

--MATTHEW HALTON GRADUATION

YOUR FUTURE: THE ADVENTURE OF YOUR LIFE

Honored guests, ladies and gentlemen, graduates of the Class of 91:

It is indeed a pleasure -- and a very great honour -- to stand before this audience on the town where I graduated from High School more than thirty years ago. I remember thinking to myself, I don't know what the future is.

What I could not have guessed is what an adventure day before me. And that is my theme for tonight - the adventure of life. For me, it can be summed up in three watchwords: Education; Avocation; and Application.

EDUCATION

I remember thinking to myself that night long ago, "the first part of my education is over; now I'll go to University, and in two or three years my education will be finished, and I'll be able to get on with living."

It was in reflecting on that thought that the question occurred to me, "What is education?"

For many of us, education is something to get out of the way -- a task which has to be done, so we can have what we really want, do what we really like.

So we have a system of "formal education", primary, secondary and post-secondary technical or university education.

"Get a good education", we are told, and you'll be set for life.

Perhaps the most important thing I have learned in the years since I stood on this platform as one of the class of '61, is that my notion of education was wrong.

Or more accurately, incomplete. There can be no doubt about the importance of formal education and training. The Prime Minister was right when, in the recent Speech from the Throne, he stressed the importance of improving our secondary and post-secondary education systems in this country.

Other countries far outstrip us, particularly in the domains of science and engineering which are so critical to the maintenance of the high standard of living we enjoy in this country.

If we are to compete, we must continue to improve our education system.

More of our young people must complete high school, more must go to university.

But a degree, however reputable, is no longer the complete talisman of a functional education.

First, formal education and training is no longer something we can regard as finished at a certain point in our lives.

More and more we are told that if we are to compete in today's society and continue to function as part of the workplace over the decades to come, we must continue to educate ourselves, to learn new skills and approaches.

More and more employers seek not only employees with skills, but employees who are flexible, creative and willing to continue learning and adapting throughout their working lives.

It is that flexibility which our education must give us.

True and full success, either individually or collectively as a country, depends on a concept of education as a process to self-fulfillment.

I digress a moment to define success -- ultimate success. Success is not making a lot of money.

Success is not becoming famous.

Success is not to use the maxim of the "me" generation of the 80's- having it all.

Success is not so much what we take as what we give.

In the final analysis, no person is successful unless he or she is living the life he wants to be living, which he knows, in the dark moments when he or she pauses to search himself, is right.

Success on the collective national scale reflects the same values; no matter how competitive or rich our country is, it will not be a good or successful country unless it promotes the ideals which we hold to be right -- ideals like equality, tolerance, and the right balance between independence and caring.

To achieve success in this broader sense, we need to view education as a process which begins at birth and ends only at death, a process capable of expanding as new horizons beckon, new interests are piqued, new needs are presented. The great actor, Peter Ustinov, well into his seventh decade, put it as follows:

...it is of primordial importance to learn more every year than the year before.

After all, what education but a process by which a person begins to learn how to learn?

(Dear Me)

The process of education begins in the family, extends to the community and school, and continues throughout one's working life.

If my experience is any indication, you are fortunate indeed to have begun this process in the community of Pincher Creek.

I remember as a high school student feeling pangs of envy upon reading about large urban high schools with thousands of students, hundreds of courses from which to choose, and a myriad of technical equipment to permit the realization of almost any dream.

I'm sure things have changed, but our three language choices consisted of French, French and French in that order, all taught by an anglophone.

We had one science teacher and in Grade 12 we got to pick between physics and biology.

Yet I soon came to realize that small communities have absolutely nothing to apologize for when it comes to education.

There may be less choice, but what they offer is good and important. More significantly, what the community offers more than makes up for any deficit.

You have only to look at the people this community has produced to realize how advantaged you are.

Pincher Creek through the years has contributed highly productive and original people in all walks of life -- not just the teachers and nurses and business people who are the backbone of any community -- but doctors, engineers, and lawyers.

We all know of Matthew Halton, international journalist and the namesake of this school.

Perhaps less well known are the judges.

At last count, I estimated that no less than five judges had come from hereabouts -- including Judge Ives on the Alberta Supreme Court, Justice Milvain who served as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Charles McClean on the present Alberta Queen's Bench, George Lynch-Staunton now retired, and myself. Make that six -- I just recently met at a new judge's course Judge LeGrandeur from this area. If you want to stretch things to the Crowsnest Pass, I can add a couple more.

When people ask me how a single small southern Alberta community has produced so many judges, I usually say something bright like "It must be in the water."

That answer is wrong. The truth is, it must be in the community.

Evidence like this has caused me to reflect on what it is about communities like this that makes them such a good place to begin the process of education. The answer, I think, can be summed up in two words -- values and character.

Values start with the family.

The basis of life in town like this and in the countryside surrounding it, is

family.

Usually stable, happy families.

Families live together -- quite frequently I am told even eat together -- a phenomenon which is becoming increasingly rare in urban centres. Urban life has a tendency to fling family members out from the centre, like a powerful centrifugal force.

