

SMU COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

May ²¹~~10~~, 1994

- RAY L. HUNT

SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, I RECEIVED A VERY DISCONCERTING TELEPHONE CALL. IT WAS FROM SOMEBODY AT SMU ASKING WHAT THE TITLE OF MY SPEECH WAS GOING TO BE. AT THAT TIME, I HAD ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA WHAT I WAS GOING TO SAY BUT IT DID START ME THINKING.

FOR A VARIETY OF DIFFERENT REASONS, I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO HEAR MORE UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT SPEECHES THAN SHOULD BE REQUIRED OF ANY NON-ACADEMIC. THE FIRST COMMENCEMENT SPEECH I EVER HEARD WAS WHEN MY WIFE AND I BOTH GRADUATED HERE AT SMU AND WE WERE SEATED IN THIS SAME BUILDING WHERE WE ARE TODAY. I HAVE ALSO HEARD COMMENCEMENT SPEECHES IN THIS BUILDING WHEN BOTH OUR DAUGHTER AND SON GRADUATED, AS WELL AS OUR SON-IN-LAW AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. ADDITIONALLY, I'VE BEEN PRESENT AT COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES HERE WHEN WE HAD NO MEMBER OF OUR FAMILY GRADUATING BUT I WAS ATTENDING AS A TRUSTEE. AS A RESULT, I'VE HEARD A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT SPEAKERS AND SPEECHES AND, IN ALL HONESTY, IT'S REALLY BEEN A MIXED BAG. SOME SPEECHES WERE EXCELLENT; SOME WERE HORRIBLE.

THEN, AS I BEGAN TO THINK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS ADDRESS, MY WIFE, NANCY ANN, RECEIVED A NOTE IN THE MAIL FROM A FRIEND OF HERS. THE NOTE CONTAINED A QUOTE FROM A FELLOW NAMED WILLARD WIRTZ WHO, AT SOME POINT, APPARENTLY OBSERVED THE FOLLOWING:

QUOTE: COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS HAVE A GOOD DEAL IN COMMON WITH GRANDFATHER CLOCKS; STANDING USUALLY SOME SIX FEET TALL, TYPICALLY PONDEROUS IN CONSTRUCTION, MORE TRADITIONAL THAN FUNCTIONAL, THEIR DISTINCTION IS LARGELY THEIR NOISY COMMUNICATION OF ESSENTIALLY COMMONPLACE INFORMATION. - UNQUOTE

WHILE I NEVER REMEMBER HAVING HEARD THE NAME WILLARD WIRTZ BEFORE, IT DID SEEM TO ME THAT THIS FELLOW WAS RATHER ACCURATE. TO BE BRUTALLY CANDID, I DON'T THINK I HAVE EVER HEARD A COMMENCEMENT SPEECH - GOOD OR BAD - THAT IMPARTED ANY NEW KNOWLEDGE. HOWEVER, WHAT SEEMED TO SEPARATE THE BETTER COMMENCEMENT SPEECHES FROM THE LESS MEMORABLE ONES WAS ONE CHARACTERISTIC. NAMELY, THE BETTER ONES PUT INTO A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE KNOWLEDGE WHICH THE GRADUATES ALREADY HAD.

SEVERAL DAYS LATER, I WAS WALKING THROUGH OUR LIVING ROOM AT HOME AND I NOTICED ON THE COUCH A LITTLE NEEDLEPOINT PILLOW. MY WIFE LOVES TO COLLECT LITTLE NEEDLEPOINT PILLOWS WHICH HAVE SAYINGS ON THEM AND SHE HAS AN ABSOLUTELY UNCANNY ABILITY TO COME UP WITH SAYINGS THAT REALLY HAVE A LOT OF SUBSTANCE TO THEM. THE ONE THAT I NOTICED THAT DAY IS ONE OF HER FAVORITES. IT SAYS THE FOLLOWING:

"THERE ARE TWO THINGS
OF REAL VALUE WE CAN GIVE OUR CHILDREN;
ONE IS ROOTS
THE OTHER IS WINGS."

