

Creighton University Commencement Address
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INTRODUCTION:

How great is this? Creighton University! Home! What a thrill to share this moment with you!

I'm honored to be here at Creighton University to mark this incredible occasion with you--college faculty, board members, family, friends, and of course--the graduates, the class of 2012.

This is a tremendous accomplishment! I'd like to give a special thanks to Creighton President, Father Timothy Lannon, for inviting me. I understand this is your first May Creighton Commencement as well.

I'd also like to acknowledge Archbishop Lucas, and John Koraleski.

Now I've got a confession to make--some of you may already know this. I've got a special place in my heart for Creighton University.

You guys are family to me. My father, Dr. Floyd Malveaux, is a graduate of Creighton University--1961.

So when the University asked me to speak today--I knew if I ever wanted to be invited back for Thanksgiving dinner--I'd have to say yes.

But honestly, it is just so exciting to be able to speak at a university that my family has held in such high esteem for so long, and has been such an integral part of our education as well.

I'd like to mention--my father is in the audience today, along with my mother. A word to the graduates--as much as you may try to break away from your parents--they do follow you. You cannot get rid of them. But as you get older, you appreciate having them around.

My father came to this school because he wanted a Jesuit education.

Creighton is the only school among the 28 Jesuit institutions to be named for a layman. Edward Creighton was the fifth of nine children and it is said that his mother, Bridgit, quote “supplied him with enough Catholic fervor to last a lifetime.”

CREIGHTON THEN AND NOW:

Since 1961 when Dad graduated Creighton--you've come a long way!

IN 1961...only slightly more than 30 percent of graduates were women. This year 57 percent of Creighton graduates are female.

IN 1961 there were just one or two percent minority students. Today 25 percent are students of color.

In 1961 there were no co-ed dorms, and a curfew. My Dad says sometimes he had to sneak in through the window.

He got caught by Father McGloin. He gave him a talking to, and I understand it never happened again.

IN 1961-- campus royalty was everywhere -- for every dance there was a queen -- the freshman queen, the queen of diamonds, sweethearts, first ladies, homecoming queen, Helen of Troy, not to mention the “honorary colonel”-- also a female -- crowned by the ROTC.

Today you Creighton students are less impressed by all the pageantry-- today you gave two graduates “Spirit of Creighton” awards for inner strength, leadership, and service. (And yes, I understand they were hot too.)

IN 1961-- Athlete Paul Silas made a huge splash on campus leading the freshman basketball team in every way, with a 26 point per game average.

This year, Creighton sophomore “Dougie” McDermott made his own huge splash on campus, named a first team all-American by the Associated Press, the first such player in the program's history.

And IN 1961-- ROTC required male students to enroll in military training -- to pass they had to clean an M-1 rifle and learn to march on the football field. As one Creighton alum put it at the time, "the military presence was comforting, since campus security back then basically consisted of one priest with a dog."

Today that football field is gone. ROTC is elective, and of the 16 students receiving commissions today as second lieutenants into the Army and Air Force, 12 are women. Thank you for serving our country.

CREIGHTON TODAY:

You have plenty of reason to celebrate who you are today!

You have worked hard.

You are dedicated to the principles of a Jesuit education--to change the world in Christ's image. Study humankind. Transform yourself and your community. Seek truth in all you do. Go forth and set the world on fire.

Well Class of 2012 -- you are already setting the world on fire!

The Class of 2012:

15 HUNDRED OF YOU GRADUATING TODAY!

You come from 37 states, and 44 different countries, including Ecuador, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, South Korea...and many others.

The youngest of you graduating is 20 -- not old enough to legally drink.

The oldest here -- getting your master's degree is 62-- but don't worry, you don't look a day over 40!

A quarter of you are the first generation in your family to go to college!

Within the college --

106 of you are graduating summa cum laude, 83 -- magna cum laude. And of course there are some of you who are graduating "thank you lawdy!"

You know who you are!

Creighton University students -- you love to travel and expand your education --

Each year more than 250 of you study in countries like China, the Dominican Republic, France, Ghana, Jordan, and Singapore....just to name a few.

In 2011 US News and World Report ranked Creighton University as the number one degree granting university in the Midwest!

You are pioneers in communication -- as the third medical school in the country to televise surgery.

