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Address on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the University of North Florida

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ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

by
Christine E. Rasche, Ph.D.,
President, UNF Faculty Association
October 2, 1997

THANK YOU, DR. HEALY. IT IS A *GREAT* HONOR TO BE HERE TODAY REPRESENTING BOTH THE FACULTY ASSOCIATION AND THE CHARTER FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNIVERSITY'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY.

AS A MATTER OF FACT, IT IS FAIRLY *AMAZING* TO BE HERE TODAY. IF ANYONE HAD TOLD ME 25 YEARS AGO THAT I--*!!*--WOULD BE STANDING HERE TODAY REPRESENTING THE FACULTY AND GIVING SOME REMARKS ON THE OCCASION OF THE UNIVERSITY'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY---WELL, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN *UNIMAGINABLE*.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN UNIMAGINABLE, FOR ONE THING, BECAUSE THIS VERY SPOT WHERE WE STAND TODAY WAS THEN A WOODSY SWAMP. THE ENTIRE UNIVERSITY ON OCTOBER 2, 1972, CONSISTED OF ONE OFFICE BUILDING, TWO CLASSROOM BUILDINGS, A LIBRARY, A FEW SUPPORT BUILDINGS, A COUPLE OF PARKING LOTS, AND THE NORTHERN HALF OF UNIVERSITY DRIVE. IT TOOK LESS THAN FIVE MINUTES TO WALK *SLOWLY* FROM THE MOST NORTHERN BUILDING ON CAMPUS TO ITS MOST SOUTHERN ONE. IN 1972, IT WAS REALLY HARD TO IMAGINE THAT THIS CAMPUS WOULD EVER GROW TO BE AS BIG AS IT IS TODAY OR THAT THIS

SWAMPY SPOT WOULD ONE DAY BE HOME TO A BRONZE OSPREY AND A HUGE SPORTS COMPLEX.

FOR ANOTHER THING, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN HARD TO IMAGINE IN 1972 THAT I WOULD STILL BE HERE IN 1997. YOU HAVE TO RECALL THAT MANY OF MY CHARTER FACULTY COLLEAGUES AND I, BACK IN 1972, WERE BABY-BOOMERS COMING TO UNF FROM CAMPUSES ALL OVER THE UNITED STATES WHICH HAD BEEN ROCKED BY ANTI-WAR DEMONSTRATIONS AND HIPPIE GATHERINGS. WE HAD BEEN ADMONISHED NEVER TO TRUST ANYBODY OVER THE AGE OF 30, AND SOME OF US SUSPECTED THAT MIGHT BE GOOD ADVICE. THE IDEA THAT WE OURSELVES MIGHT STAY SOMEWHERE AND *BECOME* THE "ESTABLISHMENT?" *UNIMAGINABLE!*

MANY OF US CAME TO UNF EXPECTING TO STAY "JUST A FEW YEARS" AND THEN MOVE ON. IN MY OWN CASE, AT LEAST, I HAD COME TO UNF PARTLY BECAUSE THE UNIVERSITY SAID IT WANTED SOMEONE TO BEGIN BUILDING A CRIMINOLOGY PROGRAM AND THAT SOUNDED LIKE IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO DO FOR A WHILE---I JUST NEVER REALIZED *HOW* INTERESTING IT WOULD BE TO BUILD ACADEMIC PROGRAMS FROM SCRATCH AND WATCH THEM--LIKE CHILDREN--*GROW*. NO ONE IS MORE SURPRISED THAN I AM TO FIND MYSELF HERE 25 YEARS LATER.

IN ADDITION, AT LEAST IN MY CASE, OCTOBER 2, 1972 DID *NOT* START OUT IN AN ESPECIALLY AUSPICIOUS WAY. IN OTHER ACCOUNTS OF THAT FIRST DAY OF CLASSES YOU MAY HAVE READ REFERENCES TO THE FACT THAT *THAT* AUTUMN WAS A VERY RAINY ONE. THE CAMPUS WASN'T REALLY *QUITE* FINISHED YET AND IN MANY PLACES WE HAD MUD AND PLYWOOD

WALKWAYS. ONE OF MY MOST SALIENT MEMORIES OF THAT FIRST DAY OF CLASSES, 25 YEARS AGO TODAY, IS SITTING IN MY CAR IN A PARKING LOT READY TO GO TO MY VERY FIRST CLASS...WHEN A RAINSTORM SUDDENLY ERUPTED. ACTUALLY, IT WAS A DOWNPOUR. A *DELUGE*. I DID NOT KNOW *THEN* THAT, IN FLORIDA, YOU CAN GO FROM BLINDING RAIN TO SUNSHINE IN 15 MINUTES. IN THE MIDWEST WHERE I GREW UP, REAL GULLY-WASHERS LIKE THAT COULD GO ON FOR *HOURS*. SO, AS THE MINUTES TICKED AWAY TO THE START OF MY FIRST CLASS, I MADE THE DECISION TO GRAB MY BOOKS AND BRIEFCASE AND UMBRELLA AND MAKE A MAD DASH FOR THE BUILDINGS.