NOW, I REALIZE THAT IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE ANYONE WEARING A CAP AND GOWN TODAY HAS BEEN REFERRED TO AS A CHILD, BUT I WOULD SUGGEST TO YOU THAT THIS IS ONE OF THOSE SAYINGS THAT REPRESENTS DEEP WISDOM. I, THEREFORE, WOULD LIKE TO DIVIDE MY COMMENTS TODAY INTO TWO BROAD CATEGORIES. THE FIRST DEALING WITH ROOTS AND THE SECOND DEALING WITH WINGS.

EACH OF YOU WHO WILL GRADUATE TODAY WILL HAVE A DIFFERENT SET OF ROOTS WHEN IT COMES TO THE FAMILY AND LOVED ONES WHO RAISED YOU AS A CHILD, ENCOURAGED YOU WHEN YOU NEEDED ENCOURAGEMENT, PUNISHED YOU WHEN PUNISHMENT WAS DESERVED (AND POSSIBLY ON A FEW OCCASIONS WHEN IT WASN'T DESERVED), HELPED YOU WITH YOUR HOMEWORK, OFFERED A LITTLE PRAYER AT THAT HOUR OF THE DAY WHEN THEY KNEW YOU WERE TAKING A PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT EXAM, WERE WORRIED TO TEARS WHEN YOU CAME HOME LATER THAN YOU SHOULD HAVE

ONE NIGHT AND THEN, ONCE THEY LEARNED YOU WERE HOME AND OKAY, THREATENED TO KILL YOU - ETC., ETC.

NOW, I'M IN NO WAY SUGGESTING THAT WE LIVE IN AN "OZZIE AND HARRIET" WORLD, AND WE ALL ARE AWARE OF THE MANY CHANGES WHICH HAVE OCCURRED IN OUR SOCIETY DURING THE RELATIVELY SHORT SPAN OF TIME SINCE EACH OF YOU WAS BORN. HOWEVER, EACH OF YOU, IN SOME MANNER AND FROM SOME SOURCE, HAS BEEN THE BENEFICIARY OF SOME FORM OF WHAT I HAVE JUST DESCRIBED AND WERE IT NOT FOR THOSE WHO PROVIDED YOU THIS ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT AT SOME POINT WHEN YOU REALLY NEEDED IT, YOU PROBABLY WOULD NOT BE PARTICIPATING IN THESE CEREMONIES TODAY.

WHOEVER THEY ARE, AND WHEREVER THEY ARE, THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO GAVE YOU YOUR INDIVIDUAL AND PERSONAL ROOTS AND THESE ARE THE INDIVIDUALS UPON WHOSE SHOULDERS YOU WILL BE STANDING AS YOU GO FORTH AND ACCOMPLISH WHATEVER IT IS THAT YOU ACCOMPLISH IN LIFE.

MANY, BUT OBVIOUSLY NOT ALL, OF THESE LOVED ONES ARE HERE WITH YOU IN THE COLISEUM TODAY. LET'S RISE AND GIVE THEM A WELL-DESERVED ROUND OF APPLAUSE FOR ALL THAT THEY HAVE MEANT TO YOU.

WHILE THE FIRST SET OF ROOTS YOU DEVELOPED ARE TOTALLY DISTINCT AND UNIQUE TO EACH OF YOU AS INDIVIDUALS, ANOTHER SET OF ROOTS IS SHARED, NAMELY THE EXPERIENCES WHICH EACH OF YOU HAVE HAD AS YOU HAVE STUDIED HERE AT SMU.

AS TIME PASSES AND AS YOU LOOK BACK UPON THE YEARS YOU SPENT ON THIS CAMPUS, YOU WILL FIND THAT, WHILE YOU WERE HERE YOU DEVELOPED SOME OF YOUR CLOSEST ENDURING FRIENDSHIPS, REALIZED SOME OF THE MORE IMPORTANT TRUTHS THAT WILL SUBSEQUENTLY FASHION YOUR LIFE, AND REFINED MANY OF THE SKILLS WHICH, HOPEFULLY, WILL ALLOW YOU TO COMPETE SUCCESSFULLY IN THE RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD IN WHICH YOU WILL LIVE.