-- and the first university in the country to notify students of acceptance by text message.

-- you are ranked fifth in PC magazine's "top wired colleges."

And you kick butt in sports too--

Three of your teams had record breaking seasons--men's soccer and basketball, and women's basketball, winning conference championships and competing in NCAA tournaments.

Men's soccer is number two in the country and advanced to the college cup semifinals.

LESSONS LEARNED:

But what makes Creighton students so special--

ITS YOUR MISSION:

To change the world in Christ's image. Study humankind. Transform yourself and your community. Seek truth in all you do. Go forth and set the world on fire.

Your passion for learning and zeal for making a difference sets you apart.

Creighton students, faculty and staff performed more than 295 thousand hours of community service -- in more than 800 programs around the world last year.

So how do you live up to your mission, as you move on? Especially during these tough economic times?

LESSONS I'VE LEARNED I'D LIKE TO SHARE:

1. First, follow your own unique path, however unconventional or round about it may be.

I can recall the utter worry my own parents had when I announced to them my senior year of college, I was taking time off, to participate in an exchange program in Kenya to live with the Masai, speak Swahili, and do documentary work.

The fear of thousands of dollars going down the drain on my education if I didn't return to get my degree...

Needless to say they were relieved when I came back and finished what as a family we began.

Soon after I graduated college, I presented them with my employment options. Two journalism internships. One in Cairo, Egypt. The other in Bahrain.

My parents just shook their heads and asked me, why couldn't I get a job, like everyone else, a little closer to home?

But ultimately it paid off -- it made me a unique applicant in the hypercompetitive environment of journalism. And ironically my parents caught the travel bug when they came to visit me in Egypt.

So while your path may not be traditional, it will take you to where you belong. It is for this reason....that secondly...

2. I urge you today, a day that marks both an end and a beginning in your lives, to listen to your heart.

Life is a constant struggle between your head and your heart. Our head tells us to play it safe. It tells us to settle. Do what pays the bills and makes others happy. But there almost always is something deep within us that beckons us to another calling.

Even, during these hard economic times when jobs and our futures are uncertain, you will likely never be as unburdened as you are today -- to truly pursue your dreams.

For myself -- I debated between pursuing medicine or journalism. My head was focused on the possibility of becoming a doctor like my father, but my heart was into telling stories.

At first -- my parents and my first TV boss were not so confident I'd made the right decision.

My first big break came when I'd just gotten out of graduate school to report for a start-up cable station in Boston. I was offered \$18,000 a year.

It was a big risk for my boss since I had no on-air experience. My first live shot bore that out. I was sent to cover a shooting and had a near melt down. I was so scared my body was shaking violently. I could barely get the words out. I was embarrassed and humiliated.

I returned to the station that evening expecting my boss would fire me, but to my surprise, he didn't. Instead he sent me out the next day to do another live shot.

And on that second day, after that initial shock, and several prayers, a certain calm washed over me and it was like I had been doing it for years.

From that point on, my heart, my passion helped me conquer my fear, and helped me excel at what I really wanted to do. So don't be afraid to follow your heart.

3. Third, I urge you not to lose sight of what's really important, to take care of yourself.

Soon after I started my first reporting gig -- coming home late one night from a story -- I got into a car accident, a head-on with a tractor trailer in the rain.

My car was totaled, but miraculously, I didn't have a scratch. Strangely my only worry at the time was how I was going to get to work the next day. When I did show up and my boss heard about the accident he immediately demanded that I go to the hospital.

I was ok. But I still didn't have enough money to buy a car for my 30 minute commute to work (and for those of you wondering -- why not take the family car -- that WAS the family car I totaled).

So my boss helped with my predicament -- by letting me borrow one the live news trucks -- to drive back and forth from work until I could get a car.

Now, I don't know if you can imagine just how cool I felt, being 22 years old at the time and pulling up to the grocery store or rolling up to the club in a news van with the big satellite dish on top. I'm sure now it would definitely be fodder for a lawsuit. But back then, it just seemed cool.

But cool or not -- looking back on it now -- I was so into work that I had lost perspective and, indeed, lost sight of the fact that it was also important to take care of one's self. Some times when we excel we forget that we are NOT invincible. Your own well being is paramount.

