

Keynote by

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AS I BEGAN TO PREPARE MY COMMENTS FOR THIS EVENING I FOUND MYSELF WONDERING WHY I WAS INVITED TO SPEAK AND TO BE HONEST, WHEN DAVID AND PETER CAME TO TALK TO ME ABOUT THE RECOGNITION I THOUGHT THEY MADE A MISTAKE!

I NEVER CONSIDERED MY COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS AS ANYTHING OTHER THEN ORDINARY; THEY WERE JUST SOMETHING I DID BECAUSE IT WAS MY WAY OF GIVING BACK. THEN WHEN I LEARNED THAT I WOULD BE FOLLOWING JIM SMITH AND BOB SCINTO AS PRIOR HONOREES I WAS STILL PUZZLED, BUT ALSO HUMBLLED AND HONORED.

AS I THOUGHT THROUGH THIS EVENINGS PRESENTATION I FELT CHALLENGED TO FIND THE WORDS AND THE MESSAGE THAT WOULD CAPTURE JOHN WINTHROP WRIGHT'S BELIEF THAT ETHICS IN ACTION CREATES CHARACTER.

THEN, AS I RESEARCHED THE SCHOOL FOR ETHICAL EDUCATION AND MR WRIGHT'S LIFE I FOUND MYSELF THINKING ABOUT HOW OUR WORLD HAS CHANGED IN THE 15 YEARS SINCE MR WRIGHT FOUNDED THE SCHOOL.

I COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER WHAT HE WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IF HE WERE HERE TO WITNESS THE UNRAVELLING OF ENRON AND WORLDCOM, THE DECEPTION OF BERNIE MADOFF, OR THE TRAMPELLING OF A WALMART EMPLOYEE BY HOLIDAY SHOPPERS LOOKING FOR A BARGAIN.

CERTAINLY EACH OF THESE EXAMPLES FALL SHORT OF THE PRINCIPLES MR WRIGHT AND HIS FAMILY FOR GENERATIONS STOOD FIRM ON - FAIRNESS, RESPONSIBILITY, CARING, JUSTICE, HONESTY, COURTESY, CITIZENSHIP AND THE PRINCIPLES OF THE GOLDEN RULE.

I AM NOT SURE WHAT YOU MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT AS BOB INTRODUCED ME AND I CANNOT HELP BUT WONDER IF YOU FOUND YOURSELF THINKING -

“WHAT WAS IT THAT MADE HER WORTHY?” “WHAT LIFE OPPORTUNITIES DID SHE HAVE THAT GOT HER TO WHERE SHE IS TODAY?” “WAS THIS HER PLAN? WAS HER JOURNEY CHALLENGING OR WAS IT EASY?” WELL UNFORTUNATELY I AM HERE TO SAY THAT I DIDN'T HAVE A PLAN, THE JOURNEY WAS FULL OF CHALLENGES AND SURELY WAS NOT EASY.

I BELIEVE THAT OUR CHARACTER DEVELOPS OVER TIME AND IS SHAPED BY OUR LIFE EXPERIENCES. IT WAS THE LESSONS LEARNED ON THIS JOURNEY THAT HAS BECOME THE FOUNDATION OF MY CHARACTER AND TRAITS; PRIMARY AMONG THESE TRAITS HAS BEEN DETERMINATION.

OR STATED MORE SPECIFICALLY MY DETERMINATION TO FACE THE CHALLENGES, ALBEIT SOME EXTREMELY DAUNTING, AND TRY AND LEARN FROM THE EXPERIENCE. TO NEVER GIVE UP AND TO BELIEVE THAT I COULD ACCOMPLISH THE IMPOSSIBLE.

THERE WERE MANY PEOPLE IN MY LIFE THAT HELPED SHAPE MY CHARACTER AS IT EXISTS TODAY. I AM CERTAIN THAT ONLY A FEW REALIZE THE POWERFUL INFLUENCE THEY HAD ON MY LIFE, BUT BEYOND THOSE FEW THERE COUNTLESS OTHERS THAT HELPED ME BY THEIR ACTIONS, WORDS AND DEEDS.

WHEN I WAS 4 YEARS OLD THE COURTS GAVE ME TO MY DAD WHO RAISED ME. BY MOST STANDARDS, THEN AND NOW, THE WAY WE LIVED WE WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED BY MOST TO BE POOR. BUT MEASURED BY MY OWN STANDARDS, WE HAD WEALTH BEYOND ANYONES IMAGINATION.

I DON'T REMEMBER THINKING THAT MY FAMILY WAS DIFFERENT – IT WAS JUST A FAMILY WITH A FATHER AS A SINGLE PARENT IN THE 50'S.

HE WENT TO MOTHER-DAUGHTER DINNERS WITH ME, - HE WAS THE ONLY DAD.

HELPED ME IN SCOUTING – THEY WOULD ONLY LET HIM BE AN ASSISTANT AND TOOK ME TO CHURCH, EVEN THOUGH HE DIDN'T BELIEVE IN GOD.

HE ALWAYS TRIED TO DO WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS RIGHT AND TAUGHT ME TO HAVE THE DETERMINATION TO FIGHT FOR WHAT I BELIEVED IN. HE TAUGHT ME TO BE RESPECTFULLY HONEST AND HAVE UNWAVERING INTEGRITY.