THAT IS WHAT THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE IS DESIGNED TO DO - AND THIS IS WHAT SMU DOES PARTICULARLY WELL.

YOUR CLASS IS UNIQUE, HOWEVER, AS RELATES TO WHEN YOU MATRICULATED AT SMU. IN MY OPINION, IF A HISTORY BOOK ON SMU IS WRITTEN 50 YEARS FROM NOW, YOUR CLASS WILL BE DESCRIBED AS HAVING BEEN AT THE CUSP OF A SIGNIFICANT EVOLUTIONARY STAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY, A TIME WHEN IT WAS TESTED AND A TIME WHEN, IN RESPONSE, ITS STUDENTS, ITS FACULTY AND ITS ADMINISTRATORS STOOD TALL.

AT ABOUT THE TIME THAT YOU WERE FIRST CONSIDERING COMING TO SMU, THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCED A TRUE CRISIS BROUGHT UPON BY THE WELL PUBLICIZED SCANDAL INVOLVING SMU'S FOOTBALL PROGRAM.

THIS CRISIS WAS OF SUFFICIENT MAGNITUDE THAT IT FORCED THE UNIVERSITY TO GO BACK AND REEXAMINE ITS INSTITUTIONAL ROOTS AND REAFFIRM THE PRINCIPLES FOR WHICH IT STOOD. THAT PROCESS WAS NOT A PARTICULARLY EASY ONE TO GO THROUGH AS IT WAS CARRIED OUT UNDER AN INTENSE NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT BUT CRISES ARE FUNNY THINGS IN THE SENSE THAT IF ONE SURVIVES A CRISIS, ONE OFTEN EMERGES STRONGER THAN ONE WAS BEFORE THE CRISIS. THIS WAS THE CASE AT SMU AND MANY OF THE ADVANCES WHICH HAVE OCCURRED BETWEEN THE TIME YOU FIRST BEGAN THINKING OF COMING TO SMU AND YOUR GRADUATION TODAY HAVE BEEN QUITE REMARKABLE.

I AM ABOUT TO EMBARRASS A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE BUT I NEED TO STATE THE OBVIOUS, NAMELY, THAT THESE ADVANCEMENTS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP WHICH WAS PROVIDED BY KEN PYE, SMU'S 9TH PRESIDENT, WHOM WE RECRUITED AWAY FROM DUKE UNIVERSITY. WE LURED HIM FROM DURHAM TO DALLAS BY STATING THE RATHER OBVIOUS TRUTH THAT, AT THAT POINT IN TIME, SMU REALLY HAD A LOT OF PROBLEMS BUT THAT, WERE HE TO COME HERE AND DO THE OUTSTANDING JOB WE KNEW HE COULD DO, SMU'S CIRCUMSTANCES WERE SUCH THAT HE COULD TRULY MAKE A FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE. AND THERE ARE NOT THAT MANY PEOPLE IN LIFE WHO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY WITHIN THEIR PROFESSION TO MAKE A TRULY FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE.

UNDER KEN PYE'S LEADERSHIP AND WHILE YOU WERE HERE ON CAMPUS, SMU WAS ABLE TO ATTRACT A NUMBER OF NEW KEY FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS SUCH THAT TODAY THE UNIVERSITY ENJOYS PROBABLY

THE STRONGEST SET OF SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS, DEANS AND FACULTY IN ITS HISTORY.

ALSO WHILE YOU WERE HERE, THE UNIVERSITY WENT THROUGH A TWO YEAR PROCESS OF REEXAMINING AND REDEFINING ITS ACADEMIC PRIORITIES AND THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES SUBSEQUENTLY ENDORSED THE CONCLUSIONS FROM THAT STUDY AS THE CORE OF THE UNIVERSITY'S LONG RANGE STRATEGIC PLAN.

WHILE YOU WERE HERE, A NUMBER OF OTHER ADVANCES WERE MADE IN AREAS OF STUDENT AID, DIVERSITY AND A HEIGHTENED AWARENESS OF THE GLOBAL SOCIETY IN WHICH ALL OF THE UNIVERSITY'S GRADUATES WILL LIVE.