Father is at the office until 9:30 most nights.

Mother has her own work or pursuits. Children, at the still and sometimes vacuous centre of the centrifuge, watch T.V in isolation or build their own life of autonomous activities in which other family members play no part.

In a smaller community, the family is more likely to act as a magnet, which does not fling out so much as draw in and back.

The values learned from a good family life are among the most important acquisitions any education can give one.

Respect, cooperation, pulling one's weight, getting along, most basically love -- all these values essential for success in later life are first and best learned in the family.

Next is the community.

The relationship of the individual and the family to the larger community sometimes seems tenuous in larger urban centres.

In smaller communities the lines that bind are more evident, as are the lines that connect the different communities that inhabit the same region.

Thus I grew up knowing, working with, going to school with, native children, coming to know firsthand the strengths of the aboriginal community and its struggles.

That experience is one which I carry with me to this day.

And the differences were not confined to those between natives and non-natives; English, Scotch, Irish French and German all formed part -- and continue to form part -- of the community mosaic.

A large city embraces the same mosaic, but often with less chance for interaction, since the different groups may form their own communities within the city.

In a small community, each person is intensely aware of how he or she is related to the other.

As a child, I knew that the library, where I went at least once a week, did not magically appear by some far-off government munificence; the library was Mrs. Boyden and the other women of the community, who took the time, in addition to all their other duties, to be there.

Without knowing it, we came to accept a standard which based the individual's worth on what she or he contributes to the community.

But the values I learned in this community did not stop with love, friendship, and the importance of working hard and making a contribution.

One experienced a connectedness not only with the family and the community, but with nature and the notion of something much larger beyond it all.

The aesthetic and the spiritual always assumed a supreme importance in our lives.

Perhaps it could not be otherwise, growing up in the lee of the Rocky Mountains with the ever-changing beauty of nature about one.

But the importance of beauty to the full life did not stop there; around me as I grew up I saw those who found it necessary to express themselves through music, painting, writing, reading and discussing ideas and good literature.

I learned that to deny such activities is to deny that which is most human in us.

So much for values.

The other thing this community gave me -- although I did not realize it until much later -- was strength of character.

We grew up with a strong sense of identity, an awareness of where we fit in the small part of the world we were part of.

We also grew up with a sense of competence and independence.

I read recently that one of the problems faced by urban children is that such work as they do is often of artificial or marginal utility and consequently does not give the child either the sense of accomplishment or of contribution.

The teenagers I grew up with in this community did not have that problem.

Most helped on the farm or in the family business in a way that clearly contributed to the welfare of the family.

This gave us a sense of competence, an awareness that we were worth something, that we could make our own way and contribute on the larger stage beyond.

If, as Herbert Spencer said, (Social Statistics [1851] II, 17), "[e]ducation has for its object the formation of character", then you are fortunate indeed to have begun your education here.

I do not intend this as a paean to small town farm life.

I would not wish to minimize the difficulties your community and its

members have faced from time to time, difficulties which are no less important than those arising in larger urban centres.

My intention is rather only to tell you, the graduating class of 1991, that you need take a back seat to no one.

You come from one of the oldest and best communities in one of the most favoured provinces of our country.

You have been provided with a fine formal education.

But more importantly, the community of which you are part has provided you with an education in the broader sense.

It has shown you the right values.

And it has given you character.

It has made you independent, self-reliant and outward reaching.

With this as your starting point, you cannot go wrong, wherever the adventure of your life of your life may lead you. You have a fine start on the process of education which with luck will continue for the rest of your lives.

The adventure of living is, in the final analysis, the process of continuing education to which I learned at the outset.

If you see life as a process of continuing learning to learn, to use Ustinov's phrase, you cannot but live life as an adventure.

The adventure takes place on two planes.

The first is the grand scheme -- the work that is our lives viewed, as it were from birth to the end. The second is the minute by minute, day by day, reality of our lives.

As you embark on the next stage of your adventure of learning, it is important to keep both perspectives in mind.

AVOCATION

I turn first to the grand scheme.

Over the past days and weeks you have probably spent a lot of time asking yourself, "What am I going to do in life? What will the shape of my life be?"

Graduations, like the other major rites of passage of our lives -- marriage, parenthood, retirement -- provoke such musings.

I would sum up my advice on this score in one phrase borrowed from the great 20th century moral philosopher, Joseph Campbell, "Follow your bliss."

Campbell explains this concept by reference to the last line in Sinclair Lewis's novel, *Babbitt*: "I have never done the thing I wanted to in all my life."

He recalls the story of sitting in his favorite restaurant one evening at dinner in the Bronx.

At the next table there was a father, a mother and a scrawny boy about twelve years old. The father said to the boy, "Drink your tomato juice."

And the boy said, "I don't want to."

Then the father said, in a louder voice, "Drink your tomato juice."

And the mother said, "Don't make him do what he doesn't want to do."

The father looked at her and said, "He can't go through life doing what he wants to do.

