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## 72nd Commencement Address

William J. Crowe Jr.

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**COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS BY  
ADMIRAL WILLIAM J. CROWE, JR., U.S. NAVY (RET)  
CONNECTICUT COLLEGE  
MAY 26, 1990**

PRESIDENT GAUDIANI, MEMBERS OF THE FACULTY, PROUD PARENTS, GUESTS, AND--ABOVE ALL--GRADUATES OF THE CLASS OF 1990.

IT IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT TO SAY THAT I AM THRILLED TO BE WITH YOU TODAY IN THIS EXCITING SETTING, AND TO SHARE THE SENSE OF ENTHUSIASM, ANTICIPATION, AND FREEDOM THAT ATTENDS ALL GRADUATION CEREMONIES.

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESSES FADE RAPIDLY--PERHAPS IN A MATTER OF SECONDS, BUT WHAT WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN ABOUT TODAY IS THAT THE CLASS OF 1990 HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A HARD AND CHALLENGING CURRICULUM AND IS GRADUATING. YOU HAVE CLEARED ALL THE HURDLES, SLAIN ALL THE DRAGONS, AND KNOCKED ASIDE THE WINDMILLS WHICH FOUR YEARS AGO STOOD BETWEEN YOU AND A DIPLOMA. TODAY WE ARE RIGHTFULLY CELEBRATING THAT ACHIEVEMENT AND ON BEHALF OF ALL OF THE PARENTS AND FRIENDS ASSEMBLED, I SALUTE YOU AND EXTEND OUR WARMEST WISHES.

SPEAKING OF PARENTS, I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT THEY LIKewise SHOULD BE ACCORDED SPECIAL RECOGNITION TODAY. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THE GRADUATES WOULD BE HAPPY TO DIVIDE THEIR GLORY WITH YOU. AFTER ALL, YOU HAVE MADE A SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE WHOLE PROCESS --INCLUDING MONEY, COMFORT, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND PROBABLY A RESPECTABLE SHARE OF NAGGING AND PRODDING.

AT THE SAME TIME, IF MY OWN EXPERIENCE IS ANY GUIDE, YOU HAVE NOT ONLY PAID A FINANCIAL, BUT A PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PRICE. IN THE NAME OF THE STUDENTS, I WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF THE PARENTS, HUSBANDS AND OR WIVES OF THE GRADUATES. PERHAPS YOU WOULD STAND WHILE THE GRADUATES ACKNOWLEDGE YOU AND EXPRESS THEIR APPRECIATION.

ONE FURTHER ASIDE. IF AS PARENTS YOU HAVE FOUND THE ROAD TO THIS DAY UNDULY TAXING, YOU MIGHT PROFIT FROM A BIT OF ADVICE I SAW ON A BUMPER STICKER A FEW YEARS AGO. IT SAID, "AVENGE YOURSELF. LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO BE A PROBLEM TO YOUR CHILDREN."

IN A MORE SERIOUS VEIN, I MUST CONFESS TO A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF APPREHENSION, BECAUSE DRAFTING A COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS IS A TOUGH PROPOSITION. FIRST OF ALL, YOU KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE HAS OTHER THINGS ON ITS MIND THAN LISTENING TO ONE MORE LECTURE AND SECONDLY, THE SPEAKER IS NEVER GIVEN A TOPIC BUT IS, AT THE SAME TIME, EXPECTED TO INSPIRE AND TO ENCOURAGE HIS LISTENERS WITH STIRRING REMARKS ABOUT NOTHING IN PARTICULAR.

