

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

BY

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Dr. Wagner, Members of the Faculty, the Graduating Class of 1979,  
Other Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is good to be back in Ada, my old home town. Returning to the campus of ECU, where I spent many enjoyable years, stirs many pleasant memories. It also is a reminder that the years have been moving right along.

A person realizes he has reached a considerable degree of maturity when folks say: "My, you're looking well---anyway!" His company gives him a gold watch. Uncle Sam mails him a Medicare card. And his university invites him to deliver a commencement address.

If you live long enough, you become an old timer, which has been defined as that stage of life when you remember things that never happened, are accused of things you never did, and are praised for virtues you never possessed.

In spite of what you might suspect, universities don't have commencement exercises just so one of us old timers can come back and make a speech.

The real reason, I understand, is so the faculty can work in just one more makeup lecture before they have to award your coveted diplomas.

If ever a word was loaded with both overt and hidden meanings, the word commencement is! If you could see what you're about to commence, some of you might be looking for an enrollment blank, so

you could enlist for another four years at East Central!

My association with ECU goes back 60 years. That was when I began driving a bob-tailed horse hitched to a 2-wheeled cart to deliver meat here in Ada for my father's store.

Some faculty members were customers. I delivered to them, so you might say my first contact with college education was through the back door.

When we got our first car, it was a 1918 Buick touring car with ising-glass side curtains. On Sunday afternoons, our family and many other families would drive out Main Street, then the longest paved road in the county, to circle the driveway around Science Hall, then practically the entire college.

Sometimes we could observe students engaged in extracurricular campusology.

When I became a teenager, the college allowed high school students to attend summer sessions. I did, liked it, and stayed on, graduating from the original Horace Mann High School in 1928 on the ECU campus.

The financial crash that started the Great Depression came the next year, due to other causes. Before long, everybody was equal. Nobody had any money to speak of. Making a student loan meant borrowing a dime to buy a hamburger at the restaurant across the street.

There was no student union. If the term was used, it probably had matrimonial connotations.

Enrollment was expensive in the 1930's. It took \$5 hard cash per semester. Books were additional at Thompson's store nearby.

There were compensations. The \$5 also covered cost of a ticket to athletic contests and Lyceum events. This was valuable because we took our dates there instead of to the movies, which cost a quarter.

A great privilege we students enjoyed was a cordial relationship with the faculty. We knew all the professors and most of them knew us, whether or not they were anxious to make our acquaintance.

This included President A. Linscheid and the dean of women, Mrs. Ina Mackin, who taught me English.

Harvey Faust, for whom Faust Hall is named, was one of my 8th grade teachers. His wife, Mary Belle, taught me math in high school and Mrs. Frank Spencer taught me English. They were very young ladies then. I had a class in agriculture with former President Frank Spencer.

ECU Foundation Director, Oscar Parker, I remember for teaching Spanish, playing tennis and singing "On the Road to Mandalay" at special events. He still plays tennis.

Dr. Bob Naylor, who occupied this platform a year ago, was my high school debate coach. My college geometry teacher was Miss Kate K. Knight and Bank Director Dad Fentem taught me rural sociology.

This beautiful center was named for Senator Robert S. Kerr, a lifelong friend. These are mentioned because they are real people. Some day your professors and friends may be similarly honored, but they will always be living personalities to you.

ECU gave me my start in journalism when Professor Ben L. Morrison appointed me sports editor and business manager of East Central Journal.

At least two of my former colleagues on the Journal are here today, Jeff R. Laird of Oklahoma City, and Conner Logsdon of Ada.

Perhaps we did not conform to all traditions of journalism, but students and faculty eagerly read or sometimes dreaded the next issue of the Journal.

My advanced journalism consisted of reporting for the Ada News. Publisher W. D. Little, Sr. and News Editor Roy S. McKeown saw to it that I got a lot of experience of various kinds.

This background has enabled me to make a living as a writer and editor, which may have amazed my teachers and colleagues.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to ECU, its faculty, my fellow students, my family and my friends for what I gained here. I really appreciate all of them, and take this opportunity to say "Thank You."

Dr. Wagner showed me an EC yearbook of 1927, 28, and 29. We enjoyed seeing pictures of faculty and fellow students whom we knew 50 years or so ago.

If you should return to campus after similar passage of time, you may expect even greater changes. By then, more than one-fourth of the 21st century will have gone by, and many marvelous new things will have been invented or discovered, no doubt by some of you.

We can't anticipate what those developments might be. We may be confident, however, that the eternal truths that have endured through the ages will still be in effect to guide and steady those who adhere to them.

Traditionally, a commencement speaker is expected to give advice to the graduating class so that its members may be warned against making the same mistakes he has made.

But an old proverb comes to mind: Never give advice in a crowd. With that ominous admonition, I would like, instead, to express a few opinions, in the form of Editorial Headlines for Success.

An editor is a person who has an opinion on every subject. He might not be particularly concerned about whether people agree with his opinions, but he does hope his editorials will be read and considered.

Editorial writers use the capital WE instead of the capital I. This isn't modesty. It's so if the item turns out badly, we can look for someone to share the blame.

An old editor once told a younger one: "Your editorials should be no longer than your pencil. As your pencil gets shorter, your editorials will get better."

