

## Baccalaureate Address

June, 1985

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I want to thank the class of 1985 for giving me the honor of being the Baccalaureate speaker. When Keith Morgan informed me I was selected to give the Baccalaureate address I was of course, pleased and flattered. But, as time passed, I began to have some reservations. What should I say? How should I say it? Time passed ... June 9 grew closer ... Its June 1<sup>st</sup> and I still have yet to pen the first word. Then, In one of those moments we often have when a startling vision presents itself, I suddenly understood what it was really all about. The class had assigned me the Baccalaureate speaker its traditional term paper. Length ... unspecified. Topic ... unspecified. Just don't keep it too long and make it interesting. My interest grew. Yes, this was truly a brilliant class – not only because you afforded me this increasingly dubious honor, but rather because you have continued the tradition of many classes before you – that is, finally getting back at the faculty by assigning one of its members a term paper ... A love-hate proposition to be sure. O.K., I'll show you, I thought, the insight now growing to monstrous proportions, Let's see – what about simply by using my 1980 Baccalaureate address ... no, that won't do, members of the class of 1980 will be present and they might remember. I could say I typed the talk into the computer yesterday and the computer ate it. Humm ... no, that won't do either. So, as my profession would dictate, I went to the library – to the archives, to find out how it came to be that students managed to create such a clever ritual and assign a faculty a term paper. In the archives I discovered two things that were truly startling. First, it seems that any faculty member who gives the Baccalaureate speech twice within five years automatically earns a full-year paid sabbatical that begins one year from the last speech. Accordingly, I will be meeting with the Dean of Faculty, Len Clark next Thursday at 3:00 in the afternoon. On to more serious matters.

Today, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1985 is an important day. It is an important day for the class of 1985, their relatives and friends. It is an important day for those members of the class of 1980 who, by their presence here today, attest to the impact Earlham has had on their lives. And, it is an important day for the members of the class of 1935 who are here – their positive affirmation of the long lasting influence of the Earlham experience. It is an important day because we know we are joined together in experiences that have clearly stood the test of time and the judgment of history.

But more than that ... today, June 9<sup>th</sup> is an important day because it comes at the end of a difficult period in the history of Earlham. You, the class of 1985, have seen three presidents during your stay at Earlham. The upcoming class will have seen four presidents during their undergraduate years.

While we recognize we have come through difficult times, we must also recognize that you have been forged in the fires of adversity. And, were it not for the underlying vitality and responsibility of Earlham, we would not have been able to expose our wounds to the healing process of dissension, discussion and debate. It is Earlham's vitality and

responsibility that has allowed us to expose our wounds rather than let them fester and grow in the dark idle doldrums of complacency.

On this important day I had to resist giving a final professional lecture. Remembering my grandmother helps me here. Let me say a few words about her. Grandma Susan lives in New Bern, North Carolina. An area many Indiana Quakers migrated from. She and her husband sharecropped in their early married life and despite the racial oppressiveness of the South in the early 1900's they were able to purchase 100 acres of land from Mr. Dawson who, despite local custom, reached out and touched them in selling part of his estate. My grandmother had ten children and when the youngest was 8, they saw my grandfather die of a bleeding ulcer because the local hospital didn't admit people of color, and the closest colored hospital was hours away. She raised her family virtually alone but with the help of others, and now, at age 90, she is looking death squarely in the face, her body a victim of cancer. Still, in a telephone call two weeks ago my mother told me that grandma Susan still showed vitality, that when possible she was up and about, and, in fact, she had, that very morning at 7:00 A.M. planted her garden and was responsible to the earth she knows so well. Her simple advice to me over the years has been simply to be who you are, accept and learn from others for who and what they prove to be and, above all, to reach out and help people when you can. Don't attach the crippling expectation of reciprocity to your help, just try to touch someone and make this a better world.