NOW, IT WAS A LITTLE TRICKIER BACK THEN TO ACTUALLY *DASH* FROM CARS TO BUILDINGS BECAUSE WE DIDN'T EXACTLY HAVE SIDEWALKS BETWEEN THE PARKING LOTS AND THE BUILDINGS---WE HAD *PINE BARK*. ON OCTOBER 2, 1972, I LEARNED THAT PINE BARK TRAILS CAN BE VERY *INTERESTING* TO WALK ON IN THE POURING RAIN. KINDA SLIPPERY, ACTUALLY. SO I PICKED MY WAY CAREFULLY OVER THE PINE BARK AND I GOT PRETTY WET IN THE PROCESS. MY CAREFULLY CONSTRUCTED "COLLEGE PROFESSOR" LOOK WAS BEGINNING TO DISINTEGRATE INTO SOMETHING APPROXIMATING JANIS JOPLIN ON A BAD HAIR DAY. THIS DID *NOT* ENHANCE MY CONFIDENCE ABOUT APPROACHING MY FIRST CLASS.

BUT THEN, TO MAKE MATTERS WORSE, I SUDDENLY REALIZED THAT MY KEYCHAIN HAD BROKEN IN TRANSIT AND ALL MY KEYS WERE SCATTERED SOMEWHERE ON THAT PINE BARK TRAIL. PANIC SWEEPED OVER ME. IF I DID NOT GO BACK LOOKING FOR THEM IMMEDIATELY, I THOUGHT, MY KEYS WOULD BE WASHED AWAY INTO THE SWAMP FOREVER! I'D BE CAR-LESS!

HOMELESS! *BUT IT WAS TIME FOR THE CLASS TO START.*

SO, I WENT TO THE CLASSROOM AND INTRODUCED MYSELF TO THE 25 OR SO STUDENTS WHO WERE SITTING THERE, MANY ALSO SOMEWHAT DAMP, AND I EXPLAINED MY DILEMMA. MUCH TO MY SURPRISE, ONE OF THE STUDENTS IMMEDIATELY VOLUNTEERED TO GO BACK OUT INTO THE RAIN TO LOOK FOR MY SCATTERED KEYS. HOW NICE, I THOUGHT! BUT THEN I REALIZED THAT IT WAS NOT THAT MUCH OF A SACRIFICE SINCE MY STUDENT VOLUNTEER WAS CLOTHED *ONLY* IN SWIMMING TRUNKS ANYWAY. IT SEEMS HE HAD COME STRAIGHT TO HIS FIRST CLASS AT UNF FROM THE BEACH WHERE HE HAD BEEN SURFING AND HE WAS WET *BEFORE* THE RAIN EVEN BEGAN! I KNEW IT WAS TRUE BECAUSE HE HAD HIS SURFBOARD WITH HIM IN THE CLASSROOM; HE EXPLAINED THAT HE'D HAD TO ROLL HIS CAR WINDOWS UP AGAINST THE RAIN WHEN HE GOT TO THE UNIVERSITY SO THE SURFBOARD *HAD* TO COME WITH HIM. BUT I CONFESS THAT AT THAT MOMENT I HAD MY FIRST SERIOUS CONCERNS ABOUT WHAT MY STUDENTS AT UNF WOULD BE LIKE.

AS THE VOLUNTEER RAN BACK OUT INTO THE RAIN TO LOOK FOR MY LOST KEYS, I DISTRIBUTED THE SYLLABUS. THE REMAINING STUDENTS BEGAN TO READ, AND I LOOKED THEM OVER APPREHENSIVELY. I QUICKLY REALIZED THAT, WHILE THE SURFER REPRESENTED THE MOST CASUAL END OF THE DRESS SPECTRUM, I ALSO HAD STUDENTS THERE IN BUSINESS SUITS AND SUNDAY DRESSES. SOME WERE YOUNG, BUT MOST WERE SOMEWHAT MORE MATURE---OLDER THAN I WAS, IN FACT. AND, WITH SOME RELIEF, I REALIZED THAT MOST OF THEM WERE AT LEAST AS SCARED AND APPREHENSIVE AS I WAS ON THAT VERY FIRST DAY.

