

Moving the Agenda

Acceptance Speech by J. Richard Corbett, MD, 2012 UNCW Albert Schweitzer Honors Scholar

Chancellor Miller, Dr. Kate Bruce, Dr. Atwill, students of the honors program, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great honor to be the recipient of the Albert Schweitzer award. He was genuinely a great citizen of life and was so accomplished in so many disciplines of knowledge and learning! Not to minimize this honor from a personal stand point as Dr. Bruce can attest personally, I don't go in for this sort of thing...I.E, being singled out having the privilege of doing and serving is an honor in and of itself! And, quite sufficient! All of this folderol caused me to remember a statement by Abraham Lincoln in his early years threatened with the prospect of being tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail he said, "Except for the honor I'd just as soon forego it." This speaks to my nature, too! I am quite resigned to be no more if no less than who I am. Besides, it makes me nervous!

My interest in and involvement in UNCW began in 1990. I was endeavoring to find a way to honor my parents. I called the university switch board and was referred to Mr. Tyrone Rowell, an associate vice-chancellor for the university development. Ty set up an appointment at the Advancement office- we met and I conveyed my desires to meet him. Soon we were at work establishing the necessary academic and legal structure for the Emmett & Gladys Corbett Merit Scholarship.

(As an aside)

Both parents lived with me during their waning years. Should this become your lot in life and chances it will as geriatric literature points to the return of the multigenerational family dictated by the economy and the shared responsibility especially of the elderly and of children.

As a further aside:

Harmony will be dependent upon all involved. As for my situation, both parents were very cooperative and extremely appreciative of my efforts. I could, I believe, feed mother a hotdog at every meal and she would complement me by saying it was the best hotdog she ever had! And, she did not particularly like hotdogs...even Oscar Meyer!

A further aside:

An article recently described a three generation family and lauded its members for their harmonious and cooperative family life!

(Moving the Agenda)

As a consequence of Ty's endeavors the Emmett & Gladys Corbett merit scholarship was established with one student awarded. This number has progressively increased over the years. My remarks will predominantly be directed to: the scholars of the honors college. You are the why of why we are here! This university exists because of you the students! Using "why" as a noun Webster defines you as, "a reason a cause, a baffling problem, I.E., an enigma.

Hence, you are the “Sine Qua Non” Latin for “Without which nothing.” Without you there would be no need of all these magnificent edifices, nor the learned instructors, professors and ancillaries.

As the “why” of the university I learned from a journal sent to college trustees that the best and brightest students were in part given scholarships because by their presence they help to teach their peers. Hence, you have a dual obligation for the grant of a scholarship:

1. To pursue your chosen discipline of higher learning
2. To share your knowledge, abilities, and expertise. I.E. to teach your colleagues- your fellow students.

“Why”, you are the hope of the future, you are “the tomorrow” of now, UNCW class of 2016, welcome!

Come to the campus before a major holiday and witness the life and activity then return the next day and observe the emptiness, the quiet-tude!

The last time I spoke to this august group of intellectuals I incurred the wrath of not only the students but also the faculty members and especially the chancellor, Dr. Rosemary DePaolo (a personal friend). Why? One: because I made the statement that 10 percent of you would not be qualified to perform adequately in your discipline. Two weeks later an article in the Star News quoted 20 percent...I didn't bother to send her a copy. And two because I talked so long!

So, an anecdote told by Billy Graham

When I was a student at Wake Forest where Chapel attendance was required Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, Dr. Graham told of a chapel speaker who had droned on past his allotted time. The moderator threw the gravel at him trying to attract his attention. Instead, it missed and hit a student on the first row who immediately woke up and loudly exclaimed, “Hit me again- I can still hear him!” Hence, he is the cudgel in my McDonalds bag...No doubt you may have wondered why I brought this bag with me- now you know in part. However, as you begin to attend meetings it is always challenging to the others as to what may be in the briefcase or carry-in. So, what would you have me say to you?

Rhetorical:

A young minister was having trouble deciding on a sermon topic and kept walking around in circles beneath a tree. “Lord, what shall I preach on?” When a small voice said, “Why don't you preach on hell, you've raised enough of it!”

One of the advantages I have discovered with aging is that all of the trivia you ever encountered comes back multifold! The threes: Emmett and Gladys Corbett believed in young people and assisted many by their encouragement of young people to further themselves through education. As these young people graduated and became financially able many returned endeavoring to payback my parents. My parents encouraged these recipients to use the payback to assist others who need financial assistance and encouragement. In doing so, they fostered a desire in these young people to reach out and to help

others permitting them to experience the joy derived from helping someone else and being a part of something greater than themselves. Today this has come to be referred to as “paying it forward.”

(Moving the Agenda)

I promised Dr. Bruce I would not consume as much time as I did on a previous presentation. Hence, I would like to direct your attention to admonitions, admonishments, and reminiscences of an octogenarian. As an octogenarian I am at least four times as old as each of you. What’s this supposed to mean? As you are, so once was I. As I am, someday you will be (an epitaph in a country church yard). Trust me it has been a fast and enjoyable run! Of this run the longest segment was from birth to the age twenty.

These thoughts I will leave with you: get a good night’s rest. My medical roommate and I learned after staying up past midnight studying and not doing well on the first quizzes that it was better to go to bed early (we settled on 10:30 p.m.) so that we could stay awake in class and hear and concentrate on the subject being presented.

Rise early: As Benjamin Franklin said. “Early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” ...at least healthy!

