desk of a leader. He said that the true job of the leader was to distinguish which items really were important and required action and which were merely noise.

BRETT BISSELL '96



**One of the most important jobs of a leader
is to find a successor.**

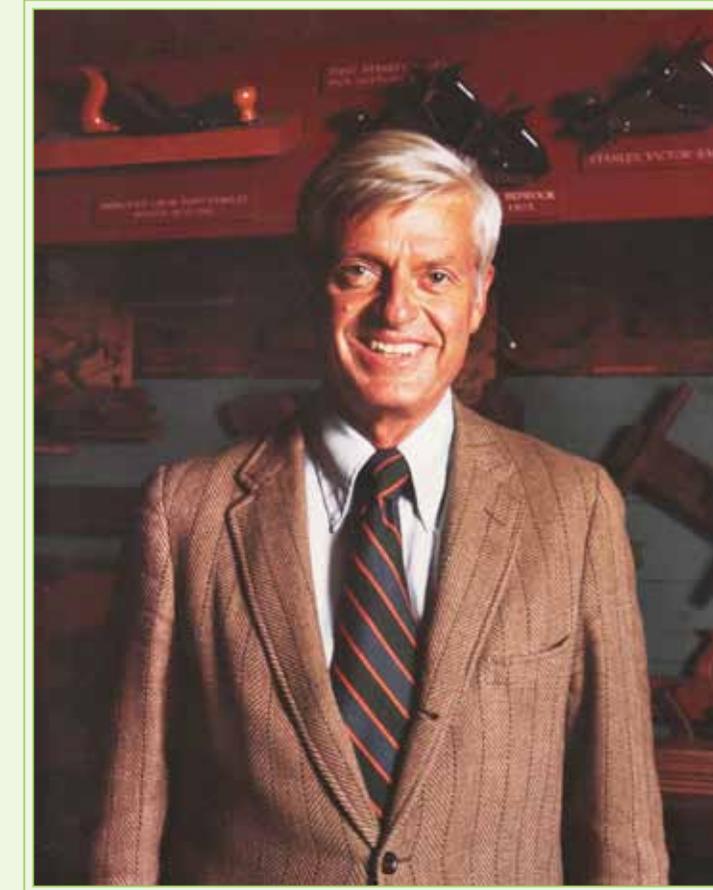
**Things you have worked for continue —
culture as well as specific technical processes.**

**Doing what is right and ethical will make you
a strong leader in the long run even if it causes pain or loss
(to you or to others) in the short term.**

ALISON McCAFFREY '99



Don Davis's patience and the reverence our class felt for him kept the younger and older of our 48 fellows glued to his words on leadership. His classes had an altogether different, deeper, true-to-life feel to them. His energy and sincere intent for us to grow, contemplate, and learn could be felt in the silence of his pauses. Leadership is a difficult subject to teach and is widely thought to be instinctual, or if not, can only be developed experience. But through his stories and thanks to his authenticity and integrity, Don did manage to teach us leadership. We learned that leadership is not merely a class subject or something we turn on at work, but a way of life in which we develop our own style that is unique among our organizations, our academic institutions, our peers, our managers, our investors, our government, our nations, our communities and our families.



His real-life stories reverberated in the halls of E40 after class with questions among us students like “Would you have done it like that?”

MITCH MALONE '00



Don Davis' easy-going accessibility was another early sign to our class that LFM was a special place at MIT. It was a unique opportunity to have direct access to the ex-CEO of a major company and soak up wisdom borne of real life leadership success. It was evident that Don wanted to give back by helping to train the next generation of business leaders. Through the Don Davis seminar sessions and in hallway conversations, Don passed along a humble and common-sense outlook to our class, and thus his spirit lives on through each of our careers.

MIKE VANDER WEL '01



Don gave us an ethical standard to practically guide tough decisions:

**Would you be OK with your actions published
on the front page of the newspaper?**

Even if it wouldn't be, or even if no one found out, it is most important to apply this standard when no one is looking.

