

(Glen Browder, April 26, 2013)

TOP-TEN PARENTAL PEARLS OF WISDOM FOR COLLEGE GRADUATES

Wow! I have never seen so many happy, smiling faces!

I'm not talking about you graduating students—I'm talking about your families. They're happy and smiling because they finally see some light at the end of a long tunnel.

And you see these smiling professors behind me? They're not just pleased with your success—they're overjoyed to see you departing from their halls of ivy.

And look at that smile on President Meehan's face. Have any of you parents ever been to one of these things before? If you have, you know that he shakes the hands of the new graduates as they walk across the stage; and he whispers something personal to each and every one of them. You know what he whispers to about half of them? He whispers: "Thank goodness I don't have to put up with you any more!"

Of course, you all know I'm just kidding. And I hope you'll pardon me while I share a message I got last month from one of my former students about her graduation and the special relationship between teachers and students here at JSU. She wrote:

I remember vividly the advice given me when I wanted to work toward a teaching degree from JSU. My dad knew I would never earn a high salary, and he worried that I would not be able to control high school students. Furthermore, teachers were "a dime a dozen" then, especially in my field of English. However, a JSU mentor told me to pursue my dream because "a fire makes room for itself." I landed a job at Jacksonville High School,

where I taught for 12 years before moving back to Birmingham and finishing my career in public school teaching. Having retired, I now teach a course in English Composition at Southeastern Bible College and tutor individual students in my home. The fire has not gone out, and I'm still grateful for the encouragement I received as a soon-to-be college graduate looking for a job in a glutted market.

What a great line from that JSU mentor: “A fire makes room for itself.”

And Dr. Meehan does indeed treasure each of you graduates, and everybody here today. Which is why, when I asked him what should I talk about—he quickly said “about ten minutes”.

GRADUATION DAY.

Let me begin my ten minutes by saying that this is indeed a grand and glorious day for all of us.

Graduation is a day to celebrate our collective accomplishments. You soon-to-be graduates, and your families, and our professors, and our president have a right to be proud.

It is also a day for commencement speakers to articulate their own particular version of great truths and supreme secrets of the universe.

Frankly, however, while I’m honored to participate in this ceremony, I have a confession to make.

MY CONFESSION.

I am not going to share any of my truths and secrets with you.

Let me explain. I delivered the commencement address in this very same stadium a long time ago, a quarter century ago, when I was Secretary of State. I told the graduates that they should never forget that they were all special creatures of God, that they should never forget where they came from, and that if they kept these things in mind, then they should never be afraid about where they were going. Pretty good counsel, in my opinion.

But, the older I get, the more I realize that graduating students don't pay much attention to graduation speeches; most don't even remember who spoke unless they're famous celebrities. Too bad you're not at some other graduation ceremony this Spring, where you could benefit from the immense wisdom of illustrious speakers like Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Robert Redford, Terry Bradshaw, and Mikhail Baryshnikov—all of whom are eager to spread their immense wisdom all over you.

However, whenever I hear some politician, actor, athlete, or other celebrity pontificating about great truths and supreme secrets of the universe, I cannot help remembering comedian Rodney Dangerfield's hilarious graduation speech in the movie "Back to School".

Dangerfield's entire speech was only a few sentences—and it went like this:

I have only one thing to say to you today...it's a jungle out there.

And so, to all you graduates...as you go out into the world, my advice to you is...don't go!

It's rough out there. Move back with your parents. Let them worry about it.

That is pretty funny—except for those of you who haven't found a job yet!

The problem is that, most of the time, graduation speeches tend to be too long and not very inspirational or helpful.

I PROMISE ...

Therefore, I promise you something relatively brief and really worthwhile here today.

Just give me your attention for the next five minutes, and I will share with you the best advice you'll ever get at a college graduation—more wisdom than any politicians, actors, athletes, or any other celebrities will ever impart.

That is a big promise. But it is true, because the advice I'm going to share comes from your mamas and daddies.

The fact is that nobody knows you better, or really cares more about you, or has more sincere, genuine, valuable advice for you than your parents. Of course, that's not always true—But, most of the time, when all is said and done, those mamas and daddies, or somebody else who raised you, are the people you can count on to steer you straight.

Over the past few weeks, I contacted many of my former students who have sons and daughters graduating from college. I asked them to tell me what you, their children, need to know as you move through this critical stage of your lives. Some of their advice is inspirational, some is practical, some is humorous, and some I find just simply interesting—but I think it is all worthwhile because this wisdom comes from their hearts straight to you.

I got so much good advice that I cannot present it all here today. I had to cull it down to what I call my “Top Ten Parental Pearls of Wisdom for College Graduates”.

Here now is some of the best advice you’ll ever get!

PARENTAL PEARLS.

I’ll present these pearls in reverse order, counting up from No. 10 to No. 1.

Starting with No. 10, from a father who lives in the Boston area and keeps me informed about the Red Sox and last week’s terrorist bombing. His advice: *“You’re a college graduate now. Continue to read and think. Keep your mind open. Never sell yourself short. It’s a big interesting world. Go see it.”*

No. 9. From a former JSU baseball player who now lives in Huntsville. He says: *“You do not have to settle in life...for a job, or for a husband or wife, or a place to call home. Use all the tools you have been given and don’t settle for less than you have worked for and God has blessed you with.”*

No. 8. A Jacksonville high school teacher, who has helped countless students through the honors program, says: *“Change is the only constant in life. Especially now, one needs a Plan A and a Plan B and really a Plan C.”*

No. 7. A father from down near Auburn counsels: *“Don’t be afraid to fail. Be willing to try something even if you’re worried about being successful.”*

No. 6. From a local attorney to his son, who is getting a master’s degree today: *“Do your homework, show up on time, and then do your best.”*

No. 5. From a local judge comes this wisdom: *“Life is not a video game; and you don’t get do-overs. Strive to get it right the first time.”*

No. 4. An Anniston father provides this poetic philosophy: *“Dream with imaginative hearts and do the right things through reason and logic.”*

No. 3 A Calhoun County father, whose daughter is graduating in nursing today, cautions her with this obligation: *“You didn’t do all of this on your own; so don’t forget to look back and see who you can help.”*

Actually, I had a hard time deciding between the next two “pearls”—both seem like No. 1, so I’ll call it a tie.

The first No. 1 pearl of wisdom comes from a former Marching Ballerina, who now has a bunch of kids and grandkids; her advice for graduates combines human compassion and a little preaching: *“Be kind to others. Help those who need help. Love those that are not loveable. And follow the 10 Commandments ... they are not suggestions.”*

The other No. 1 pearl comes from a father who sometimes hops on his motorcycle to visit this area; he offers this no-nonsense, three-part message to his daughter: *“(1) Your mother and I have moved to an undisclosed location; (2) get a job; and (3) start paying those student loans.”*

So, soon-to-be graduates, how about giving your mamas and daddies a warm round of thank-you applause for some of the best advice you’ll ever get.

“IN CONCLUSION”

Now, for those two magical words you’ve all been waiting for:

“In Conclusion” ...

Congratulations, Class of 2013. God bless all of you. And I thank you for your kind attention.