IT DIDN'T COME AS A TOTAL SURPRISE THAT MY GUIDANCE FOR TODAY WAS A BIT VAGUE. I LEARNED EARLY IN MY SCHOOL CAREER THAT ACADEMICIANS HAVE A STRONG TENDENCY TO SPEAK IN GENERALITIES AND, WHEN YOU MOST WANT SPECIFIC ANSWERS, TO LEAVE YOU ON YOUR OWN. AS A YOUNG AND STRUGGLING STUDENT, I HAD A NUMBER OF TEACHERS INSIST THAT A MAN BECOMES WHAT HE THINKS ABOUT--THIS ADVICE WAS, OF COURSE, DESIGNED TO ENCOURAGE STUDIOUSNESS AND HIGH THOUGHTS. BUT I LATER DISCOVERED THAT IT WAS MISLEADING. IF IT HAD BEEN TRUE THAT I BECAME WHAT I THOUGHT ABOUT, THEN BY THE TIME I WAS 18, I WOULD HAVE BEEN A GIRL.

IN ANY EVENT, LACKING A SUBJECT OR DEFINITIVE INSTRUCTIONS, I TURNED TO MY OWN EXPERIENCE FOR HELP. AS I CONTEMPLATED THE 44 YEARS SINCE I GRADUATED FROM THE NAVAL ACADEMY--SINCE I FACED THE WORLD AS YOU DO NOW, WITH A DEGREE BUT LITTLE WORK EXPERIENCE; WITH HIGH HOPES BUT LITTLE ACTUAL KNOW-HOW--A FEW PHILOSOPHICAL GUIDEPOSTS SEEMED TO SPRING OUT--BENCHMARKS, SO TO SPEAK.

THEY ARE NOT SPECIFIC DIRECTIONS, BUT PIECES OF GENERAL ADVICE WHICH IN RETROSPECT SEEMED TO APPLY TO ALL LINES OF WORK, AND WHICH HAVE MADE IT EASIER FOR ME TO ADJUST TO PRESSURE, TO CHANGE, TO DISAPPOINTMENT, AND ALSO TO GOOD FORTUNE. DON'T MISUNDERSTAND, I AM NOT SAYING

THAT I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO SUCCESSFULLY PUT THESE CONCEPTS INTO PRACTICE, BUT I WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER OFF IF I HAD. IN SUM, THEY CONCERN HOW WE APPROACH LIFE AND IN MY MIND, THEY EMPHASIZE THE MERITS OF THE BROAD EDUCATION YOU HAVE RECEIVED AT CONNECTICUT COLLEGE. I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE THESE THOUGHTS WITH YOU FOR THE NEXT FEW MINUTES.

AT TIMES IN THIS COUNTRY, THERE IS A STRONG TENDENCY TO FANTASIZE ABOUT THE PAST--THE GOOD OLD DAYS--AND, IN TURN, TO DEPLORE THE STATE OF THE WORLD AND TO WRING ONE'S HANDS ABOUT OUR FUTURE. IN FACT, THE "DECLINE AND FALL" THESIS HAS LATELY TOPPED THE BEST-SELLER CHARTS. SOMEHOW THE PROPHETS OF DOOM AND GLOOM MANAGE TO OVERLOOK AN AWFUL LOT THAT HAS GONE ON IN THE PAST, AND TO IGNORE THE STEADY PROGRESS THAT HAS BEEN MADE OVER THE CENTURIES.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT WE DON'T HAVE GLOBAL ANXIETIES. YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE TOLD THAT OUR OWN SOCIETY HAS STRAINS; YOU HAVE, NO DOUBT, DISCUSSED THEM IN OR OUT OF CLASS. BUT TO CONCLUDE THAT BECAUSE WE HAVE SERIOUS PROBLEMS THAT WE ARE GOING TO THE DOGS IS SHEER NONSENSE.

PAUL HARVEY, A FAMOUS MIDWESTERN PHILOSOPHER, IS FOND OF SAYING, "IN TIMES LIKE THESE IT'S USEFUL TO REMEMBER THAT THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TIMES LIKE THESE." I THINK THAT'S EXCELLENT ADVICE.