Diet, that is, your daily intake: eat moderately and heavily laced with vegetables and fruit.

Exercise (tolerance levels and needs may vary): My needs involve sit-ups to prevent “adipositas abdominis” which is a fat abdomen or “done-lops” syndrome.

Read: have a daily reading in the morning as the thought, not necessarily religious, will go with you through the day. Employees will often ask, “What’s the word for the day?” Years ago I was given a book entitled “Growing Older, Growing Better” written by a young lady in Boston. I wrote her through her publisher as I frequently do when I am particularly impressed with the book. Amy wrote back and sent nine other copies of several other volumes such as “Facing Life’s Challenges,” “First Light,” “Pleasant Dreams,” and “Peace of Mind” which I am currently reading, again. We continue to correspond.

Advertisement that used to be on television: “Give me a person who reads.” – a company advertisement.

Be sure to vote: Many have voted an absentee ballot. However, I prefer to go to my polling place no matter how long the line may be. This is real voting...voting at its best where you see neighbors and friends and get to visit while waiting your turn (in a place I have come to realize the title of “doctor” is actually my name).

Voting is like watching the Academy Awards but if you haven’t seen the movies, the awards are less compelling.

Be altruistic: The day is too short to be selfish. Give to worthy causes, as they become an extension of yourself. Give anonymously where possible, as the Holy Bible states, "Those who give in secret will outwardly be awarded."

Be active: In your place of worship, trade organization, community, politics.

KEEP A JOURNAL: Not a diary. Physically, physiologically, anatomically, basically we are pretty much the same. Your mind is the truly only thing unique about you. That is, your thoughts and ideas. Make entries in a journal. When you feel your thoughts are relative to the moment. Remember the Chinese proverb, "THREE THINGS COMETH NOT BACK: The spent arrow, the lost opportunity, the unique thought."

Be truthful and believable: My brother told me about a man who advertised a "talking dog" for sale for \$10.00. An interested party came by and inquired if the dog was still available. The owner informed him the dog was in the back yard in his pen. So, with permission the man went into the back yard and engaged the dog in conversation. The dog told the man of his service in the K9 Corps. How he had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. With piqued interest the man returned to the owner and asked him why he was getting rid of the Canine Heroe who had done so much for our country. Without hesitation the owner replied, "Because he an inveterate liar, he's never even been out of the back yard!"

Be Yourself: While I was at Fellowship at the University of Chicago we daily made medical rounds with Nobel Laureates. They were impressive by their very "unimpressiveness". They were just being themselves. Shakespeare said: This above all to thing own self be true and, it must follow as the night to the day. Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Be aware and prepare for the increased longevity of your generation: You may well live to be nonagenarians and, with increased length of life will come greater responsibility. It is not unusual today to see elderly people bringing their parents to the doctor...or dropping them off at an adult daycare facility. If this should fall your lot make the best of it as your parents do not wish to be reliant upon you but often have no other option.

Be patient: And remember the person most difficult to be patient with is yourself.

One generation comes and another goes: In the past each succeeding generation would stand on the shoulders of it predecessors and rise that much higher than its predecessor, however economists and prognosticators predict that that day may be past.

Develop a "sustainer": When life gets you down, with one foot on your throat and is using the other one to kick the stuffing out of you, have a "sustainer". Something that gives you courage and strength in effect, a place to "send your mind", something or someplace. As Garrison Keeler says, "To get you going and do what needs to be done!"

At the end of the day have something relaxing to read: After a day of study or work have something to clear "The mental/cerebral palate". (As my son would say: "Literary Pabulum".) (Infant food) This is especially beneficial if your discipline is in a scientific field. Scientific disciplines represent jealous mistresses.

As a youth I remarked to my father that: “We need to MAKE time for a project we needed to accomplish”. To which he responded, “Son you may TAKE time but you’re never going to MAKE ANY.”

TAKE TIME

Take time TO THINK...

It is the source of power.

Take time TO PLAY...

It is the secret of perpetual youth.

Take time TO READ...

It is the fountain of wisdom.

Take time TO PRAY...

It is the greatest power on earth.

Take time TO LOVE AND BE LOVED...

It is a God-given privilege.

Take time TO BE FRIENDLY...

It is the road to happiness.

Take time TO LAUGH...

It is the music of the soul.

Take time TO GIVE...

It is too short a day to be selfish.

Take time TO WORK...

It is the price of success.

Take time TO BE HOLY...

It is to be blessed.

Take time TO WRITE...

It is the essence of expression.

-Anon.

So, “why”

What would you have me say to you? Get into a lifework/profession/whatever. You may have to do it a long time. This is my fifty-fifth year in the practice of medicine and I’m still going strong! I continue to practice ‘cause I genuinely love what I do. And, more importantly I continue to be of service and continue to contribute as a radiologist and mentor to my colleagues and students. **IT’S NOT WORK WHEN YOU GENUINELY ENJOY YOUR VOCATION.**

Caution: Pace yourselves. Don’t burn out. As the Holy Bible cautions: “Much learning is a weariness of the flesh”!

Be your best: “Whatever life’s work is: Do it well! If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, like Shakespeare wrote poetry, like Beethoven composed music...sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say” ‘Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well’”! Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“In Conclusion” (Two glorious words): I invoke the presence again of Abraham Lincoln who said: “Tis better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt!” Learn to number your days that you may apply your hearts and minds unto wisdom and in service to your fellowman and to the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Remember especially you have merely made a down payment on your education...Payment comes later as an Alumnus!