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Marquette University 2009 Commencement Address

Dick Enberg

Full Text of Dick Enberg's Commencement Address to Marquette University Class of 2009

Father Wild, faculty and staff, honorees, family and friends, and the distinguished Marquette University class of 2009...

Thank you for your invitation to participate in this momentous day. I'm immensely pleased to be in your educational company.

It reminds me of my unusual journey that included attending a rural Michigan one-room school, eight grades all in one room with one teacher, then graduating in a high school class of 33. That was 57 years ago, long before Google became a verb.

With no plans for college, I nevertheless introduced myself to our commencement speaker, the president of a teacher's college. As a rousing third in that class of 33, he suggested I send a transcript of my grades to Central Michigan College. In those days we couldn't spell SAT.

Two weeks later, a letter arrived, announcing I had been awarded an academic scholarship of $100. I thought: "This is a terrific deal. They pay you to go to college." No car, I hitchhiked the nearly 100 miles to campus for freshman orientation.

As a senior, I was elected student body president, then earned a graduate assistantship to Indiana, where at age 26, having earned master's and doctoral degrees, I accepted a position as an assistant professor and assistant baseball coach at what is now California State, Northridge.

The bottom line: Education was very, very good to me. It accepted a perfect nobody and allowed him to be somebody. Education from one-room reading writing 'rithmetic to doctoral dissertation allowed me to taste a grand variety of experiences and build a basis for the confidence that I could succeed. And so it is and will be for many of you today.

My first serious off-campus job was at the one and only radio station in Mt. Pleasant, Mich. I applied for the custodial vacancy, one dollar an hour. They would hire me instead as a weekend disc jockey, one dollar an hour.

Within a month, I was calling play by play of college and high school football games, one dollar an hour. It was a mighty good investment, taking me eventually to a wonderful, privileged place.

On the ride I encountered the most unforgettable character I've ever met, Al McGuire, the man that brought this great university and the city of Milwaukee a national basketball championship in 1977.

I'm certain there are parents, grandparents, family here today who were witness to that uncanny, unlikely, magical season orchestrated by Al McGuire was absolutely the most unforgettable character I've ever known, a New York street genius.

In the lecture hall of life, he had several doctorates. Al never delivered a Commencement address. Oh, my, if he had, students would have been in for such a special treat. His speech would have been packed with uncommon wisdom and rare wit.

He was a master of the many angles of human behavior, first learned while growing up above an Irish bar on Long Island and later refined during a Hall of Fame coaching career. In our long-term relationship, he carefully spent time to share his sage insights, enough so that upon his death I decided to record them in writing. This led to the creation of a one-act play on his life. It is one of my most rewarding experiences ever because for 70 minutes this rascal of a friend is once again alive.

Therefore, as we collaborated so many times as a basketball announcing team, so will we address you in tandem, today. I bring his spirit with me.

First, congratulations to you all, as Al would say, "for getting the piece of paper," the diploma. He promised every one of his players and their parents that part of playing for Marquette was getting that piece of paper. And in his 13 years here, he was enormously proud that 90 percent of them did.

I especially salute those of you who have graduated with honors. With your academic performance, you've thanked your parents in a very special way. However, McGuire would have been quick to add, "Always remember, the world is run by C-plus students."

"C-plus students who have people skills become outstanding leaders," he argued. To underline his point, half in jest, Al would suggest that if you want your master's and doctorate in "humanism," tend bar for six months and then drive a taxi for 6 months.

The message: Study those around you, friends and rivals. Know them well enough to anticipate their needs and their actions. In his words, "Know the ripple below the surface of the water."

He preached: "Winning is a habit. Losing is also a habit." Today, all of you are winners. You've successfully hit the finish line. Your education now becomes the platform on which to build future wins.

In these times it'll be a challenge. There's a big world out there ready to test your fiber. It might even come in simple ways. There's a well-traveled story about Al at a restaurant. He orders an expensive lobster. (Someone else must have been picking up the tab that night.) The lobster arrives with only one claw. The waiter explains that sometimes they get in fights in the tank and this one lost a claw. Al's response, "Then how about you taking this one back and bringing me the winner?"

In his last lecture at Carnegie Mellon, young professor Randy Pausch, knowing fully that he was dying of pancreatic cancer, offered a final classroom presentation, later admitting his ulterior motive was to have a final video taped lecture that would serve after his death as fatherly advice for his three young children, 5 and under, who would never have the chance to fully know him.

He died shortly after delivering that final lecture. In it Pausch described the brick walls in life, those that each of you will encounter.

He advised: “Brick walls are there to stop the people who don’t want it badly enough. They’re there to stop the OTHER people.”

Pausch went on to add that sometimes the brick walls appear insurmountable. That’s when you’ll need the help and encouragement from others to climb over them. It’s important to get to the other side. It tests the habit of winning.

Winning ways, especially in today’s world, will require outworking the competition.

Pausch surprised his colleagues when he received an academic promotion much sooner than normal. When asked how he did it, he answered, “Call me at my campus office Friday night at 10 o’clock, and I’ll tell you.”

Author Vince Flynn, despite suffering from ADD, is credited with 10 bestselling novels. His writing game plan: no complex sentences. As an upper Midwest native and fan of McGuire, he quotes Al in his speeches.