THE EUROPEAN OF THE 1400S WHO EXPERIENCED THE BLACK PLAGUE--WHO DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHY HIS FRIENDS WERE DYING--WOULD NOT AGREE THAT WE HAVE NOT PROGRESSED. NEITHER WOULD THE SPANISH SEAMAN WHO SAILED WITH THE ARMADA; NOR THE BEDOUIN ARAB WHO LIVED FOR CENTURIES ON THE MARGINS OF STARVATION; NOR THOSE UNFORTUNATE PEOPLES OVERRUN BY THE MONGOL CONQUEROR TAMERLANE; NOR GALILEO, WHO WOULD BE ECSTATIC OVER THE ADVANCES OF MODERN SCIENCE. THESE ARE ONLY A FEW EXAMPLES FROM COUNTLESS THOUSANDS.

IN FACT, PREVIOUS AGES HAVE FACED MORE DISEASE, MORE POVERTY, MORE HUNGER, MORE CORRUPTION, MORE RACISM, AND MORE KILLING THAN YOUR GENERATION. THE GLOBE SINCE ITS BEGINNINGS HAS CONFRONTED TERRIFYING CHALLENGES AND YET IT IS STILL REVOLVING ON ITS AXIS. IN FACT, IT IS MORE EXCITING AND VIBRANT TODAY THAN IT EVER HAS BEEN.

IT IS SORT OF CURIOUS THAT OLDER PEOPLE WILL OFTEN DECRY THE STATE OF AFFAIRS IN ADDRESSING THEIR OFFSPRING, BUT IF GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY WOULD EXCHANGE PLACES WITH THEM WITHOUT A MINUTE OF HESITATION.

ART BUCHWALD PUT IT THIS WAY, "I DON'T KNOW WHETHER THIS IS THE BEST OF TIMES OR THE WORST OF TIMES, BUT I CAN ASSURE YOU IT'S THE ONLY TIME WE'VE GOT." NO MATTER WHAT YOU READ IN THE NEWSPAPERS OR SEE ON TELEVISION, WE'RE ALL GOING TO MAKE IT. FOR 200 YEARS THIS COUNTRY HAS MUDDLED THROUGH ONE CRISIS AFTER ANOTHER, AND WE HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT CHANGING OUR FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

BUCHWALD CITES WATERGATE AS THE ULTIMATE TEST. TWO HUNDRED MILLION PEOPLE WERE ABLE TO CHANGE PRESIDENTS OVERNIGHT WITHOUT "ONE TANK OR HELMETED SOLDIER IN THE STREET" OR "ONE BAYONET BEING UNSHEATHED." HE CONCLUDED, ANY COUNTRY THAT CAN DO THAT CAN'T BE ALL BAD!

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT YOU SHOULD DIRECT YOUR TALENTS AND ENERGIES TO IMPROVING OUR CONDITION WITHOUT BEING BURDENED WITH WORRIES ABOUT AN IMMINENT COLLAPSE OR CATASTROPHE. WITH TIME, YOU WILL DISCOVER THAT SUCH AN ATTITUDE NOT ONLY BETTER ACCORDS WITH THE FACTS, BUT ALSO ASSISTS YOU IN LEADING OTHERS TOWARD CONSTRUCTIVE INVOLVEMENT IN SOLVING OUR PROBLEMS.

OF COURSE, IT TAKES MORE THAN OPTIMISM TO THREAD THE ROCKS AND SHOALS WHICH BLOCK THE WAY. IN MY EXPERIENCE, THE GREATEST JOY A HUMAN BEING CAN KNOW IS THAT WHICH YOU CELEBRATE TODAY--ACCOMPLISHMENT--THE ECSTASY OF COMPLETING A JOB WELL DONE. THIS JOY CAN BE BOUNDLESS WHEN WE MAKE FULL USE OF OUR MINDS, OUR TALENTS, OUR TIME.

THIS SOCIETY OFFERS UNPARALLELED OPPORTUNITIES TO ENGAGE YOUR ABILITIES--IN GOVERNMENT, IN A PROFESSION, IN A BUSINESS, IN VOLUNTEER WORK, CHURCH PARTICIPATION, HOBBIES, COMMUNITY SERVICES, SELF-EDUCATION, AND SO FORTH. BUT, NO MATTER WHERE YOU CHOOSE TO PUT THE EMPHASIS AND TO INVEST YOUR EFFORT, THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO GIVE IT YOUR BEST SHOT--NOT JUST OCCASIONALLY, BUT ALL THE TIME.

THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES WITH YOUR DIPLOMA. THE DEGREE MAY WIDEN YOUR OPPORTUNITIES BUT "FUTURE" ACHIEVEMENT, RESULTS, SATISFACTION DEPEND ON WHAT YOU HAVE YET TO DO AND, BELIEVE ME, IN THE LONG RUN YOU CAN NEVER EXPECT TO RECEIVE MORE THAN YOU EARN. THIS ADVICE MAY NOT COMFORT YOU, BUT LIKE THE LAW OF GRAVITY, IT'S AN INESCAPABLE FACT.

NEWTON D. BAKER WISELY POINTED OUT THAT, "THE MAN WHO GRADUATES TODAY AND STOPS LEARNING TOMORROW IS UNEDUCATED THE DAY AFTER." THINK OF YOUR LIFE AS A PIECE OF FARMLAND. IT CAN ONLY RETURN TO YOU WHAT YOU FIRST GIVE TO IT. MAKING FULL USE OF YOUR ABILITIES, YOUR PLOT OF GROUND, WILL RETURN TO YOU AND YOURS AN ABUNDANCE THAT WILL AMAZE AND DELIGHT YOU.

I NEVER USE THAT ANALOGY THAT I'M NOT REMINDED OF THE SMALL TOWN MINISTER WHO WAS DRIVING THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE. HE CAME UPON A PARTICULARLY WELL-TENDED FARM. IT WAS GREEN AND PRODUCTIVE AND JUST GENERALLY IMPRESSIVE. HE WALKED OVER TO THE FENCE AND SAID TO THE FARMER WHO OBVIOUSLY WORKED THE LAND, "BROTHER, THE LORD HAS SEEN FIT TO GIVE YOU A BEAUTIFUL AND WONDERFUL FARM." THE FARMER THOUGHT ABOUT IT A MINUTE AND SAID, "WELL, I GUESS THAT'S RIGHT, PASTOR, BUT I WISH YOU'D A SEEN IT WHEN HE GAVE IT TO ME."

IN FACT, MANY OF YOUR REWARDS WILL BE UNEXPECTED ONES. PEOPLE TAKE NOTICE OF A JOB WELL DONE AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES OFTEN FOLLOW. IN PREPARING THESE REMARKS, I READ SEVERAL GRADUATION ADDRESSES. IN PRACTICALLY EVERY INSTANCE, THE SPEAKER MENTIONED THAT HIS CAREER HAD ON ONE OR MORE OCCASIONS TAKEN A COMPLETELY UNFORESEEN TURN--NORMALLY FOR THE BETTER. IN MOST CASES, THIS GOOD FORTUNE WAS NOT THE RESULT OF CLEVER MANIPULATION OR SOME MASTER PLAN, BUT OPENED UP BECAUSE THE INDIVIDUAL HAD DRAWN ATTENTION TO HIMSELF BY DOING A GOOD JOB--OFTEN A JOB THAT HAD LITTLE DIRECT RELATION WITH THE NEW OFFER.

AT TIMES THE PATH WILL BE DIFFICULT, BORING, DISCOURAGING, AND CERTAINLY NOT WELL MARKED, BUT IF YOU TAKE EACH STEP AS WELL AS YOU CAN AND KEEP ON WALKING, YOU WILL ULTIMATELY REACH HIGH GROUND. ABRAHAM LINCOLN ONCE REMARKED, "WHEN I WAS A YOUNG BOY, I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I WANTED TO DO WITH MY LIFE, BUT I PREPARED MYSELF FOR THE OPPORTUNITY THAT I KNEW WOULD COME MY WAY." I COULD NOT CALL A BETTER WITNESS TO TESTIFY ON BEHALF OF DOING YOUR BEST.