TO GO INTO THE DETAILS OF THESE CHANGES, AND MANY, MANY OTHERS WOULD NOT BE APPROPRIATE AT THIS TIME BUT SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT THOSE OF YOU GRADUATING TODAY HAVE BEEN ON THIS CAMPUS AT AN ABSOLUTELY HISTORIC TIME AND THE EXPERIENCES WHICH EACH OF YOU HAVE HAD WHILE YOU WERE STUDYING HERE WILL CONSTITUTE ROOTS WHICH YOU WILL SHARE WITH EVERYONE ELSE IN THIS ROOM FOR AS LONG AS YOU LIVE.

NOW LET'S TURN TO THE ISSUE OF WINGS.

MOST COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS HAVE AS A THEME THAT YOU, AS GRADUATES, HAVE BEEN VERY WELL PREPARED TO GO FORWARD INTO THE WORLD AND ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS. I WILL IN NO WAY DISAGREE WITH THAT THEME. YOU HAVE BEEN UNIQUELY TRAINED AND PREPARED AND EACH OF YOU HAVE WITHIN YOURSELF THE ABILITY TO ACCOMPLISH GREAT THINGS AND TO BECOME SUCCESSFUL AND PRODUCTIVE MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY. HOWEVER, AT THE RISK OF PERSONIFYING WILLARD WIRTZ'S DESCRIPTION OF COMMENCEMENT SPEAKERS, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU SEVEN SHORT OBSERVATIONS ON LIFE THAT MAY NOT YET BE READILY APPARENT TO YOU.

THE FIRST DEALS WITH THE FACT THAT, TO THIS POINT IN TIME, YOU PROBABLY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN TOLD THAT IF YOU WORKED HARD, STUDIED HARD, EXPLORED ALL YOUR OPTIONS, ETC., YOU WOULD BE EXPANDING SIGNIFICANTLY THE OPPORTUNITIES AND ALTERNATIVES WHICH LIFE WOULD AFFORD YOU. ALMOST ANYTHING IN THE WORLD COULD BE YOURS IF YOU APPLIED YOURSELF HARD ENOUGH, AND, TO THIS POINT IN YOUR LIFE, THAT STATEMENT HAS PROBABLY BEEN TRUE. HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO REALIZE THAT FROM THIS POINT FORWARD THE OPPOSITE IS GOING TO OCCUR, AS ALMOST EVERY MAJOR DECISION WHICH YOU WILL BE CALLED UPON TO MAKE WILL PROBABLY NARROW, NOT BROADEN, YOUR SUBSEQUENT OPTIONS. FOR EXAMPLE:

- A) THE PROFESSION YOU ELECT TO PURSUE WILL CAUSE YOU TO EXCLUDE A NUMBER OF OTHER PROFESSIONS.
- B) THE COMPANY OR ORGANIZATION FOR WHOM YOU CHOOSE TO WORK WILL REQUIRE YOU TO TURN YOUR BACK ON OTHERS.
- C) WHERE YOU CHOOSE TO LIVE WILL LIMIT A NUMBER OF LIFE EXPERIENCES WHICH YOU WOULD HAVE HAD IF YOU HAD LIVED SOMEWHERE ELSE.
- D) WHETHER OR NOT YOU ELECT TO MARRY - AND IF AND WHEN YOU ELECT TO HAVE CHILDREN - WILL CAUSE CERTAIN OTHER OPTIONS TO FALL AWAY.

AND THE LIST GOES ON.

OBVIOUSLY, EACH DECISION OF THIS NATURE, IF MADE CORRECTLY, CAN BENEFIT YOU GREATLY, BUT ALL OF THESE ARE DECISIONS WHICH WILL BEGIN TO NARROW YOUR SUBSEQUENT OPTIONS IN LIFE AND IT IS THEREFORE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT THAT YOU MAKE THESE DECISIONS CAREFULLY AND WISELY.