In this spirit, I want to keep things simple. I had to resist the temptation to talk about the challenges of the future – you know – how you are the “Leaders of Tomorrow.” I am not going to tell you that by virtue of sitting here today in front of chase stage that you have completed on the finest educations that money can buy. Your parents and guardians can tell you that. I am not going to tell you how challenging the next five years will be ... members of the class of 1980 here today can tell you about that. And, I am not going to tell you about the long term value of an Earlham Education ... how well it will equip you to deal with the trials and tribulations, the high points and low points, the sorrows and joys of life ... other alums and members of the class of 1935 can tell you that. I just want to keep things simple and to blend the literature tradition of Western culture with the oral-performance of African-American culture. But, in the event all that I say is obscured in the importance of the day, let me now say that in the final analysis, it is not the money you have borrowed – Earlham and the banks will certainly remind you of that. In the final analysis, it is not the scholarships you have earned, the awards bestowed upon you, your grade point average or what you will be doing come September. In the final analysis it is not the jobs that you have held while attending Earlham – waitresses, waiters, camp counselor, saga worker and all of the sacrifices and experiences you have had that enabled you to be here today – But, rather, it is the character, integrity and soul you have developed over the past four years that will carry you through. And so, I want to say, on this day, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1985, three simple things related to vitality and responsibility.

In a manner of speaking we might say you have just made a \$40,000 investment in the Earlham corporation- a corporation that produces educated people. An, if you think of yourselves as stockholders, it seems to me that you would want to protect that investment and see it grow. For the historical record, let me say that you must not just take your degree and leave. You must protect you investment – not only with dollars from future earnings – I'm not going to say money isn't important, but rather that you must protect your

investment by remaining a vital part of Earlham in a responsible way. Help keep Earlham a vital institution by checking on what we are doing ... give us your ideas ... be an active alum. Don't let us direct you – but don't you direct those of us who are here ... It must be a cooperative relationship. As I have said, you have been forged in the fires of adversity and with the strength you now possess, you must not browse nihilistically in the library of non-involvement. For an institution to have vitality it must be able to adapt to the ever present future. Now, there are at least two ways Earlham can move into the future. We can, with your responsible help, be at the forefront of higher education moving triumphantly and engagingly. Or, without it we can be pulled, pushed or dragged screaming our way into the future. If you help, your investment will be protected. If you don't, then Earlham's future will be the past. Just reach out and touch your alma mater.

Another way we can move into the future is by protecting our moral investment ... and I think we can do this by keeping things simple and only moving to more complex assessments of a situation if the simple approach does not work. I think the issue of apartheid falls into this way of looking at things. I think we make things overly complex when we consider the issue of apartheid. Our institutional vitality gets sapped and our claims to moral leadership diminished in community-wrenching divisions that emerge when we argue and debate the issues of divestment and disinvestment. We end up with countless meetings among and between Board members, students and faculty ... and this drama has been played continuously on and off for the past twelve years ... it saps our vitality and we must be more responsible than this ... it is a simple thing to recognize things that cannot be getting better if one group must remain subservient to another, while waiting for the day when all will be equal. It is a simple thing to recognize the hazards smoking present to the human body and consequently to refuse to invest endowment funds in cigarette companies. It is a simple thing to recognize the debilitating effects liquor has on the human body and, consequently, to refuse to invest endowment funds in liquor companies. It is a simple thing to recognize that guns, warplanes, conventional and nuclear bombs are fundamental prerequisites for war and as a consequence of this realization, refuse to invest endowment funds in companies whose primary products are armaments. And it is a simple thing to recognize that apartheid is just plain immoral and we should refuse to invest endowment in companies that do business in the land of apartheid. As a columnist in the Wall Street Journal put it recently... “we cannot be associated beyond the coolly correct links of formal diplomacy with a slave state that invokes the images of Western civilization to mask the policies of Hitler.” ... it is a simple thing to recognize that our vitality is sapped and our claims to moral leadership diminished when we are, however distant, party to a system that degrades human beings, attempts to depress the human spirit and tried to obliterate the will of peoples to be free.