ONE THING YOU CAN BE SURE OF AS YOU PROCEED IS THAT THE WORLD WILL GIVE YOU LITTLE REST. NO ONE CAN PREDICT EXACTLY WHAT THE GLOBE WILL BE LIKE TWENTY OR THIRTY YEARS FROM NOW, WHEN SOME OF YOU MAY BE PREPARING COMMENCEMENT ADDRESSES.

TODAY THE PACE OF CHANGE IS MIND-BOGGLING. MORE TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS WILL BE MADE IN THE NEXT 35 YEARS THAN HAS BEEN MADE IN THE LAST 50,000. IN FACT, OVER THREE-FOURTHS OF ALL THE SCIENTISTS AND MATHEMATICIANS WHO EVER LIVED ARE STILL WITH US TODAY. THE WORLD'S MAJOR POWERS NOW STAND ON THE THRESHOLD OF NOTHING LESS THAN ANOTHER INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION--AS RESEARCH INTO SUPERCONDUCTORS, MICROELECTRONICS, AND OTHER NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND MATERIALS CARRY US FORWARD WITH EVER-INCREASING MOMENTUM. EVERY DECADE THOUSANDS OF NEW PRODUCTS, CONCEPTS, AND TECHNIQUES ENTER OUR ECONOMIC LIFE WITH THEIR ACCOMPANYING SOCIAL PROBLEMS.

FOR EXAMPLE, THE PERSONAL COMPUTER THREATENS TO DISRUPT MY OWN LIFE STYLE. FIVE YEARS AGO I HAD NEVER GIVEN A THOUGHT TO WHETHER COMPUTERS WOULD BE "USER FRIENDLY," TO MY PAC MAN SCORE, OR TO MY WIFE'S RECIPE FILE. ALL OF THESE THINGS HAVE SUDDENLY TAKEN ON A NEW IMPORTANCE BECAUSE AN INFERNAL MACHINE CALLED A "PC" IS NOW IN THE HOUSE. I AM HAVING TO LEARN A WHOLE NEW WAY OF THINKING AND TALKING SO I CAN INTERACT WITH MY COMPUTER WITHOUT HURTING ITS FEELINGS AND AT MY AGE, THAT'S NOT EASY TO DO.

IT IS NOT, HOWEVER, JUST TECHNOLOGY THAT WILL CHALLENGE US. THE STUNNING POLITICAL EVENTS OF THE LAST FEW MONTHS IN EASTERN EUROPE ARE TRANSFORMING OUR GLOBE POLITICALLY AND SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY. TO EFFECT PEACEFULLY THE CHANGE FROM COMMUNISM TO A FREE MARKET ECONOMY AND TO PLURALISM ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE IRON CURTAIN WILL BE A HERCULEAN TASK. THE UNITED STATES' POSITION AS LEADER OF THE FREE WORLD WILL COMPOUND THE CLASS OF 1990s RESPONSIBILITIES. YOUR GENERATION WILL REQUIRE EXTRAORDINARY STATESMEN AND LEADERS IN EVERY PROFESSION AND LINE OF WORK.

A FEW DAYS AGO, A FRIEND OF MINE EXPLAINED TO ME THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A POLITICIAN AND A STATESMAN. A POLITICIAN MAKES THE POSSIBLE NECESSARY; A STATESMAN MAKES THE NECESSARY POSSIBLE. THIS IS A SIMPLE WITTICISM DESIGNED TO AMUSE, BUT IT PUTS ITS FINGER ON WHAT I CONSIDER OUR MOST URGENT PROBLEM TODAY AND YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE.

WHILE THERE IS NO DEARTH OF SOUND IDEAS IN THIS COUNTRY, THERE IS DEFINITELY A SCARCITY OF LEADERS WHO CAN RECOGNIZE A TRULY WORTHWHILE PROPOSAL, FLESH IT OUT, DRIVE IT THROUGH OUR COMPLEX SOCIETY, OVERCOME THE NAY-SAYERS, AND ULTIMATELY DEVELOP SUFFICIENT PUBLIC SUPPORT, CONGRESSIONAL, OR OTHERWISE--TO MAKE IT A REALITY. TRANSLATING THOUGHT INTO ACTION IN A MODERN REPUBLIC IS NO MEAN TASK AND REQUIRES A WHOLE QUIVER OF FINELY HONED SKILLS.