A PARTIAL ANTIDOTE TO THIS VERY NATURAL BUT NARROWING PHENOMENON DEALS WITH HOW YOU PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THESE DECISIONS.

OUR DAUGHTER AND SON-IN-LAW, BOTH OF WHOM GRADUATED FROM SMU SEVERAL YEARS AGO, ARE SITTING IN THE AUDIENCE TODAY AND THEY ARE GOING TO START SNICKERING IN A MINUTE OR TWO AS THEY BEGIN TO

RECOGNIZE SOME OF THE UNSOLICITED PARENTAL ADVICE WHICH I OCCASIONALLY BURDEN THEM WITH. BUT BASICALLY, I WOULD STRONGLY URGE EACH OF YOU TO CONSIDER EVERY SIGNIFICANT DECISION YOU MAKE BETWEEN NOW AND WHEN YOU TURN 30 AS BEING PRIMARILY AN EXTENSION OF YOUR ACADEMIC EDUCATION.

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN.

WHAT IT MEANS IS, WHEN GIVEN THE OPTION - GO TO WORK FOR THE ORGANIZATION WHICH WILL GIVE YOU THE BROADEST EXPOSURE TO AS MANY DIFFERENT CHALLENGES AND LEARNING EXPERIENCES AS IS POSSIBLE. PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO WITH WHOM YOU WILL BE WORKING. SELECT THOSE OPTIONS WHICH WILL PUT YOU IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE ALREADY HAD AS MANY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES AS IS POSSIBLE SO THAT YOU CAN LEARN FROM THEM.

ALSO, SEEK OUT POSITIONS WHICH WILL GIVE YOU MAXIMUM RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY, EVEN IF THE PAY IS LESS AND THE LOCATION IS NOT AS ATTRACTIVE AS OTHER ALTERNATIVES. EVEN IF - ESPECIALLY IF - YOU MAKE MISTAKES, YOU WILL LEARN FROM THOSE MISTAKES AND BE A BETTER AND MORE QUALIFIED PERSON BECAUSE OF THEM.

SECOND, I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN STRUCK BY THE INSIGHT REPRESENTED BY THE TITLE TO THE BOOK EVERYTHING IMPORTANT IN LIFE I LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN. I THINK THAT PHRASE HAS A LOT OF TRUTH IN IT. BASICALLY, WHAT THAT TITLE SAYS IS THAT THE SOLUTIONS TO MANY OF LIFE'S PROBLEMS - EVEN THE COMPLEX PROBLEMS - CAN BE FOUND IN SIMPLE TRUTHS. IN KINDERGARTEN EACH OF US LEARNED CERTAIN BASIC RULES SUCH AS :

1. BE NICE TO OTHER BOYS AND GIRLS,
2. DON'T FIGHT,
3. TELL THE TRUTH, AND,
4. IF YOU MAKE A MESS, CLEAN IT UP.

THESE, AND A FEW OTHER VERY BASIC KINDERGARTEN RULES REALLY DO HAVE UNIVERSAL APPLICATION THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES.

EXTRAPOLATING FROM THAT, I PERSONALLY BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE A RELATIVELY SMALL NUMBER OF VERY BASIC PRINCIPLES THAT DETERMINE HOW PEOPLE CONDUCT THEIR LIVES. THESE PRINCIPLES TEND TO BE RELATIVELY SIMPLE IN NATURE AND IN LARGE MEASURE THESE ARE THE PRINCIPLES WHICH WILL CONSTITUTE YOUR PERSONAL VALUE SYSTEM AND EVEN YOUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS. AT YOUR AGE, THESE PRINCIPLES ARE NOW WELL FORMED AND IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO IDENTIFY AND UNDERSTAND THESE PRINCIPLES AS THEY, IN FACT, REPRESENT YOUR CORE BELIEFS.

