

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS, UCSB, JUNE 1995

Very honored to be here....and to have this opportunity to speak on graduation day....

Public speaking has always been a major challenge for me, however, since I was born in Nebraska, and learned how to do almost everything there...

Nebraska people can't figure out why graduation is called commencement....and they also prepare themselves for long speeches...especially if the speakers are **slow talkers**.....

And they expect that there will be some humor at the beginning of the talk....

like the one about vocational hazards -- the optometrist who fell into the lense grinder and made a spectacle of himself....

the butcher who backed into the meat grinder and got a little behind in his work....

And in Nebraska, they expect to hear farm stories...like the one about the farmer who raised three legged chickens. The reason was that he and his wife and his son all liked drumsticks. With

three legged chickens they wouldn't have to fight over who gets the drumsticks. But the chickens ran so fast that they couldn't catch them, and never got to taste them....

And another thing they used to do at graduation time was to tell memorable stories about members of the graduating class....

the one about the student who was graduating, but missed the exam question, "when was the War of 1812."

And another who was stumped by the question, "And what is Alexander the Great's middle name?"

He was given a hint: same as Erik the Red, Charles the Bold, and even Smokey the Bear."

And his response was: since when did mothers choose "the" as a middle name?"

Then there was the coach who complained that one of his star players was ruled ineligible to play....

And when he complained, the dean responded.

"We gave him a simple test -- one question only -- which was "add six and seven," and he answered fourteen, to which the coach replied, "It's not so bad; he only missed it by two."

But we don't tell those stories here today.....

We don't have time for them.....

So what we do instead -- WE REMINISCE....

We recall the year 1972, when many of you were born, and we reminisce about what life was like during those years.....

1972..... Richard Nixon was President of the United States and the nation was heavily involved in the Vietnam War....

1972, the year that the death penalty was ruled unconstitutional in the State of California, on grounds that it enforced "cruel and unusual punishment."

The year Mark Spitz set 7 world records and won 7 gold medals in swimming in the Summer Olympics in Munich....

If you turned on the radio in 1972, you would still hear Paul McCartney and John Lennon doing single albums, but the Beatles were no longer a group.

David Cassidy of Partridge Family fame, had\ launched his own singing career, and Donny Osmond was singing "Puppy Love."

The Dallas Cowboys, behind the strong arm of Roger Staubach, were the NFL champions.

Richard Nixon defeated George McGovern.

Harry Truman died that year.

And the best selling book was "I'm OK, You're Ok," which calls to mind the famous poem: "Roses

are read; violets are blue; I'm schizophrenic, and so am I."

Or, let's reminisce about 1973, when others of you were born, and a whole lot was happening...

The Vietnam War was still raging, but Peace Talks were underway, and the first American prisoners of war were released by the Hanoi government to return home...

Richard Nixon was still president, but the Water-gate mess would take that position from him, and turn it over, at year's end, to Gerald Ford.

Aleksander Solzynitzen published GULAG ARCHIPELAGO, but the book did very poorly alongside the best seller of the year, WEIGHT WATCHERS COOKBOOK.....

And in the world of music, Jim Croce was killed in an air crash. Carly Simon was telling somebody, "You're so vain." John Denver was singing about "Annie," and Kris Kristofferson mixed the Bible with astrology with his song, "Jesus was a Capricorn." \

Down under, in Australia, Queen Elizabeth dedicated the Sydney Opera House, but refused to sing an aria. And Lyndon Johnson died.... (No

particular connection between these two latter events...)

Just think of it....

A generation ago, when you were born, there was a Cold War that pervaded everything....

There was great fear of communism....

Now the Cold War appears over. But now we have terrorism and random violence and neo-nationalism and broken trust between the people and their elected leaders.

A generation ago, there was hardly talk at all about **AIDS**, or about **Hepatitis B**.....

A generation ago, the Counter Culture was still alive, though not quite so vigorously as when it was born, and there was hardly any talk at all about **Political Correctness**....