I WOULD COME TO LEARN THAT MANY OF MY STUDENTS WERE PAYING THEIR OWN WAY THROUGH COLLEGE, AND WORKING FULL TIME AT JOBS THEY WANTED TO LEAVE FOR SOMETHING ONLY A COLLEGE DEGREE WOULD MAKE POSSIBLE FOR THEM. THEY WERE *EXCITED* ABOUT THIS NEW UNIVERSITY BEING OPENED IN THEIR HOME TOWN. THEY *WANTED* TO LEARN! BY THE TIME THAT FIRST CLASS WAS OVER ON OCTOBER 2, 1972, I ACTUALLY FELT ALMOST EXHILARATED, EVEN THOUGH I WAS STILL SORTA DAMP. THE KEYS HAD BEEN RECOVERED, THE RAIN HAD STOPPED AND THE SUN WAS SHINING ON GLISTENING LEAVES, AND I HAD 25 PEOPLE APPARENTLY *REALLY INTERESTED* IN LEARNING ABOUT SOCIOLOGY. WHAT HAD SEEMED THE MOST *INAUSPICIOUS* OF BEGINNINGS HAD TURNED SOMEHOW INTO A *MAGICAL MOMENT* WHICH HAS REPEATED ITSELF FOR ME MANY TIMES OVER THE YEARS HERE AT UNF. IT IS THE MAGIC OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN WHICH BOTH STUDENTS AND TEACHER ARE ENERGIZED BY THE EXPERIENCE.

THEY TOLD ME WHEN I CAME TO FLORIDA IN 1972 THAT "SAND WOULD GET IN MY SHOES" AND I WOULD WANT TO STAY. I DID *NOT* BELIEVE THEM THEN. TO MY MIDWESTERN EYES, FLORIDA SEEMED RELENTLESSLY FLAT, VERY WET AND UNCOMPROMISINGLY *HOT!* BUT THEY WERE RIGHT. ONLY IT WASN'T SAND IN MY SHOES THAT KEPT ME HERE. INSTEAD, IT WAS:

- * THE CHALLENGE OF BUILDING ACADEMIC PROGRAMS FROM SCRATCH AND THE WONDER OF WATCHING THEM GROW;
- * THE AMAZEMENT OF SEEING NEW BUILDINGS POP UP ALL OVER THE PLACE, AND MORE AND MORE STUDENTS, FACULTY AND STAFF COME TO FILL THEM UP;

- * THE INSPIRATION OF WORKING WITH COMMUNITY AGENCIES EAGER FOR OUR EXPERTISE, AND SEEING THAT KIND OF WORK MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE IN THE *REAL* WORLD;
- * THE THRILL OF SHARING MY DISCIPLINE WITH MY STUDENTS AND HAVING AT LEAST *SOME* OF THEM CATCH THE EXCITEMENT; AND
- * THE DEEP PLEASURE OF COMING TO KNOW AND LOVE AMAZING FACULTY COLLEAGUES AND STAFF MEMBERS WHO SHAPED ME EVERY BIT AS MUCH AS THEY SHAPED THE STUDENTS.

I WOULD NOT HAVE MISSED ANY OF THESE EXPERIENCES FOR ANYTHING!

IN CONCLUSION, I CAME TO UNF IN 1972 FRESH FROM HAVING LIVED MOST OF MY LIFE AS A STUDENT. I CAME TO TEACH AND TO LEARN, AND---AS IT TURNS OUT---TO GROW UP ALONG WITH THE UNIVERSITY. I WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO STAYED---YOUR PROGRAM LISTS 70 (!) FOUNDING FACULTY AND STAFF MEMBERS WHO WERE HERE FOR THAT FIRST DAY OF CLASSES ON OCTOBER 2, 1972 AND REMAINED HERE TO BUILD A MAJOR UNIVERSITY OUT OF THOSE FIRST 4 BUILDINGS AND ALL THAT MUD AND PINE BARK. YOU WILL GET TO *MEET* THE REST OF THEM IN JUST A LITTLE WHILE.

BUT FIRST, LET'S MAKE A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE: HOW ABOUT WE ALL MEET BACK HERE IN THE YEAR 2022 TO CELEBRATE THE UNIVERSITY'S 50TH BIRTHDAY AND HAVE AN EVEN *BIGGER* PARTY? WITH LUCK, *I'LL* SEE YOU THERE!