In regard to great wealth there is an established tradition to differentiate those who have made it on their own from those who have had it bestowed upon them. And among those who are identified as “self-made,” a term that elicits the classic image of a man chiseling himself into being from a huge slab of marble, there are those who have worked hard and long, often to the exclusion of much that other people would consider quite ordinary, to arrive at their success.

Dale Carnegie gave this advice, “when speaking in public it is always best to try to speak about something that you actually know something about.” Let me apply that to this letter and write about one of those aforementioned “self-made men.” You’re on a mission, and it is on a grand scale. It is to change the world, to make a difference. To excel and to exceed the expectations and perhaps even the predictions of all who said you couldn’t. But here is the thing. It is easy after all of that hard work to be seduced by the notion that your success is just that, yours, and that you have earned it.

Little children are often heard to say “that’s not fair.” Which is actually the statement of their perception that when their mother broke the cookie in half that their brother or sister got the bigger half. As you go about your day listen to how often you hear adults saying the very same thing, and usually over the smallest matters. They are waiting in one of two lines and the person from the other line gets waited on first. Still, they’re right. Live is most definitely not fair.

It is true that I worked very hard, by my choice, and succeeded mightily. Yet there are many people who have worked harder than I did, perhaps holding 2 or 3 jobs and just managing to get by, while hoping to have a better life for their children. So that it is all not just luck, and much of it is, from where you were born and to who your parents are, at this point it’s good to add in the superior intellectual functioning that went along with the hard work to justify the fairness of the outcome. But if that intelligence is not a gift from God, as well as the circumstances that allowed that to matter, I do not know what is. If you don't subscribe to something greater than yourself then call it luck, but my point would be the same. Life is not fair and some of us have been given way too much.

We have all read Frost's poem “The Road Not Taken", most of us in high school. “Oh I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads onto way, I doubt if I should ever come back".

The starfish story now comes to mind. It goes something like this. A man is walking along the beach after a terrible storm. A boy in picking up starfish that have been beached and throwing them back into the ocean. The man says “look around, the beach is just covered by starfish, what difference do you think that you will make?” With that the boy bends down and picks up a starfish and throws it into the ocean. “It will make a difference to that one.”

So I was that boy treating my patients one by one. And I was that man standing at the most important fork in the road of my life. Down one road, the one more traveled would have been a wife, children a family, and to put at point on it, even a television. Down the other was the chance to do what had
not yet been done in the area of my expertise. To change the world for the better, and to improve the lives of millions of people rather than a few. Such choices have a cost. And as I travelled down the one road, the other road moved further and further from view. So under the heading of life is not fair and I have been given way too much. Let me say the word that actually comes to my mind, blessed. So after a journey of more than a quarter century down the one path, God blessed me with the unlikely opportunity that had eluded even Frost. The chance to somehow now travel the road that I had not taken. To have a life with the most remarkable woman that I have ever known and to have three wonderful children. Maybe it is just me, but having a child it seems is a bit like playing Russian roulette, and later in life more so. But here again I have been blessed with three healthy and happy children. For that matter my wife and I are healthy and happy. Each of those things are gifts, blessings if you will. Yes, life is not fair. As for the money it cannot all be for us. It must be purposed to do some good in the world. Perhaps to make life a little less unfair.