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1991 COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

MAY 18 1991, ROSS PEROT

It is a privilege to be with you and congratulations to all the graduates.

I would like to thank the entire faculty and, particularly, the retiring faculty members for spending their lives helping to create the full potential of our future leaders. There is no question that you could have reached a much higher financial return by choosing another profession. However, I encourage each of you, particularly those that are retired now, to look back. What you did is truly an accomplishment and far more important. You helped build a future generation and a better nation. God bless you, and thank you very much.

I would now like to single out one group of the faculty: the Perkins School of Theology. And, to thank them for spending their lives teaching and re-enforcing the fundamental values that are absolutely essential for a society to work. If we lose those things, and substitute with immoral selfishness and greed, then we are lost.

Alexis de Tocqueville
~~(...two second gap in recording...)~~ He visited our country and studied our country. He concluded that America is great because its people are good. He found goodness in the Church and then he went on to say, "If the average American person ever ceases being good, America will cease to be great." So God bless you, the Perkins faculty, for

giving your lives to see that America will continue to be good.

Now, the statutory walk. If you think about the statutory walk a minute, everybody out there who fought, or was impacted for four years of their lives right after college, by World War II. This was a four year grueling war that took a huge toll on the population. To the people here today, I hope you never face anything like that. I hope you don't face a one day war. I hope you don't face a ^{one} ~~100~~ hour war.

I pray you will never forget people better valued than you that died. Never forget Alexander Montgomery, a Rhodes scholar, who died for all of us. He wrote his own obituary before he died. He said, "Surely if there is nothing worth dying for, then there is nothing worth living for." Then went on to say, "I didn't die for my country, I lived for my country." I hope you never face that.

We have people here today who have faced it in a way that nobody else has ever faced it. We are what we are today because they faced it every time. They didn't do it with sound lights. They didn't do it with ^{speech} ~~speck~~ control. They didn't create an image. They picked up a tool box. The test for our country's future is for those people who will pick up an axe and go where the job is. Or, perhaps pick up a hammer and go drive a nail.

I am talking about serious (...two second gap in recording...) So let's get right down into the trenches.

We live in a country where if there are potholes in our city streets, we hold a press conference on potholes. We cry for leaders who will pick up a shovel, fill the pothole, and move on to the next one, and skip the press conference.

If I can be truthfully honest, I particularly wanted to be here. I particularly wanted to commend those of you, who at this early age of your life, came out of Southeast Asia and put your lives on the line because you were willing to die to be free. The object that you were breaking in that mold. The object of every member of your family and loved ones who tried (...three second gap in recording...)

You came to our country. You learned a new language. You learned a new culture and your record of achievement, so far, epitomizes the American dream of everyone that comes to our country. I know that your life will be spent contributing a great deal to this country. You have made a strong start. You epitomize our survivor's creed. The coward never survives. Only the strong survive and die of old age. You are survivors. The fact that you are here today is a testament to this dream.

Let us not forget our past and thank our parents who sacrificed. I have attended many commencement ceremonies but I have never spoken at one before. I know today is a big day for you. Today is also a big day for your parents, especially parents who did not have a chance to go to college and parents that sacrificed so you could be here today. (...three second gap in recording...) Let them know

how much you love them and how much you appreciate what they've done for you. (...two second gap in recording...) They have given you words of wisdom that made an impression.

What I just asked you to do is nothing but cheap talk, right! Now live your life, but never forget your parents and the sacrifices made for you. Their dreams and aspirations are realized through you. That is a significant responsibility for you to bear.

I will now speak to the graduates who made perfect grades, received the highest honors, and were elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Your intellect is unbelievably wonderful. Your mind is like a perfectly wired stereo with no static. You can casually re-dictate your complex scientific literature and embrace your mind. Most people could not get that attention level (...two second gap in recording...) to be able to understand the people around them.

