

CHASING CHURCHILL

PBS is airing a wonderful three-part series entitled “Chasing Churchill.” This program, hosted by Celia Sandys, granddaughter of Winston Churchill is spectacularly filmed and wonderfully presented. It tells the story of Churchill’s formative years, the adventures that shaped his character and the people that influenced his development. It is a very human look at the greatest man of the twentieth century rather than yet another historic tale of Churchill’s wartime leadership.

William F. Buckley once asked, “Why should we praise famous men?” and answered his own question with a litany of what makes men famous. It is that “what” that is important to know; it is that “what” that is the measuring stick for future generations.

The story is told of a young American exchange student who in 1953 asked The Greatest Briton of All Time, “What is the secret to your success?” Churchill replied, “Study history, study history. In history lie all the secrets of statecraft.” Celia Sandys artfully puts voice to the study and heart to the tale of young Winston. Adventurer, soldier, journalist and leader, these are the qualities of Winston Churchill richly told, brilliantly pictured and warmly presented.

On July 9, 2008, Celia Sandys spoke to an overflow audience at the Charlotte Museum of History about memories of her “grandpapa.” She had traveled with her grandfather in his later life, at a time when he was one of the most recognized persons in the world. She sailed with him aboard the Onassis yacht Christina from Monte Carlo to Istanbul and back. She cried with him as they watched televised reports from Dallas on that fateful day in November 1963 when President Kennedy was assassinated, she held his hand as he was brought back to England in an ambulance plane from a holiday in the south of France and she was at his bedside as he slipped the bounds of this earth in 1965. The Museum audience rose as one to thank Celia for sharing these treasured memories. And now we can relive this magical time as PBS adds their terrific filming to the narrative.

It is Churchill’s relevance that attracts many to his story. This man with the lion’s heart was the one to have also given it its roar. What is the message, what is the relevance? One example is from 1943 at Harvard University when Churchill said, “The price of greatness is responsibility. One cannot rise to be in many ways the leading community in the civilized world without being involved in its problems, without being convulsed by its agonies and inspired by its causes.”

And, finally, this most important lesson for us all, young and old, “Never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in EXCEPT to convictions of honor and good sense.”

“Churchill’s life uplifts our hearts and fills us with fresh revelation of the scale and reach of human achievement.” Chasing Churchill helps us to see “why we should praise famous men.” Be sure not to miss the next two episodes (July 28 and August 4 at 10pm on PBS). For more information, visit The Churchill Centre at www.winstonchurchill.org.

NOTE: D. Craig Horn is chairman of The Churchill Society of North Carolina (www.churchillsocietyofnorthcarolina.org) and resides in Weddington, NC.