I WOULD STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT EARLY IN YOUR CAREER YOU IDENTIFY THE FRONTRUNNERS IN YOUR ORGANIZATION, OFFICE OR COMMUNITY, WHO CAN MAKE THE NECESSARY POSSIBLE--STUDY THEIR EXPERIENCE, MAKE THEIR TECHNIQUES YOUR OWN, AND ABSORB BOTH THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND THEIR WISDOM. BELIEVE ME, QUALITY LEADERSHIP IS OUR MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCE. IT CAN AND DOES MAKE A CRUCIAL DIFFERENCE IN EVERY SUCCESSFUL UNDERTAKING AND ORGANIZATION. I URGE YOU TO BEND YOUR BEST EFFORTS TO CULTIVATE LEADERSHIP SKILLS. BOTH YOU AND YOUR COUNTRY WILL PROFIT FROM THE EFFORT.

HISTORICALLY, MANY OF OUR PROBLEMS STEM FROM PEOPLE PREDICTING THAT PAST TRENDS WOULD CONTINUE OR REFUSING TO ADAPT TO NEW CIRCUMSTANCES--WITNESS THE FAILURES OF OUR STEEL INDUSTRY, AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURERS, AND SAVINGS AND LOAN INSTITUTIONS TO ADJUST TO THEIR COMPETITION.

RIGHT NOW AS YOU COMPLETE THIS COURSE, I SUSPECT THAT MOST OF YOU APPROACH THE OUTSIDE WORLD WITH COMPARATIVELY OPEN MINDS, WILLING TO ENTERTAIN NEW IDEAS AND VARIOUS POINTS OF VIEW. IN FACT, YOU PROBABLY DEPLORE WHAT APPEARS TO BE THE NARROW OUTLOOK AND PREDICTABILITY OF MANY OF YOUR ELDERS.

MARK TWAIN PUT HIS FINGER ON MUCH OF THE DIFFICULTY WHEN HE SAID, "YOU TELL ME WHERE A MAN GETS HIS CORNPONE, AND I'LL TELL YOU WHAT HIS OPINIONS ARE."

HE WAS RIGHT, OF COURSE. BANKERS, MILITARY PEOPLE, DIPLOMATS, JOURNALISTS, LAWYERS, STOCK-BROKERS, TELEVISION EXECUTIVES ALL DEVELOP THEIR OWN STEREOTYPED VIEW OF THE WORLD, WHICH OFTEN LEAVES LITTLE ROOM FOR CHANGE OR INVENTION OR APPRECIATION FOR THE OPINION OF OTHERS.

THEY DIDN'T START OUT THAT WAY. THEY WERE ONCE IN YOUR POSITION--DOZING THROUGH A COMMENCEMENT SPEECH AND DETERMINED TO REMAIN OPEN-MINDED. BUT THEN THEY ENTERED A CERTAIN INDUSTRY OR PROFESSION OR GOVERNMENT AGENCY AND WERE GRADUALLY ENTRAPPED IN ITS PATTERNS OF THINKING AND DOING. THE COLUMNIST, JANE BRYANT QUINN, ONCE CALLED SUCH PEOPLE PRISONERS OF THEIR VOCABULARY, THE VOCABULARY OF THEIR WORK WORLD.

SHE POINTS OUT THAT THE GREATEST RISK YOUNG PEOPLE RUN IS THAT THEIR MINDS WILL PICK UP THE IDEAS OF THEIR CHOSEN OCCUPATION, THEN CLOSE AND SINK LIKE A STONE, THEIR INTELLECTS VANISHING WITHOUT A TRACE. IN OTHER WORDS, THEY BECOME THE "NARROW-MINDED ADULTS, WHOSE EXISTENCE THEY ONCE FAILED TO UNDERSTAND." SHE'S DEAD RIGHT AND WHAT SHE DESCRIBES IS MORE THE NORM THAN THE EXCEPTION.