We were just learning to edit with a short lead pencil when somebody invented the ball point pen!

Some editors are like ball point pens. They run dry without getting any shorter.

So let's go to press with today's East Central Journal and try to keep the editorials short.

HEADLINE: HAVE FAITH IN GOD (Editorial)

Our universe is a creation of God. He created mankind on this earth, giving us bodies of wondrous design, minds to acquire knowledge, eternal souls and freedom of choice, in addition to the necessities of life provided for all of God's creatures.

The Psalmist wrote: "The heavens declare the Glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge."

It may be fashionable to deny the existence of God, but in our opinion, a successful person is one who has faith in God, loves his fellowman, and is dedicated to a life that is worthwhile.

Ralph Barton Perry, former professor of philosophy at Harvard University, said: "Religion should be man's culminating freedom."

In his religion, he extends his mind to the whole of existence, and to the whole scale of existence, and to the whole scale of values, and establishes an equation between them."

When he was discussing the necessities of life with his followers, Jesus Christ said: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these other things will be given to you."

Millions of successful people can testify to that truth.

HEADLINE: NEVER STOP LEARNING (Editorial)

The noted educator, Albert Edward Wiggam, said: "Intelligence appears to be the thing that makes a man get along without education. Education enables a man to get along without the use of his intelligence."

What the world needs is educated people who can and will use their intelligence for the good of mankind. Today's world asks: "What can you do that a computer can't do?"

Man can live without air for a few seconds. He may survive without water for days. He could continue for weeks without food. And some exist for years without a new idea!

If you don't believe there is a critical shortage of good ideas, you haven't been watching TV or reading about old ideas that failed which are being pushed forward as new thinking.

The most valuable commodity in business, the arts, education, science, entertainment and government is good new ideas. Computers don't produce them. Only people have ideas.

Individuals who want to live productive, rewarding lives keep on learning, thinking and doing. It's surprising how many people there are who won't use their mental faculties to relieve their spiritual and physical miseries.

HEADLINE: ASPIRE TO BE SOMEBODY (Editorial)

An Ada business man once told a teenager that to become somebody he ought to associate with people who were smarter and richer than he was. That was easy for this writer, because almost everyone he met was both smarter and richer.

It has been said that liberty consists in the right which God has given us of doing, getting, and enjoying all the good in our power, according to the Laws of God, of the state, and of our consciences.

With that freedom, shouldn't everybody aspire to become somebody? It would seem so, but a lot of nobodies lack that ambition.

Great numbers of young people have been misled into the world of mediocrity. In the past, one could be ordinary without trying. Now some people appear to be making a real effort to be inferior, to avoid refinement, to exist as a drag on society.

They try to pull others down to their levels, abandoning morality and other fundamentals of civilization. Even college degrees do not prevent some of them from acting like barbarians.

Mediocrity is excellent only in the eyes of mediocre people. Those who aspire to be somebody are more likely to succeed, because they seek the better things of life.

HEADLINE: MAKE YOUR MONEY WORK (Editorial)

Money is more often a problem than an evil. It is fairly easy to make some money, but to make enough money requires skill.

To manage money well calls for greater skills, which even Congress can't provide.

Application of five proved principles will enable people to manage money, keep money from managing them, and make the money they have worked for work for them.

MAKE MONEY: If you don't know how, learn!

SPEND MONEY WISELY: Get your money's worth.

SAVE MONEY: If you don't make enough money to save some, learn to make more.

INVEST CAREFULLY: Put your money to work.

GIVE GENEROUSLY: You can't take it with you. IRS won't let you leave it here, so put it where it will do good while you can.

Money isn't everything in life, but it is essential. The happier persons are those who are smart enough to make enough, sharp enough to know when they have enough, and intelligent enough to quit chasing the dollar when they get enough!

HEADLINE: ENJOY YOUR WORK (Editorial)

Work can be fun! We may enjoy working if we have chosen careers that suit our talent and interests, and if we devote sufficient time and effort to become proficient at them.

Chances are, a person will spend more time at work than in doing any other one thing in life. Work should provide satisfaction as well as a livelihood. Our work usually presents our greatest opportunities to help make this a better world.

Some people are afraid they might work too hard. They idle away time on the job, waste their leisure, and complain they are overworked, underpaid, overtaxed, and underfed. They might be none of these.

More people break down from dissipation and useless worry than from overwork.

Those engaged in work that is distasteful to them should learn to like what they do, or else they should change occupations.

Work usually is necessary. Because of the satisfaction that may be derived from tasks well done, work also is desirable.

Work can be fun, and it should be for the person who wants to



make the most of life, and to get the most out of what he makes.

Now, to digest all of these HEADLINES FOR SUCCESS into one short editorial.

Have faith in God.

Never stop learning.

Aspire to be somebody.

Make your money work.

Enjoy your work.

Why?

Because a successful life is worth the effort.

In conclusion, members of the Graduating Class of 1979, please accept my sincere congratulations for your achievements, my commendation for your industry, and my encouragement in your hope for the future.

May you aim high in life, and then exceed your highest expectations.

Whatever you do, always do right! As Mark Twain said:  
"This will gratify some people, and astonish the others!"

Thank you!