AS YOU GO FORWARD IN LIFE, THERE IS NO DOUBT BUT THAT YOU WILL BE CONFRONTED WITH PROBLEMS WHICH WILL BECOME PROGRESSIVELY MORE COMPLEX. THE PREMISE I WOULD LIKE TO PRESENT TO YOU TODAY, HOWEVER, IS THAT WHILE TIMES AND CONDITIONS MAY CHANGE, PRINCIPLES VERY SELDOM CHANGE AND IF YOU CAN SUCCESSFULLY IDENTIFY WHICH PRINCIPLES APPLY TO ANY GIVEN PROBLEM OR SITUATION AND IF YOUR PERSONAL CONDUCT AND DECISION MAKING IS IN CONFORMITY WITH HOW YOU VIEW THOSE PRINCIPLES, THEN EVEN THE MOST COMPLEX OF PROBLEMS BECOME MUCH EASIER TO DEAL WITH.

A THIRD POINT I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE IS FOR YOU TO TRUST IN YOUR OWN JUDGEMENT, AND NOT THE JUDGEMENT OF THE CROWD. IN TODAY'S AGE OF RAPID AND GLOBAL COMMUNICATION, AN EVENT - ANY EVENT - CAN OCCUR ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD AND IN LITERALLY A MATTER OF HOURS 70% OR 80% OF THE PEOPLE IN THE WORLD CAN BE MADE AWARE OF THAT EVENT IF IT IS DEEMED NEWSWORTHY. FURTHER, INSTANT ANALYSIS AND EDITORIAL OPINION WILL EMERGE AND, IT IS EXTREMELY EASY IN SUCH A FLUID AND FAST MOVING ENVIRONMENT FOR CONSENSUS THINKING TO DEVELOP VERY QUICKLY ON ALMOST ANY SUBJECT.

WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF IN SUCH A SITUATION, AND ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE GOING TO BE CALLED UPON TO MAKE DECISIONS, MAKE SURE THAT YOUR DECISIONS REFLECT YOUR PERSONAL THINKING AND YOUR INDEPENDENT JUDGEMENT, AND NOT WHAT THE CROWD MIGHT BE THINKING.

THIS CONCEPT IS EQUALLY VALID WHEN APPLIED TO THE MANY SMALL DECISIONS WHICH EACH OF US MAKES CONCERNING THE WAY WE LIVE ON A

DAILY BASIS. IF YOU EVER FALL INTO THE TRAP OF MAKING DAY-TO-DAY DECISIONS BASED UPON THE OPINIONS OR THE EXPECTATIONS OF OTHER PEOPLE, THEN YOU ARE IN REALITY ALLOWING THIRD PARTIES TO GOVERN YOUR LIFE AND, AT THAT POINT, YOU RUN THE RISK OF LOSING YOUR OWN IDENTITY. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO PERIODICALLY STAND BACK AND TAKE A DISPASSIONATE LOOK AT WHAT YOU ARE DOING AND WHY YOU ARE DOING IT AND TO MAKE SURE THAT THE MANNER BY WHICH YOU ARE CONDUCTING YOUR LIFE REFLECTS YOUR PERSONAL THINKING AND DESIRES AS OPPOSED TO THE EXPECTATIONS OR OPINIONS OF OTHER PEOPLE.

FOURTH, BE DISCIPLINED IN HOW YOU APPROACH THINGS AND, BE CONSISTENT. THE OLD COMMON SENSE SAYING THAT, "IF YOU TAKE CARE OF TODAY, TOMORROW WILL TAKE CARE OF ITSELF" IS EXTREMELY VALID BUT WHAT NEEDS TO BE ADDED TO THAT SAYING IS THAT YOU NEED TO DO THIS DAY AFTER DAY ON A CONTINUING BASIS.

A FRIEND OF MINE ONCE OBSERVED THAT THERE ARE QUITE A FEW PEOPLE WHO CAN TAKE ON ONE PROJECT AND DO IT WELL. THERE ARE A SMALLER NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO CAN TAKE ON TWO PROJECTS IN SUCCESSION AND DO BOTH OF THEM WELL. THE NUMBER GETS MUCH SMALLER WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY TAKEN ON THREE CONSECUTIVE PROJECTS WITH NO INTERVENING FAILURES. OBVIOUSLY, WHAT I AM DESCRIBING IS AN EXPONENTIAL CURVE AS RELATES TO THE SUCCESSFUL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF DIFFERENT TASKS BUT THAT CURVE REALLY DOES EXIST IN LIFE AND IN MANY RESPECTS, WHERE YOU WILL ULTIMATELY END UP IN LIFE WILL BE A FUNCTION OF WHERE YOU END UP ON THAT CURVE.