At the same time issues like Apartheid threatens our vitality and our claims of moral leadership we must not overlook the source of these notions. Indeed, our debate over Apartheid is ironically only possible because of our stated commitment to a community that values diversity among its members – including the ideas such members may hold. Sooner or later a simple truth will emerge ... and that truth is that in order for Earlham to maintain its vitality we must continually cultivate an atmosphere which allows me to state my views on the Apartheid issue without fear of harassment or retribution and which allows others the right to address equally as explosive issues in an open atmosphere that values diversity. Sooner or later the simple truth will emerge ... that without racial, ethnic, religious and

intellectual diversity, vitality for a college like Earlham is an empty concept. The human spirit cannot survive, in all of its glory and permutations, in a homogenous community, or a community that reflects social narrowness or one that keeps people in intellectual or ideological straight jackets. Sooner or later these simple truths will emerge.

Whether at Earlham or in the worlds you enter the simple truth is that we must be able to actively engage the world with all of its diversity ... the world is getting smaller ... one cannot pick up a newspaper, watch or listen to the daily news without hearing about Nicaragua, El Salvador, Poland, the Soviet Union, the Middle East, Western Europe, Asia or Africa. We must learn how to better know these places – how to engage them ... how to reach out and touch them. We must learn how to better accept others – the Protestant, the Catholic, the Jew, the African, Hispanic, Oriental, and others whatever they might be.

But more than that. An intellectual community, by its central mission – the free interplay of ideas, is a very fragile thing. The greatest enemy of an institution of higher learning is intellectual myopia. This occurs when a way of thinking and interpreting the world is so dominant that things appear to be self-evident and other, equally valid ways of thinking and interpretations of the world become regarded as inadequate or unimportant. It is indefensible for an intellectual community to attempt to muscle out different ways of thinking, different interpretations of the world, and their resultant styles of teaching and learning because they don't fit comfortably. That is why we must, in order to remain a vital institution, become more willing to engage the intellectual traditions of other cultures and nations, with their respective different ways of understanding the world around us.

The free interplay of ideas is a fundamental prerequisite for a college of higher learning that makes the joint claims of intellectual vitality and social responsibility. A truly diverse community insures that vitality and responsibility and these are some of the things you should look for when you seek to protect your investment.

Diversity demands that we explain our underlying assumptions, be willing to debate openly, negotiate, compromise and establish new and shared understandings of concepts, ideas and interpretations of the world. Diversity allows us to be improved and impressed by people from different generations, cultures and intellectual traditions. Our grandparents parents, teachers, friends and young college students. Diversity compels us to struggle to communicate – to reach out and touch someone ... in order to accomplish what I have said, - healing our wounds, protecting your investment, to accepting and learning with and from others who look and/or think differently, we must be able to reach out and touch others, to join together and help create the world we want to live in. Earlier, I spoke about my grandmother. I think she would like that message, that it is important to reach out and touch someone.

Let me conclude by saying that diverse communities are not easy to live in. And if we think of the Earlham community as a family, it seems appropriate that I paraphrase a few simple rules from a well known family therapist ... rules that will help you maintain your vitality and be responsible citizen of the world community.

1. You must learn how to better hear and see what is around you ... instead of hearing and seeing what others would have you hear and see ...

2. You must learn to better say what you feel and think ... instead of being told what you should feel and what you should think ...
3. You must learn to ask for what you want instead of always waiting for permission or worse, being told what you should want ... and,
4. You must better learn how to take responsible risks on your own behalf and on the behalf of others instead of choosing to be only secure and not rocking the boat.

This is what I have to say to you ... the class of 1985 ... for your efforts over the past four years, for what you are now and what you will become, we the

Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff,

The class of 1935

The class of 1980 and other alums,

Parents, relatives and friends,

We applaud you.