If he does only what he wants to do, he'll be dead.

Look at me, I've never done a thing I wanted to in all my life."

(The Power of Myth, pp. 117, 118)

Babbitt incarnate.

Campbell concludes (p. 118):

You may have a success in life, but then just think of it -- what kind of life was it?

What good was it -- you've never done the thing you wanted to do in all

your life.

I always tell my students, go where your body and soul want to go.

When you have the feeling, then stay with it, and don't let anyone throw you off.

You will find intimations of your bliss in the little experiences of life.

What feels right, what touches the spark of contentment, excitement.

Of course, the advice to follow your bliss must not be confused with an invitation to hedonism.

Its concern is with the path that is right for you, as an individual. And along that path, there may be difficult times when you have to draw on that valuable result of education -- "the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, whether you like it or not." (Husley, Technical Education).

Following your bliss means being in touch with your innermost self, taking chances with your lives, doing what you want to do, not what others think you should do. It is not without its risks, but it alone permits you to seize the chance to live the life that is right for you, and perhaps, to accomplish something truly great.

The adventure, as Campbell says, is its own reward:

If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living.

Wherever you are -- if you are following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you, all the time.

(Ibid, p. 91)

What Campbell is talking about is an extension of a universal truth that has been expressed variously at various times.

Socrates said, "Know thyself." Rudyard Kipling said, "To thine own self be true." And the poet Robert Frost wrote these lines:

And yield who will to their separation
My object in life is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight

(Robert Frost: Two Tramps in Mudtune)

Campbell says, let this oneness between what you want to do, what is right for you, and what you do in fact, be the guiding principle by which you make your choices, shape your life.

The results of this philosophy may surprise you.

The plans others -- even you -- have made for yourself may need re-examination.

When I was in high school, the expectation was that girls, if they went to university at all, would become teachers or nurses.

Those are great professions, but they never felt right for me.

And there were no role models for other professions.

I floundered. I studied general arts, I tried different things, some which pleased me more than others.

Then I tried law, and knew it was right.

I followed, if you wish, my bliss, and it took me a direction and to a conclusion that I could never in my wildest imaginings have predicted as I stood here thirty years ago, but one which I know has been right for me.

This philosophy is echoed in the theme of your celebrations tonight: "We don't know what the future holds, but we know who hold the future". Your future lies ahead, an unknown adventure. It is you who holds this future; you who will shape it by choosing and following not only, to borrow Frost's words- your vocation but your avocation.

From the global picture, I turn to the moment by moment reality of the life we live.

For the global picture is really an abstraction; the real stuff of our lives lies in moment by moment, day by day decisions and activities.

It is here, as I mentioned earlier, that you find what is right for you.

You take the next step because it accords with your sense of self and where you want to be going. This brings me to my third watchword "Application".

APPLICATION

As we progress through the multitude of small acts that make up our days, we can be aided, not only by this sense of where we should be going, but by other maxims consonant with good living and with the open mind and spirit essential to making life a continuing adventure of education.

I would like to close by sharing with you a list of daily reminders which I have found to be of great help.

The late Dr. Armand Hammer, a great industrialist, original thinker and actor and humanitarian, had these maxims, which are based of the original credo of Alcoholics Anonymous, taped on his bathroom mirror.

Just for today I will be happy. Abraham Lincoln said, "Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be." He was

right. I will not dwell on thoughts that depress me. I will chase them out of my mind and replace them with happy thoughts.

Just for today I will adjust myself to what is. I will face reality. I will correct those things that I can correct and accept those things I cannot correct.

Just for today I will improve my mind. I will not be a mental loafer. I will force myself to read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.

Just for today I will do something positive to improve my health. If I'm a smoker, I'll make an honest effort to quit. If I'm overweight, I'll eat nothing I know to be fattening. And I will force myself to exercise—even if it's only walking around the block or using the stairs instead of the elevator.

Just for today I'll do something I've been putting off for a long time. I'll finally write that letter, make that phone call, clean that closet or straighten out those dresser drawers.

Just for today, before I speak I will ask myself, "Is it true? Is it kind?" and if the answer to either of those questions is negative, I won't say it.

Just for today I will make a conscious effort to be agreeable. I

will look as good as I can, dress becomingly, talk softly, act courteously and not interrupt when someone else is talking. Just for today I'll not improve anybody except myself.

Just for today I will have a program. I may not follow it exactly, but I will have it, thereby saving myself from two pests: hurry and indecision.

Just for today I will have a quiet half-hour to relax alone. During this time I will reflect on my behaviour and get a better perspective on my life.

Just for today I will be unafraid. I will gather the courage to do what is right and take the responsibility for my own actions. I will expect nothing from the world, but I will realize that as I give to the world, the world will give to me.

There can be no better advice for the adventure of life that lies before you.

You must have courage. The courage to see what you are. The courage to see what you can be. The courage and will to make learning a permanent condition of life. The courage to give to others. The courage to follow your dream, your avocation, through the good times and the bad.