While trying to publish his first book, Flynn was warned that there are 50 rejections for every book that makes print. “That’s good,” he replied, “I’ve already been told ‘No’ 48 times. That means I’ve got only two more to go before my first one is on the shelf.”

Hard work trumps rejection. He added, “Given the choice, I’d hire the hardworking, persevering soul over the unmotivated brainiac every time.”

Especially in these times, Graduates, talent alone may not be enough. Your challenge will include some tough adjustments and an unrelenting effort.

It may require accepting a position or opportunity that seems below your talent and skill. If so, a tireless work ethic can push you upward and forward. Brace yourself. Don’t get left behind suffering in self-pity. Climb that brick wall.

One of the most meaningful of McGuire’s lessons was his “take a right turn” philosophy. It was born out of his daily trips from his home in the Brookfield suburbs into Milwaukee and Marquette. Every day, he’d reach an intersection in which a left turn took him into the city but a right turn sent him into the pastoral Wisconsin countryside. Once a month he allowed himself that right-hand turn.

It was spontaneous and unannounced. He wouldn’t call in to Marquette to say he would be absent. That would destroy the spirit. Besides, his assistants knew where he was. In some ways, it’s the antithesis of the brick wall. Instead of the determined battle for wins, taking a right meant that he was pausing to allow life to come to him. He wasn’t chasing life. It was meeting the guy with two teeth missing.

It's surprising how beautiful the unplanned can be. When there is no agenda, no itinerary, we allow what the Italians call, "*Il dolce far niente*," the sweetness of doing nothing. Try it. Allow time for simple surprises.

I have two children that are recent college graduates and another finishing his sophomore year. It concerns me that in this era of Tweeters, Facebooks, cell phones, iPods, text messaging and the lot that they are drinking life 24-7 out of a fire hose.

Yes, the advantages of our high-tech avalanche are enormously valuable, but they are at the risk of being ensconced in a world of black and white. How about the colors of life, the sunsets and rainbows, autumn hues, and winter crystals?

Take time to see and embrace them. Program an hour each week to take a right-hand turn. Power down. No game plan. Make a person-to-person contact uninterrupted by high tech's buzzers and bells. Experience humanness.

It's a philosophy that has considerable application. Searching for a job, searching for love, searching for the right answer. Too often we are so busy searching, chasing it, we run blindly by the desired result or miss the moment because our mental and visual focus is down instead of ahead.

One of the greatest of actors, Jack Nicholson, once related to me that he was 32 years old before finally getting his first significant acting part in the movie, *Easy Rider*.

He'd all but given up on an acting career, deciding to work as an assistant director on the film. As production began, the director asked Jack if he could do the part. "Anyone could do this part," Jack answered in that familiar whine. The rest is Oscar-winning history.

I asked him for advice for one of my older sons, an actor. Jack said to tell him, "Everybody gets a chance."

Be ready to pounce on opportunity when your chance surfaces. Sometimes it comes very early; sometimes, unkindly, painfully late. But you WILL get a chance, and your years here at Marquette are an insurance policy that will help you to take optimum advantage.

You'll be pleased that there are time restraints on my speech, so respectfully, Father Wild, in the interest of time, I'll briefly offer just a handful of worthy McGuirisms.

As Al would say, no extra charge:

1. If a guy brings home flowers for no reason, there's a reason.

2. Stars in sports or business should get special treatment. They win for you.

3. No is a good answer. Yes is the desired answer. Maybe will drive you crazy. No saves a lot of time. Accept it and move on.

4. The only real gift for the elderly is time. Not candy. Not flowers. Time.

5. I can't be both your friend and your flatterer.

McGuire's mental meanderings did make you think.

In my life, there's always a commercial, so here goes:

It won't cost you a penny, but I promise it possesses for the rest of your lives, unlimited wealth.

The message is: thank you, two words of empowerment for all who use them. And when written bring even an added feeling of warmth to the recipient and bonus power to the sender. Thank you. Say it, write it, with conviction. Why don't we use it more often? It's free. Why not try it out today, to Mom and Dad or a classmate or favorite professor? Thank you.

One of today's great thoroughbred trainers was for nine years a Wisconsin high school basketball coach, D. Wayne Lucas. He lists 12 tenets for care of the horse. It's posted on the wall of all his stables. Seventh on the list: the power of kindness. If it works for equines, shouldn't it be even more effective with humans? Needless to say, Lucas had a high regard for Al. Kindness. Thank you.

A few years ago, I was on the dais for a major banquet, seated with the emcee, Larry King, Yogi Berra, and Wisconsin's own, Tony Kubek.

As the evening droned on, Kubek turned to Berra and asked, "Yogi, what time is it?" Yogi, in his inimitable style, answered, "You mean now?"

Well, here we are. NOW is the time for you. Hearty congratulations. You got the paper. Today, each of you is a winner. Now, will you answer the challenge of the brick wall, and will you be wise enough to take a right turn?

Everyone will get a chance. And don't be afraid to take or give no for an answer. And, oh, yes, THANK YOU.

Thank you, Al.

Thank you, Marquette.

Thank you, class of 2009.