What is my point to you? You have a genetic gift. However, I am really worried about most of you because it is so easy for any of you to learn that you do not yet know failure and disappointment. I have dealt with so many bright young people through the years that I am always particularly concerned about those who were given a gift and with that gift, they could change the world. When they run into adversity, into problems they cannot solve the first time, they are out of their hemisphere. Many will give up, quit, and never reach their full potential. Don't give up.

Don't quit. Try to persevere. Remember that you have the potential to change the world.

There are other people in the graduating class who could work forever and not absorb as much knowledge as you have. When you land at night in an airplane and looking down on the city, you see a magnificent diamond of lights. Never forget that one man, Thomas Edison who worked hard and changed the world. You, too, can make that kind of contribution (...four second gap in recording...)

Now, I want to talk to the group who reads everything three times, underlines it, outlines it, and finally, memorizes it, only to forget everything the day of the exam. You have a unique advantage. You are used to persevering. You are used to climbing cliffs. You are used to butting your heads against the wall. Those traits give you a clear advantage as you enter adult life.

In my world, being successful and a successful visionary is a successful government worker. He is every bit as important and successful as a financially successful marine. Success is being the best at what you do.

I have had the best opportunity to know most of the people that you would consider successful. The strange thing is, that most of them are just not that smart. Not being all that smart turned out to be a big advantage. Because great or not you have to reach out to other people. If you are not all that smart, you tend to reach out and surround yourself with people who are wiser than you.

(...two second gap in recording...) and you eventually come up with the realization (...two second gap in recording...) treat them the way you want to be treated, with dignity and respect.

Never forget that the least educated, lowest paid person in an organization cries out, " I am unique. I am special. There is only one person in the world like me. I am me. Treat me like a human being." I hope that you will do that. Your competition is a human.

I hope you will all reflect upon how lucky you are today. Why aren't you in Bangladesh? Why aren't you a Kurd? Why aren't you a helpless Iraqi citizen? I would try anything to keep from being stuck. Don't take that for granted (...three second gap in recording...) realize that this is a very patient time. (...five second gap in recording...) Young people always want to know what they have to do to find that right job. It is not an orderly process. It is not like an organization chart. My advice to you is interview, interview, interview. Interview until you find something that you can't stand not to do. It may or may not lead to what you are searching for. For example, my favorite people in the computer business were music majors.

What used to stop it. A very pragmatic decision on our part. You learn abstractly, simply, specifically, and particularly. When you were five or six years old, most of you learned of it (...two second gap in recording...) for

the first time in algebra in junior high. There is a direct correlation between those with ability in music and success in engineering and computing.

Now comes the interesting question: interview, interview, interview till you find a corporation you cannot stand not to be a part of and give it everything that you have got. Just throw yourself into it.

Live your life every single day in the center of the field of ethical behavior. You watch television and you will probably come to the average conclusion that in a realistic world, everybody is going to count the sidelines. The question is whether it is legal or illegal. In your world, make sure the only question you ask is, "Is it right or wrong?" (...two second gap in recording) If you do that you will have a tremendous advantage because you will have earned the confidence of trial and mistake. Let me repeat. It will give you a great advantage over the people who are constantly trying to play cute tricks.

Please don't make money your god. Many do. Money is one of the most overrated things in the world. I have never completely controlled the economic spectrum. I can give you the benefits of that experience. I have had the interesting experience of knowing most of the people who have more than their share of economic problems in their pockets. I can tell you that most of them are sensible and not having any fun. Now, that is a tragedy!

You spend all your life getting there and then you don't like what you got. Do you know why most of them are so miserable? Their children are a mess. Their family life is a mess. They are hollow, empty, moral people. (...one second gap in recording...). I think that is the best reason for not making money your God (...three second gap in recording...).

Unless we get rid of the national creed of mediocrity, we are going to continue to decline socially. The world is a tiny place. You will make three to four career changes in your lifetime. To have a fully developed intellect is the greatest gift that you can have. In a tiny world driven by a change where people and companies win simply because the product matches quality. Be the very best because unlike college and high school, they don't give out red ribbons for second place. Somebody is going to win and everybody else loses in the rational world of adulthood.