I URGE YOU TO REJECT THAT PATH AND TO NOURISH THE SPIRIT OF INQUIRY WHICH YOU SEE EVERY DAY AT THIS COLLEGE. DO IT BY KEEPING A BROAD CIRCLE OF ACQUAINTANCES, BY WIDE READING, BY DEVELOPING INTERESTS OUTSIDE YOUR WORK, BY SERIOUSLY LISTENING TO OTHERS--EVEN YOUR CRITICS--AND BY CONSTANTLY SEEKING FRESH POINTS OF VIEW. QUINN SAYS, "YOU SHOULD BEGIN TO WORRY WHEN YOU START SOUNDING LIKE EVERYONE ELSE YOU KNOW."

I PERSONALLY WITNESSED A MAN WRESTLING WITH THIS PROBLEM A FEW MONTHS AGO IN NEW YORK CITY. I WAS IN A TAXI AND ASKED THE DRIVER WHO HE WAS GOING TO VOTE FOR IN THE NEXT ELECTION. HE SAID THAT HIS WHOLE FAMILY--INCLUDING HIS GRANDPARENTS, PARENTS, AND BROTHERS --HAD ALWAYS VOTED FOR PARTY X. I SURMISED THAT, THEREFORE, HE WOULD VOTE FOR PARTY X THIS TIME. HE SAID, "NO, I'M GOING TO VOTE FOR PARTY Y." HE WENT ON TO EXPLAIN THAT "THERE COMES A TIME IN EVERY MAN'S LIFE WHEN HE MUST IGNORE HIS PRINCIPLES AND DO THE RIGHT THING." I COULDN'T HAVE PUT IT BETTER.

YOUR MIND IS SOMETHING LIKE A PARACHUTE. IT WON'T HELP YOU IF IT WON'T OPEN WHEN YOU NEED IT. BUT DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THIS TASK. GIVEN THE PRESSURES AND THE SPECIALIZATION OF THE MODERN WORLD, YOU WILL HAVE TO WORK CONTINUOUSLY AT KEEPING AN OPEN MIND. THE REWARDS, HOWEVER, ARE GREAT. THIS CAPACITY IS THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH A MAN OR WOMAN CAN BUILD GENUINE INTEGRITY AND SELF-ESTEEM. TO BE ABLE TO CHANGE YOUR MIND WHEN THE FACTS WARRANT DOING SO IS THE HALLMARK OF AN EDUCATED PERSON. YOU COULD PAY NO HIGHER TRIBUTE TO CONNECTICUT COLLEGE THAN WINNING THE CONSTANT FIGHT TO MAINTAIN YOUR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM, INDEPENDENCE, AND PERSPECTIVE.

I HAVE JUST ONE MORE PIECE OF AMATEUR WISDOM TO OFFER. AS YOU PROGRESS, NOTHING WILL STAND YOU IN BETTER STEAD THAN A SENSE OF HUMOR. IN A PERFECT WORLD THIS WOULD NOT BE SO IMPORTANT; WE COULD BE SERIOUS ABOUT EVERY SUBJECT WITHOUT HARM. BUT UNFORTUNATELY, LIFE--DOESN'T MEET THAT CRITERION. THERE IS NO LINE OF WORK, NO ENDEAVOR, NO INSTITUTION, NO ACHIEVEMENT, NO FAILURE THAT DOESN'T HAVE ITS LUDICROUS OR RIDICULOUS ASPECTS.

TO RECOGNIZE THAT SIMPLE LESSON IS TO TAKE THE FIRST STEP TOWARD MATURITY.

ALAN ALDA, BETTER KNOWN AS HAWKEYE OF MASH FAME, EXPOUNDING ON HIS OWN PHILOSOPHY, CONTENTS THAT "TO BE PLAYFUL ABOUT SERIOUS THINGS IS A TRAIT OF THE MOST DEDICATED PERSON." "IT IS A MARK OF CLOSENESS AND INVOLVEMENT, NOT ANTAGONISM." HE MAY HAVE BEEN RATIONALIZING HIS OWN RATHER IRREVERENT ATTITUDE. BUT I DO BELIEVE THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF TRUTH IN WHAT HE SAYS.