ALONG MY JOURNEY THERE WERE MANY MANY TIMES WHEN OTHERS WOULD DOUBT MY ABILITY TO ACCOMPLISH SOMETHING. I HONESTLY SAW THESE DOUBTS AS A CHALLENGE AND USED OTHER PEOPLES DOUBTS TO SOLIDIFY MY RESOLVE AND DETERMINATION TO MEET THOSE CHALLENGES.

FROM THOSE EXPERIENCES I LEARNED THAT IT WASN'T IMPORTANT WHAT OTHERS THOUGHT OR BELIEVED – WHAT REALLY MATTERED MOST

WAS WHAT I BELIEVED. OR AS HENRY FORD SAID “WHETHER YOU THINK YOU CAN OR YOU THINK YOU CAN’T...YOU ARE PROBABLY RIGHT”

I WILL ALSO TELL YOU THAT ON THIS JOURNEY I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO FIND PEOPLE THAT WERE ABLE TO SEE THINGS IN ME THAT I DID NOT SEE IN MYSELF.

THEY WERE TEACHERS OR CO-WORKERS THAT GAVE ME THE COURAGE TO FAIL, BUT TO ALWAYS FAIL FORWARD.

THEY WERE MENTORS THAT GAVE ME ADVICE AND MODELLED THE WAY.

THEY WERE FRIENDS THAT LOVED ME FOR WHO I WAS INSIDE MY SOUL AND NOT WHERE I CAME FROM, WHAT I DID OR WHAT MY TITLE WAS.

THEY WERE PEOPLE THAT TAUGHT ME ABOUT KINDNESS AND COMPASSION AND THE POWERFUL IMPACT THESE TRAITS COULD HAVE ON ME AS WELL AS OTHERS.

AND A MOST RECENT LESSON LEARNED IN MY JOURNEY COMES FROM A MENTOR AND FRIEND WHO TAUGHT ME ABOUT THE VALUE OF SPIRITUALITY AND FORGIVENESS AS IMPORTANT INGREDIENTS TO A FULL AND REWARDING LIFE.

AS I REFLECTED ON MY LIFE JOURNEY AND THOSE THAT HELPED ME ALONG THE WAY I READ THE ESSAYS WRITTEN BY THE STUDENTS WHO ARE THE REAL HONOREES THIS EVENING. SINCE I AM A QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER I TOOK NOTES AS I READ THE ESSAYS AND FOUND MANY COMMON THEMES -

IT SHOULD COME AS NO SURPRISE THAT THESE THEMES WERE CLOSELY ALIGNED WITH MR WRIGHT’S BELIEFS. THE THEMES INCLUDED:

TRUSTWORTHINESS – AS SEEN IN COMMENTS LIKE BE HONEST – DO WHAT YOU SAY YOU WILL DO – HAVE THE COURAGE TO DO THE RIGHT THING AND BE LOYAL...STAND BY YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS AND THE ORGANIZATION YOU WORK FOR.

RESPECT – SOME WRITERS EMPHASIZED BEING CONSIDERATE OF THE FEELINGS OF OTHERS, DEALING PEACEFULLY WITH ANGER, INSULTS OR DISAGREEMENTS

THE THIRD THEME WAS

RESPONSIBILITY – STUDENTS WROTE ABOUT PERSEVERING...KEEP TRYING, ALWAYS DO YOUR BEST, THINK BEFORE YOU ACT AND BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR YOUR CHOICES

THE NEXT THEME WAS PART OF EVERY ESSAY -

FAIRNESS – THE STUDENTS WROTE ABOUT NOT BLAMING OTHERS, PLAYING BY THE RULES, AND LISTENING TO OTHERS

CARING LIKE FAIRNESS WAS QUITE COMMON AS THE WRITERS TALKED ABOUT THE POWER OF KINDNESS, BEING COMPASSIONATE, EXPRESSING GRATITUDE, FORGIVING OTHERS AND HELPING THOSE IN NEED

AND THE FINAL THEME WAS ABOUT,

CITIZENSHIP – COOPERATE, BE A GOOD NEIGHBOR, RESPECT AUTHORITY AND PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT.

AS I FINISHED THE LAST ESSAY I REALIZED THAT WHILE THE LIST OF THEMES WAS LONG, IT WAS ALSO ONE THAT GAVE ME HOPE AND A SENSE OF CONFIDENCE. THESE STUDENTS AND WRITERS HAVE THE BEGININGS OF A STRONG FOUNDATION OF CHARACTER AND THEY WILL BUILD ON THIS FOUNDATION THROUGHOUT THEIR LIFE'S JOURNEY.

SO TO THE STUDENTS THAT WE HONOR THIS EVENING MY ADVICE AND PERHAPS CHALLENGE FOR EACH OF YOU IS:

THAT YOUR CHARACTER IS DEFINED BY THE ACTIONS YOU TAKE IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT THE VALUES YOU BELIEVE IN

BE SURE TO YOU HAVE CONSISTENCY BETWEEN WHAT YOU SAY YOU WILL DO AND WHAT YOU ACTUALLY DO

REMEMBER THAT YOUR CHARACTER WILL DEFINE, BUILD OR BREAK YOUR REPUTATION

THAT YOUR CHARACTER IS YOUR MORAL STRENGTH AND IT TAKES MORAL COURAGE TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT WHEN IT MAY COST MORE THAN YOU ARE WILLING TO PAY.

AND MOST OF ALL YOUR CHARACTER IS WHO YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU DO WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING.

ENJOY THE JOURNEY AND THANK YOU.