WHAT YOUR PERSONAL OBJECTIVE SHOULD BE IS TO PUT TOGETHER AS LONG A STRING OF SUCCESSFUL ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS IS POSSIBLE WITH NO INTERVENING FAILURES. STATED ANOTHER WAY, WHENEVER POSSIBLE ALWAYS UNDER-PROMISE AND OVER-DELIVER AND EARN THE PERSONAL REPUTATION THAT IF AN ASSIGNMENT OR A RESPONSIBILITY IS GIVEN TO YOU - WHETHER IT IS BIG OR SMALL - EVERYBODY ELSE CAN FORGET ABOUT IT BECAUSE THEY KNOW YOU WILL DO IT AND YOU WILL DO IT WELL.

FIFTH, NEVER BELIEVE YOUR OWN PRESS CLIPPINGS. ONE OF MY FAVORITE SAYINGS - WHICH I CLIPPED OUT OF A MAGAZINE 20 YEARS AGO - IS THAT A

PERSON'S REPUTATION IS LIKE HIS SHADOW - IT'S ALWAYS LONGER OR SHORTER THAN THE REAL THING.

TRANSLATED TO A PERSONAL LEVEL, THIS MEANS THAT YOU SHOULD NEVER ASSUME THAT YOU ARE AS GOOD AS YOUR ADMIRERS SAY YOU ARE, BUT YOU CAN ALSO TAKE SOME COMFORT IN KNOWING THAT YOU WILL NEVER BE AS BAD AS YOUR DETRACTORS WOULD HAVE OTHERS BELIEVE.

IN THIS REGARD, THERE IS A MAN HERE IN DALLAS WHO IS EXTREMELY ACCOMPLISHED IN A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT FIELDS. EVERYONE WOULD RECOGNIZE HIS NAME IF I MENTIONED IT, AND HE TELLS A GREAT STORY ON HIMSELF. HE TELLS OF A SITUATION WHERE HE WAS BEING GRANTED A VERY IMPORTANT AWARD. THE PRESENTATION SPEECH WAS PARTICULARLY GLOWING AND WENT ON AND ON DETAILING WHAT A GREAT MAN HE WAS. LATER THAT NIGHT AFTER THE AWARD HAD BEEN PRESENTED AND HE AND HIS WIFE HAD RETURNED HOME, HE WAS IN A SOMEWHAT PHILOSOPHICAL MOOD AND AT ONE POINT HE TURNED TO HIS WIFE AND ASKED THE QUESTION, "HONEY, HOW MANY TRULY GREAT MEN DO YOU THINK THERE REALLY ARE IN THE WORLD." SHE RESPONDED QUICKLY, "ONE LESS THAN YOU PROBABLY THINK."

THE MESSAGE IN ALL OF THIS IS, DON'T PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT OTHERS MAY THINK OF YOU - POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY. JUST MAKE SURE THAT WHATEVER IT IS YOU ARE DOING, IT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO AND THAT IT CONFORMS WITH THOSE SIMPLE AND BASIC PRINCIPLES WHICH CONSTITUTE YOUR PERSONAL VALUES.

MY SIXTH POINT IS THAT REGARDLESS OF HOW WELL YOU DID IN YOUR STUDIES AT SMU, DON'T START THINKING TOO HIGHLY OF YOURSELF. NO MATTER HOW IMPRESSIVE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS HAVE BEEN HERE, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS ASSUME THAT THERE WILL BE SOMEONE OUT THERE WHO IS GOING TO BE SMARTER THAN YOU, MORE CAPABLE THAN YOU, AND WILL BE WILLING - POSSIBLY - TO WORK HARDER THAN YOU. WHEN THAT HAPPENS, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE WILL USUALLY BE MEASURED BY HOW HARD YOU WORK AND THE DEGREE TO WHICH YOU APPLY YOURSELF.

