

OSU Commencement Speech
Schottenstein Center
Aug. 26, 2007

President Alutto, Chairman Cloyd, Members of the Board of Trustees, Honorees, Vice Presidents, Deans, Members of the Faculty, Graduates, Family Members and Guests:

Good afternoon. I am honored to be here.

The Ohio State University has been the door to higher education for so many, and for so many in my family, beginning almost a century ago with my mother's father, who graduated in 1912 with a degree in pharmaceutical chemistry.

The procession of family members earning degrees from Ohio State has been long, and most recently included our son and daughter, in 2001. Our family's dominant genes seem to be scarlet and gray. We are ever grateful for this educational inheritance.

Today is Sunday. Some of you may have absorbed your sermon for the week. I have no intention of burdening you with another.

I recognized in grade school that a religious vocation was not in my future, despite the earnest prayers of dear old mom, who believed it would be divine if one of her two sons entered the seminary.

I'm sure it's no reflection on the quality of her prayer, but more a reflection on the quality of her sons, that she got, not clergymen, but a scribe and a tax collector.

Brother Bob and I long have debated whose hell will be hotter.

Throughout American history, the unquenchable fire is what so many have wished upon newspapermen. This is understandable. Each day, newspapers give people many reasons to be upset. Each day, our mistakes and errors in judgment are on display before hundreds of thousands.

This frustration prompted Adlai Stevenson, the highbrow governor of Illinois in the early 1950s, to famously remark: The newspaperman's job is to separate the wheat from the chaff, and then print the chaff.

Old Adlai was a smart fellow, but he could be a constipated scold.

The truth, of course, is that most American newspapers offer plenty of both wheat and chaff. Yours for the choosing.

Some newspapers, knowing their audience, definitely cater to one side of the threshing machine or the other.

Dave Barry, the longtime newspaper columnist and humorist, perhaps best explained this dichotomy.

The more boring a newspaper is, Barry pointed out, the more it is respected.

The most respected newspaper in the United States, he correctly noted, is the *New York Times*, which has thousands of reporters constantly producing enormous front-page stories on aluminum oxide, which is bauxite.

On the other hand, Barry said, the least respected newspaper in America, the *New York Post*, would write about bauxite *if and only if* celebrities in an exclusive New York nightclub were arrested for snorting it.

Different strokes for different folks, as they say.

So whether your favorite newspaper devotes more column inches to think pieces on the state of the European Union, or to your neighbors showing off their unusually large vegetables, our nation's collective, 317-year history of newspapers represents a fairly accurate reflection of where we've been and *who we are*.

Historically, the purpose of education has been to improve *who we are* – intellectually and morally. Improving our intellects to better distinguish wheat from chaff, but also improving our characters so that each of us comes to recognize just how full of -- chaff – we are.

It's a truism that no educated person is fool enough to proclaim himself or herself educated. The hallmark of wisdom, after all, is the understanding that all you believe may be wrong.

Your education at Ohio State will prove a success only if your appetite for learning is never satisfied, and if your desire to become a better person is equally never-ending. Our lives are nothing if they are not a constant struggle for self-improvement.

Be proud of your accomplishments, but don't let them go to your head.

When I was asked by the university a few weeks ago for my cap size so that I could be outfitted for this ceremony, I was reminded of the dangers of a big head. In that context, I remembered one of my favorite Yogi Berra-isms.

One spring training, the equipment manager for the New York Yankees was recording measurements for the players' uniforms for

the upcoming season. When he got to Yogi, he asked: “Berra, what cap size do you wear?”

Without hesitating, Yogi replied: “I don’t know. I’m not in shape yet.”

May we always recognize that our heads and our hearts are never in quite as good a shape as they should be. May we always understand that we are works in progress.

May each of you have a long life that gives you the opportunity to continually improve upon the condition of both your mind and heart.

Many thanks for your courtesy. Congratulations to each of you. And best personal wishes for peace and the contentment of a well-lived life.