

Opening Convocation

August 20, 2017

Good afternoon. It is my distinct privilege on behalf of the SMU faculty to welcome you to the beginning of your collegiate studies at SMU. This is the start of an important journey for you, a journey that will have an impact not only on your life, but also on that of your current and future families, and on those you meet throughout your future career. To enlighten your path on this journey, I would like to tell you a story.

When my dad was in the army and stationed in Germany during the Vietnam War, packages from home were a rare luxury. So, you can imagine his interest when he received a package from his parents in Washington State. When he opened the package he found fresh cherries from the farm back home. But this was years before FedEx and "next day" package delivery. In order to keep the cherries fresh in their transatlantic trip, my grandpa had cut off the end of the tree branch -- cherries and all -- wrapped the severed end of the branch in a wet towel, and covered the towel with a plastic bag. The cherries were red and juicy when they arrived and the leaves were not even wilted. Of course my dad enjoyed the cherries, but he also shared some with those who had gathered to see what was in the package, especially since some were surprised to learn that cherries grow on trees, not bushes.

Starting tomorrow and over the next four (or five) years, when you're attending class and busy taking notes, remember the box of cherries and recognize that your professors have prepared the course material for you with care and planning akin to that used to prepare the cherries for my dad. Remember also, that each class you take contains only part of the knowledge and experience your degree requires, like the box contained only part of the cherry tree. Throughout your education and future career you must grow and fill in the rest of the tree -- to make it your own -- as a true World Changer should. And finally, remember, most of all, to share the benefits of your education here at SMU with the world around you, as my dad shared his cherries with his fellow GIs.