KRIS HARPER '02



**If you discover a problem, you have two choices:
Solve it yourself, or find someone who will solve it.**

**Leaders don't choose their followers:
followers choose their leader.**

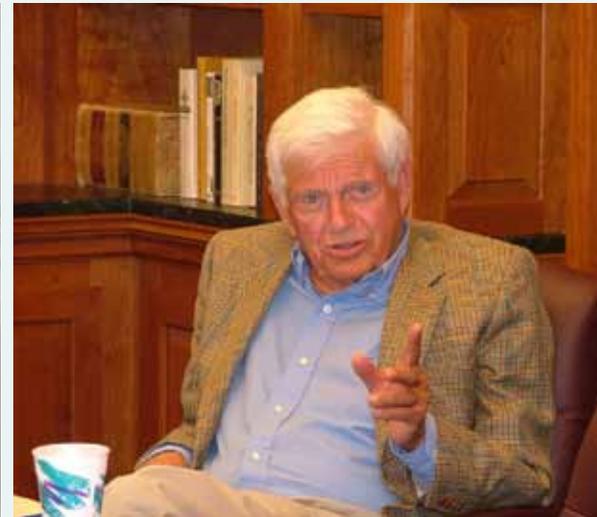
TOM EVANS '03



Don has always said you have to “listen to your gut.” But he went even further to say “if you don't have a good gut, then you have to develop one.” It is this clarification to his mantra that has had a lasting meaning for me. Don taught that your intuition is constantly being challenged and — if you make the attempt — can continuously improve. I've had several leadership opportunities since Don's leadership class and I carry this mantra with me knowing that I may not have the answers for each new leadership crucible but my constantly evolving “gut” provides me the confidence to move forward.

RICK NARDO '03





When Don entered the lecture hall, spontaneously and immediately all conversation would halt and everyone would sit down. Immediately! Don's presence captured our attention instantly.

JAMES BROOKS '04



**Attitude!
Authenticity!
Awareness!**

RACHEL SHEINBEIN '04



**Don't do anything that you would not like to read
on the front page of *The New York Times*.**

**Be authentic in order to succeed as a leader.
Lead by example!**

TANJA VAINIO '04



Work-life balance is your responsibility

His stories about the right way to do layoffs —
quickly as possible, treating employees as human beings —
“Management 5S’ing a place”

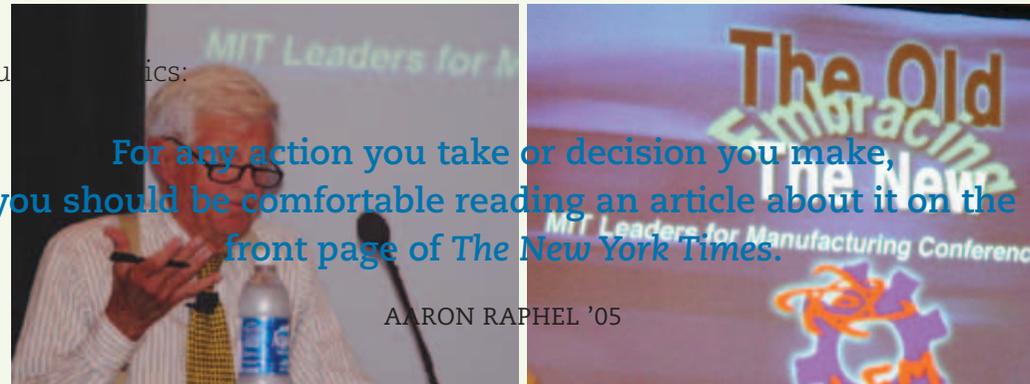
Finding our “patch of green,”
our place where we feel comfortable

AMBER CHESBOROUGH, MICHAEL MILLER, ALYSON NAUGHTON,
LINDSAY RUBENSTEIN, AND CLAUDIA SONNET '05

But the metrics:

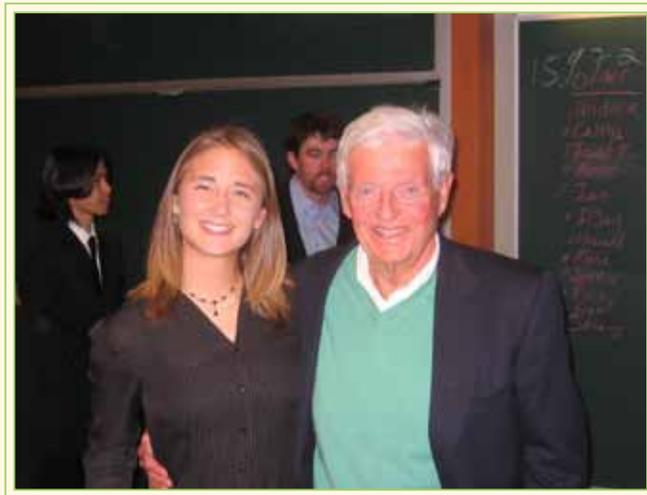
For any action you take or decision you make,
you should be comfortable reading an article about it on the
front page of *The New York Times*.

AARON RAPHEL '05



Don was unfailingly optimistic, honest, and compassionate. He sought to find the good in every situation and every person he encountered. I will never forget him nor the life lessons I have learned from him. Words cannot really express how I feel about Don, but I can say that I respected him, admired him, and will always hold a special place in my heart for him.