I MUST EMPHASIZE THAT I DO NOT MEAN JUST THE ABILITY TO APPRECIATE A JOKE OR TELL A GOOD STORY. IN MY BOOK A MAN WHO CAN'T MAKE FUN OF HIMSELF DOES NOT HAVE A SENSE OF HUMOR. THE FRINGE BENEFITS OF BEING ABLE TO LAUGH AT YOUR OWN FRAILTIES, POMPOSITY, PRETENSE, OR MISTAKES ARE MANY. IT IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF REMAINING HUMBLE.

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, MR. GEORGE BURNS, A FOURTH-GRADE DROPOUT, RECEIVED AN HONORARY DOCTORATE OF HUMANITIES FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD. IN HIS REMARKS HE SAID, STANDING THERE AT THE AGE OF 92, THAT HE COULDN'T WAIT TO RUN HOME AND TELL HIS MOTHER. SHE HAD ALWAYS WANTED HIM TO BE A DOCTOR. I CAN'T THINK OF A BETTER EXAMPLE OF HOW LAUGHTER CAN HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON EVERY MAN'S LIFE THAN GEORGE BURNS, WHO IS STILL GOING STRONG.

WHEN ASKED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THERE WERE NO STORIES IN THIS WORLD, A THIRD GRADER REPLIED, "PEOPLE WOULD DIE OF SERIOUSNESS." THAT'S NOT TOO FARFETCHED.

A GENUINE SENSE OF HUMOR OILS THE GEARS OF PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, LENDS PERSPECTIVE TO COMPLEX PROBLEMS AND, ABOVE ALL, HELPS TO KEEP YOU SANE WHEN THE WORLD CLOSES IN--AND BELIEVE ME, IT WILL CLOSE IN AT TIMES.

I SIMPLY CAN'T IMAGINE GOING THROUGH THIS LIFE WITHOUT LOTS OF LAUGHTER.

IN PREPARING FOR TODAY, I TRIED DESPERATELY TO RECALL MY OWN GRADUATION FROM ANNAPOLIS AND WHAT THE SPEAKER SAID. HE WAS MR. JAMES FORRESTAL, THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY AT THAT TIME. I HAVE ONLY ONE FLEETING MEMORY OF HIS REMARKS. HE COUNSELED US TO ALWAYS CONDUCT

OURSELVES--NO MATTER WHAT WE DID OR WHERE FORTUNE CALLED--SO THAT WE WOULD BE WELCOME TO RETURN TO OUR HOMETOWNS. IT WAS GOOD ADVICE, AND I SUSPECT THAT FORRESTAL, IF HE WERE ALIVE, WOULD BE THRILLED THAT I COULD RECALL THAT STORY.

IF YOU CHOOSE TO REMEMBER ANYTHING ABOUT TODAY, PERHAPS IT COULD BE: THAT THE ADDRESS WAS GIVEN BY A CAREER MILITARY OFFICER WHO DIDN'T TALK ABOUT CONGRESSIONAL APPROPRIATIONS, THAT HE WAS HIGH ON LIFE AND DOING A GOOD JOB, THAT HE COUNSELED OPENMINDEDNESS AND BELIEVED THAT PEOPLE SHOULD LAUGH A GREAT DEAL, PARTICULARLY AT THEMSELVES.

AND WITH THAT, I COMMEND THE KEEPING OF OUR COUNTRY'S IDEALS AND INSTITUTIONS INTO THE HANDS OF THE CLASS OF 1990. MOREOVER, AS YOU PREPARE TO SAIL AWAY ON MANY DIFFERENT COURSES, I WISH YOU THE BEST THAT AN ANCIENT MARINER CAN IMAGINE: MAY YOU ALWAYS HAVE FAIR WINDS AND FOLLOWING SEAS.