4. Fourth, I urge you to keep tabs on what you become.

As you embark on your career, I'm sure you'll continue to be curious, skeptical, and eager to see what life's next steps bring. To be sure, it will be a struggle sometimes to remain the person who you are in your core.

But it's important that you not succumb to the pull that you'll sometimes feel to become something that you are not. You must be careful to watch out for what you become.

I realized this valuable lesson when I turned to covering crime as the nighttime reporter in DC. I was the one who often walked up to the door to talk to the parent whose child had just been murdered.

I had justified it by producing memorial pieces about the innocent victims caught in the crossfire. But every night I'd get that pit in my stomach and catch my breath before I'd knock on another door.

It's when I got pretty good at it, that I realized I didn't want to become that person who started to get comfortable with the job. So I turned my focus to politics.

It is important to check in with yourself from time to time--to keep tabs on what you have become. While your family or job may demand everything of you sometimes, you must not turn into a work horse, you must preserve who you really are --

Someone who is evolving, and growing in your new role -- whether it's that of parent, teacher, caregiver, lawyer, or entrepreneur.

5. Fifth, I urge you to continue to seek out your community. Recognize your power comes from being part of that community.

For most of you -- up until now -- that community has involved your parents, siblings, extended relatives, friends, neighbors, and school.

Whether you're with Creighton's Institute for Latin American Concern in the Dominican Republic providing health care teams to the Dominican Republic to provide health care and emotional support to victims of the Haiti earthquake or defending a case pro bono --

This community at Creighton University is deeply a part of you. You can always draw on the power of your community.

Sometimes when I feel the weight of the moment or need that extra strength -- when I take my seat in the White House Roosevelt room -- readying to ask the President a question, I think of my grandparents -- my Grandma Lou and Grandpa Del -- who never got past a 5th grade education.

I think of my parents who were forced to go to segregated schools in the deep South. I think of my cousins who lost everything in hurricane Katrina.

I think of all those people who can't be in that seat but who are still with me. I draw power from that -- from the community that I have been a part of and that is a part of me.

In drawing from that community, I realize that I am not alone. I realize that, as a matter of fact, it's downright crowded, with all of us in that seat.

I urge you to remember the community that you are a part of as you take on your next big steps. For that is where your power will come from.

6. Sixth, and finally, seek inspiration from those around you. Try to draw on their faith, because there will be times your own faith is tested.

One of the greatest reminders of the power of faith that I have encountered occurred when I was covering a trip President Clinton made to Rwanda.

When Air Force One flew over the lush green countryside I remember thinking how beautiful a place -- it was hard to believe such atrocities could have happened.

But it was there I met a woman who'd survived the genocide in that country who was also the victim of gang rape. She had a machete scar across her scalp and face.

We sat down across from each other in two folding chairs for an interview, and I asked her what gives you strength? And she said faith.

I learned something that day. I gained strength and inspiration from her. Fast forward 14 years later, just last month, I visited Rwanda again, and learned the power of forgiveness.

While all of us will be tested with tragedy during our lives, few of us will be called upon to endure the horrors that this woman faced. But surely, her faith is a lesson to all of us that we can survive just about any hardship and overcome just about any burden if we keep our faith.

CONCLUSION:

So today some of you may work with the Omaha public schools to teach high school students how to save lives and become EMTs, others may create lives of your own by starting families, others may choose to advocate for health care and children's rights.

I urge you to continue to pursue the values you have come to live here, as you leave -- those of academic excellence, unwavering faith, compassionate patient care, and service to others.

Despite the dismal economic situation for most graduates -- Creighton graduates are defying the odds by staying active and engaged.

More than 90 percent of 2010 Creighton graduates are either employed, involved in volunteer work, or attending graduate or professional school within six months of graduating. The national average is 64 percent.

Those who proudly attend here, I've heard say "at Creighton University, you are never alone."

For those who seek a comprehensive education that teaches "the whole person" Creighton is just right.

The Creighton family is a life long family. You give this school its character. Take that character with you to make your unique impact on the world.

Be fearless in your pursuits. Know you are prepared for the hard work and immense joy ahead.

Thank you Creighton University, for this great opportunity to address you today. I congratulate you on your extraordinary achievement!

Now go commence!

Thank you!