ANDREA JONES '06



Don's closing remarks for our class's leadership presentations:

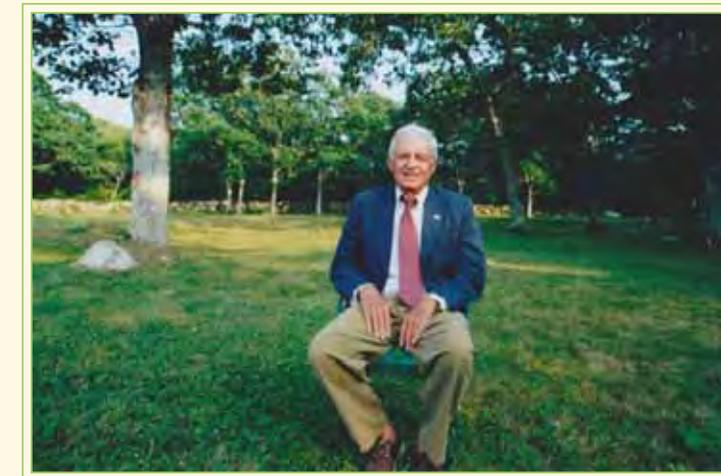
“The need (for great leaders) is terrific. To be an effective leader over a long period of time, you truly have to be a good person. ... decide ahead of time about what you are going to do, (as) by the time you are in the situation, it is too late.

(when you have decided,) put yourself on cruise control, and be glad about what you do.”

I still remember his challenge to each of us at the first seminar: lifetime of leadership is not a choice, the choice is how effective to be in these roles. I learned to always think about how to develop my potential and to care for those that I lead, as they are the ones choosing who to follow.

Thanks for the opportunity to reflect on lessons from Don. He's sorely missed.

YUE CATHY CHANG '06



**One of the most important jobs of a leader
is to find a successor.**

I recently applied this when I was interviewing with companies for a new job. I asked the company I was interviewing with to get back to me as soon as possible. My group had been interviewing candidates to backfill our analyst position, and we had two candidates who we were having difficulty deciding between for the role. When I resigned, I suggested to the head of my group that he could hire both candidates to backfill us simultaneously since they were both suitable for senior analyst roles.

SUSAN BANKSTON '08

**When facing an ethical dilemma,
always take the high road. You'll win in the end.**

Don always stressed to be true to your values in all things: work, family, community, etc. Don't fall to pressures you know are wrong: stand up for what is right.

**Find the right balance in your life:
God, family, job, health, etc.
Great leaders figure this out and lead by example.**

BRIAN FELLER '08

Hire and fire for attitude: train for skill.

This simple vision for how to make effective personnel decisions has stuck with me, and reminded me how important my attitude is each and every day.

Learn to say out loud: "I was wrong. Again."

The vision of humility, knowing it's okay to say you've made a mistake, authorizes us as leaders not to be perfect, and is such a powerful mentality that results in more closeness, authenticity, and trust.

VICTOR MROCZKOWSKI '08

**Importance of humility:
leaders shouldn't be afraid to admit they were wrong or ask
for help.**

**Attitude is more important than skills:
if choosing among smart people, hire for attitude
and train them.**

**Even if a person is trained and has a lot of experience,
they won't be successful without the right attitude...
true in all aspects of life.**

Authenticity: be yourself.

STEPHANIE TOZER '08

**Remember that when interviewing with a company
or deciding whether or not to stay with one,
you are “interviewing the company”
as much as they are interviewing you.
Determine for yourself whether the company fits
with your ethical and moral value system.**

JEFF PASQUAL '08



The most important things I learned from Don Davis were the importance of giving back to the next generation, and the idea that, even though the world changes, there are core values that remain relevant and true.

AIMEE CONSTANTINE '09



Don't work for people you don't respect, or for crazy people.

MICHAEL BOREN '09



**A mistake is a great opportunity for a learning experience.
Don't punish someone for mistakes:
help prevent them from reoccurring in the future.**

SEAN FORTIN '09



I remember the first day of our leadership class with Don Davis, the room was completely quiet — it was like we were sitting at the feet of this great leader eagerly anticipating his words of wisdom and ready to absorb everything he had to tell us. I feel profoundly privileged to have had the opportunity to learn from Don, who was not only very successful in business, but had a flourishing family life and conducted himself with integrity. Thank you Don Davis for impacting our lives, for investing in all of us and giving us a leader to look up to.

AMY LIN '10



**I must have respect for my manager,
otherwise I should move on.**

What I most remember about Don's class was the last day when I had to share what I'm passionate about. This is something that most of us don't talk about or even think about enough.

KULDIP SANDHU '11



Lesson learned: Ethics is not a topic with many gray areas. There is a clear right and wrong, and one knows the difference. It is up to the person to make the correct choice.

AMIL MODY '12



Don spoke with us once: he let us know it was our *responsibility* to lead society to positive changes, and to do that by channeling our passions.

MIKE VENTO '12



Ode to Don

From the first class you held,
Way back in September,
We knew right away
That you were someone to remember.