I can tell you with certainty that you need to be very, very careful about the selection of your lifetime mate. Step one: don't leap into it. Take your time and look around. It is a lot of fun. Every step of the way when your hopelessly emotionally in love, realize and make prudent decisions before you say, "I am going to make a commitment for the rest of my life, because my children need us both."

Today the average marriage lasts less than seven years. I hope that will not be true in your generation. I keep

coming back to children because I can tell you they are everything in my case. (...five second gap in recording...)

Here is what I once was asked, "When did you first feel successful?" I laughed and I said, "I don't feel successful and I will not feel successful until my children are grown and each one of them is a first class citizen with a deep concern for other people and a willingness to do something about that concern to help others." This is all that really matters. You can have everything in this world if your children turn out all right. You will be old and thankful. Nobody can replace you in rearing those children.

I have got to tell one other point. Is there anybody in this class who is using or has used drugs? Go to Parkland Hospital. Go to the neonatal care unit and ask to see the babies whose parents were drug users. If you will not do it for yourself, do it for your future children. The tough (...five second gap in recording...). Most of us cannot even wait for the fact that we do not (...ten second gap in recording...).

You have a responsibility to this country. You own more than 1/250 millionth of it. I own another 1/250 millionth of it. All together, it is ours. It does not belong to Congress. It belongs to us. (...five second gap in recording...)

The (...five second gap in recording...). The folks in Washington D.C. belong to you and me. Democracy must come from us.

You need to be absolutely clear headed, drug free, ready to hit the wall, and ready to solve the problems that face this country. You need to be ready to face the world. I encourage and beg each of you to face drugs and never touch them because of the long term damages. You are bright! If you do not believe me, go to the library. If you still do not believe me, go to Parkland. If you still don't believe me, call me. I would be willing to talk to any doubting person in this room because you are so important (...two second gap in recording...).

Do not just be a talker. I will never forget all the people who used to hold (...ten second gap in recording...). Anybody with a good nose can tell that. I need you all to clean it up and keep it clean. Some say, "That's something other people are supposed to do. That's dirty work." We've all got to do the dirty work. The simple fact is that you have to make a choice. Do not just talk about these problems; help solve them.

Finally, in a world driven by compromise and imagery (how it looks) you stand fairly on firm ground. Do the right thing. Do not worry about yourselves. Worry about issues. Persevere.

Not giving up is basically the difference between success and failure. The most common characteristic I have found among successful people is they don't quit. If you ever climb in the ring with them you better have some of their fight at the end of the fifteenth round. You have to

keep on plugging until you just don't want to do it any more. You need to be like that in order to make the changes that have to be made in this country. Again, persevere.

When the odds are against you and you are thinking about giving up, and you just can't take it any more, remember two things (...ten second gap in recording) the man who, despite blood and sweat, continues to show great enthusiasm for a worthy cause. And if he fails at least he fails while daring greatly.

That is my challenge to you. If you're going to fail, fail world class. Because you will probably succeed if you hang in there.

If all else fails remember; persevere and never forget Winston Churchill's shortest speech.

Here is the entire speech, "Never give in. Never give in. Never. Never. Never."

I hope that with every young person here today that you will live your life like (...two second gap in recording...) beautiful sound of music, "Climb every mountain, forge every stream. Follow every rainbow until you find your dream." And that is important.

Do it. (...two second gap in recording...) A song is a song (...ten second gap in recording...)

God bless you all. Thank You!



July 26, 1991

Mr. Ross Perot
Suite 1600
12377 Merit Drive
Dallas, Texas 75251

Dear Ross:

While we have finished transcribing your commencement address, the quality of the tape was not the best. I would appreciate your reviewing the enclosed copy, making any corrections and returning it to me. I will send a final copy to you for your files.

Thank you again for making the 76th Commencement at Southern Methodist University a special one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ruth Morgan", followed by a horizontal line.

Ruth Morgan
Provost