IN THAT REGARD, ROSS PEROT DELIVERED AN ABSOLUTELY SUPERB COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS HERE AT SMU SEVERAL YEARS AGO AND HE MADE A COMPARABLE POINT THAT I FEEL BEARS REPEATING, HE, IN EFFECT, SAID THAT WHILE THOSE OF YOU WHO MADE 4.0 POINTS AND WERE ABLE TO BREEZE THROUGH THE MOST DIFFICULT COURSES ON CAMPUS SHOULD CERTAINLY BE COMMENDED, THE REALLY LUCKY ONES OF YOU ARE THE ONES WHO HAD TO SCRAP AND CLAW AND BURN THE MIDNIGHT OIL IN ORDER TO JUST MAKE A PASSING GRADE IN SOME PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT BUT REQUIRED COURSE. YOU ARE THE LUCKY ONES, HE SAID, BECAUSE YOU HAVE LEARNED WHAT IS REALLY REQUIRED TO SUCCEED IN LIFE.

MY SEVENTH POINT IS TO EMPHASIZE HOW CRITICALLY IMPORTANT IT IS TO SELECT VERY CAREFULLY THOSE WITH WHOM YOU ASSOCIATE IN LIFE. THIS RANGES ALL THE WAY FROM THE PERSON WHOM YOU MIGHT CONSIDER MARRYING TO FRIENDS AND BUSINESS ASSOCIATES. IT IS REALLY TRUE THAT ONE WAY THAT EACH OF US IS DEFINED IS BY THE PEOPLE WE CALL OUR FRIENDS.

ADDITIONALLY, AS YOU GO THROUGH LIFE WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES, OPERATE ON THE THEORY THAT THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO SUCH THING AS A SECRET. CONDUCT YOURSELF AS IF EVERYONE WHO YOU CARED ABOUT ALWAYS KNEW EXACTLY WHAT YOU WERE DOING AND BE SURE THAT YOUR ACTIONS - BOTH PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL - ALWAYS CAN WITHSTAND THE CLOSEST SCRUTINY. NO ONE IS PERFECT, BUT IF YOU APPLY THAT PARTICULAR STANDARD TO YOUR DECISION MAKING PROCESS, THE ODDS OF YOU DOING VERY WELL IN LIFE WILL INCREASE DRAMATICALLY.

IN CLOSING, I WOULD LIKE TO STRESS THAT IN TODAY'S WORLD - AND PARTICULARLY IN TOMORROW'S WORLD - THE PRIZE WILL GO TO THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE ORGANIZATION THAT IS THE MOST AGILE AND CAN ADAPT THE QUICKEST TO CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES. WAYS OF DOING THINGS THAT MAY HAVE BEEN VERY EFFECTIVE YESTERDAY, MAY BE NOT AT ALL EFFECTIVE TOMORROW. THE ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE CHANGE, AND TO THINK CRITICALLY AS TO HOW YOU WILL ADAPT TO CHANGE WHILE ALWAYS HONORING YOUR CORE VALUES, WILL BE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT AND, IN THAT REGARD, THE FINE LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION WHICH MOST OF YOU HAVE RECEIVED HERE AT SMU WILL SERVE YOU VERY WELL.

TO COME FULL CIRCLE, AND BEFORE YOUR DEGREES ARE CONFERRED, I WOULD LIKE TO REFER ONE LAST TIME TO BOTH YOUR ROOTS AND YOUR WINGS.

AS TO ROOTS, REMEMBER THAT, WHATEVER YOU MAY ACCOMPLISH IN LIFE, YOU WILL IN SOME MANNER AND IN SOME DEGREE BE STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE YOU.

WITH RESPECT TO WINGS, YOU HAVE BEEN EXCEPTIONALLY WELL PREPARED AND AS EACH OF YOU LEAVE SMU TO EMBARK UPON AN IMPORTANT NEW PHASE OF YOUR LIFE, I WOULD LIKE TO WISH YOU GOOD LUCK AND GOD SPEED.