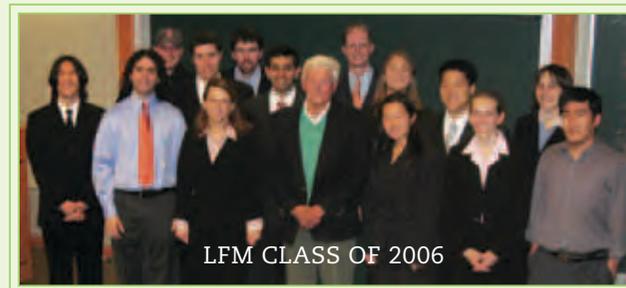
You told us your mantras:
“Steer clear from the slippery slope, by gosh!”
Taught us that when things go wrong,
Leaders play lots more squash.

We asked you tough questions
Expressed our thoughts and our fears.
That we have a strong set of values
You seemed happy to hear.

It is amazing to us,
For all the years that you’ve taught,
You ask for nothing in return
Except one measly parking spot!

So the LFM Class of 2006
Would like to make amends
By thanking you from the bottom of our hearts
For being our teacher, and friend.

THANK YOU DON!!!!



In Search of a Leader

I went one day a-searching.
A leader I hoped to find.
I sought someone who I could follow,
Who could lead me for a time.

At first I looked to men of power,
To men of wealth and fame.
I thought they would inspire me,
And new goals I’d attain.

But greed and arrogance had driven them
As they climbed up to the top.
Their goals were only for themselves,
And inspire me they did not.

I sought a man who had great strength,
Fair-haired with iron jaw.
But all that strength had no direction,
No vision that I saw.

Wealth and strength and looks and fame,
These traits somehow seemed hollow.
What was required of a leader
To inspire me to follow?

I found a wise man on a hill
And asked him his advice.
What should I seek to find one who
Can lead me down the path of life?

The wise man thought and closed his eyes
And quietly scratched his head,
And shortly he smiled and turned to me,
And this is what he said.

A leader is honest, and he is good,
And he may be a she,
And a true leader will put you first
Ahead of his own needs.

He will not stumble, wandering lost,
Because he has a goal,
And he does not lust to be given power
For his strength comes from his soul.

He knows his skills and talents come
From a much, much higher power,
And he uses them for his fellow man
Most every waking hour.

To him it's not an award or honor,
A thing of which to boast.
To him it is a sacred trust
That demands from him his most.

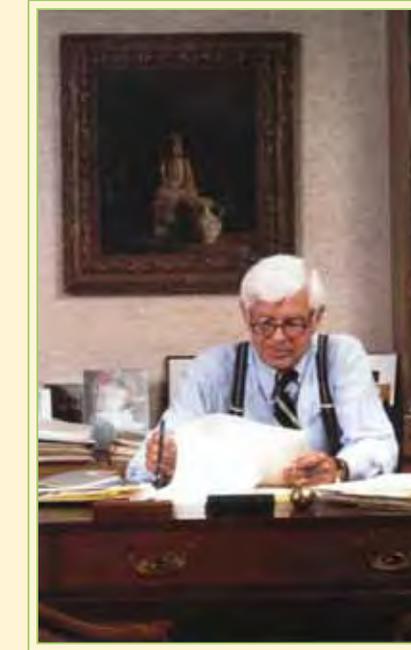
He can be trusted. He won't give up,
Nor will he easily tire.
He'll strive on toward the goal ahead,
And others he will inspire.

He won't choose you, you will choose him,
For that's how they're selected,
And he'll get more from you than you thought
you could do
As you follow one so respected.

Teacher, I said, you are right, of course.
I could follow a leader such as he.
These traits you describe are all things I
admire,
And such a man I hope to be.

The wise man smiled as he raised one eye,
And he said, perhaps your search is through.
You have sought for one who is worthy to lead,
But perhaps that leader is you.

MIKE KIRSCH, LFM '94



PATCH OF GREEN by Donald W. Davis

Unfettered and as yet unscathed
I admit my pose as youthful dilettante,
But per chance this very freedom
Gives me clearer if unleavened thoughts.

Well cast for my role in neat bourgeois society,
I falter and recoil from much I see,
Not that my lot would be to me distasteful,
Contrary-wise t'would be all too easy to embrace.

The slides have been well greased for my approach,
But poised before I slip with abandon down these grooves,
I stop and shield myself from danger there,
My armor — a patch in which to be aware.

A patch of green untrammelled by the crowd,
Secure from family, friend or man,
A proving ground on which to test the worth,
Of man's solutions on this God-made earth.

Is it important? Is it real?
Or is it what "they" want?
Does it matter? Does it count?
Or "have men always done it?"

I'll live within the pattern,
Society is stronger than I
But let me have this Patch of Green,
To weigh and test it by.