A generation ago, poverty was a problem and a challenge, as poverty always is, but there was scant if any talk about **homelessness**....

A generation ago, the entire nation was torn apart by divisions over the propriety of the Vietnam War. And Robert McNamara's recent book demonstrates that that debate has not yet been resolved.

Some things change, and some things remain the same.

Well, what does it all add up to.... What does the perspective of some 22 or 23 or 24 years teach us?

As students of the fine arts and the humanities, I want to tell you one story that we learned about when we visited Prague, in the Czech Republic, just a few weeks ago.... We were told that during the worst years of Soviet occupation, when Czech citizens were not allowed to travel anywhere, and not even allowed to say very much, and felt that they were constantly being watched, an amazing development occurred. Eventhough language was coded, and strict censorship was enforced...somehow, somehow, the word would get out when a new book was to be published that would rally the people, like Vaclav Havel's letters from prison to his wife Olga, or the writings of Milan Kundera.... Somehow when one of their books was to be published, the word would get out, and 2000 Prague citizens would be lined up in a cue in front of the bookstore to get a copy..... In addition, even in the worst of times, children practiced their violins, cellos, and pianos, and learned other languages.... So when the oppression ended, they were ready for the new day...

They somehow knew it would end someday, but

they didn't know when that someday would be....
But this is why the revolution was led by writers,
musicians, educators, and the revolution itself was
called "the velvet revolution," the triumph of genti-
lity and humaneness over political oppression... 11

And the other story comes from a synagogue
school where a rabbi is teaching children by the
question and response method....

Question: how do you know when the night is
over and the day has come.....

Answer: we know the night is over and the day
has come when we look out, and we see a tree,
and we can tell whether it is a pear or an apple
tree.....

And the rabbi asked the question again:

Answer: we know the night is over and the day
has come when we look out, and we see an animal,
and we can tell whether it is a sheep or a dog....

And the rabbi asked the question again....

then answered his own question: You can tell
the night is over and the day has come when
you look into the eyes of every person you meet....
and you see there your brother or your sister...
for if you don't see your brother or sister there,
the day has not dawned; it is still night....

What's it all about.... It's about knowing what is most important, what should be most highly cherished, and about the testimony of the ages to these truths.

The Bible speaks about "a cloud of witnesses" who surround us on every side....

In a setting like this, a hillside like this, it is easy to capture the spirit of this reference....

For as we set out to meet our challenges, your challenges, we are surrounded on all sides by persons who are cheering us on...your family, your friends...your classmates....

As a faculty member, I trust that you have met many of these in the courses you have taken, the book you have read, the teachers who have stood before you, the administrators, staff, coaches and others who have encouraged you...

I know too that you have already established support networks among the friends you have made... a network on which you will continue to rely throughout your life...

But it is also important to recognize that some of the people who are cheering you on today are no longer visible to any of us... no longer visible, but unquestionably present: to convince you that you can do it; that you must do it; and to remind you

that the tasks are worth doing and the challenges worth addressing. For our work in the arts and humanities gives us a resilient sense of the long haul -- of the striving of the human spirit against formidable odds, also, from time to time, of the triumph of the human spirit against those odds...

Finally, Václav Havel, the prime minister of the Czech Republic, as written a powerful essay on the power of Words, in which he recalls the verse in the Bible, "In the beginning was the Word." Havel comments: "What is meant in this verse is that the word of God is the source of all creation." And then he quickly adds, "But surely the same must be said, figuratively speaking, of every human action. Every human action is the source of all creation."

Think of it: every human action, the source of all creation. Every human endeavor, the source of a world at peace. Every human act, the source of a resilient people, a meaningful life, a more humane world, a life of happiness, and enduring satisfaction.....

This is what those who have gathered here today wish for those of you who are graduating. We are

proud of you. More importantly, we've pinned
our
hopes on you.

THANK YOU