

JOHN CROCKER'S VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

John Crocker

INTRO COMMENTS: Dr. Still, honored guests, members of the school Faculty and Administration, families and friends, and Class of 1988,

Baccalaureate is traditionally an opportunity to mark a special turning point or transition in the lives of members of a graduating class. It is an opportunity to reflect upon and bid fond farewells to the challenges and victories, the struggles and the joys of our years at Winter Park. It is also a chance to claim promises for the future which we now all anticipate.

I would like to emphasize the latter tonight, and ask us to think about our future. But let us not view the tomorrows we see from the perspective of tonight, May 22, 1988. Instead let us imagine ourselves looking back, from the perspective of 50 years from now, in the year 2038. What will be seen as the impact of our lives when we reflect from the vantage point of the 21st century?

Had we been born in a different age, perhaps that of our grandparents, we might stop right at this point and celebrate for actually having made it so far, and that would be enough. To have spent 12 years engaged in the process of education is a rare privilege, available to a relatively small percentage of the world's population. We should stop and celebrate having made it. But, given our time in history, we are also compelled to look ahead, and to grasp now what that tomorrow uniquely requires.

My hope for what we will have given our attention to, when we look back 50 years from now, includes four things. I don't ask that you agree with me, but I offer them for our consideration.

1) First. In our lifetime the Yuppies have come and are already on their way out. We know this because they are no longer what people strive to be; instead they are the subject and object of humor. They are fading from centerstage, and this fact points to the growing social awareness that to live a lifestyle of excessive, material comfort is not what life is all about.

As we look back 50 years from now, I hope we will have helped to meet the challenge of the inequitable distribution of this world's resources, in such a way that the economic gap between the "haves" and the "have nots" has been extensively diminished.

The year before I entered Winter Park, I lived and worked in an impoverished agricultural village in Venezuela. There I grew to know and to love people from another culture and a totally different economic level from that to which I was accustomed. My Venezuelan family of six struggled to survive on what most of us now spend to keep just one of our family's automobiles filled with gas.

In the year 2038 I hope we will look back and know we had a part in altering this discrepancy by learning to live a simple life-style out of choice, rather than requiring that others endure a life of poverty out of necessity.

2) Secondly. Wherever we live and work over the next half-century, I hope that we will be counted among those who work to shape world peace. By this I mean not just military security for ourselves, but peace for all the people of the world.

The award winning movie, Platoon, helped me realize how outmoded war is in a world which increasingly sees itself as one global village. The information revolution has given us all the opportunity to greatly expand our understanding of international issues. It has put us in a position where we have the possibility of ensuring the continued survival of the human race. War ultimately denies our own welfare. I see us actively involving ourselves in developing and carrying out alternatives that support world peace. It may be, that in our life time, more courage will be required to keep peace than to wage war.

3) Thirdly, I hope that in the year 2038, we can say that we have begun to reverse the exploitation of our environment.

Living in Florida, where we are so conscious of the plight of endangered animal species like the manatees, and can watch orange groves be replaced overnight by condos and parking lots, we are already more sensitive than most to the issues of ecological balance and environmental protection.

But in 50 years, what will we have done about the non-biodegradable fast food containers that litter our countryside today? What will we have done to alter the aerosol-spray life style that is contributing to the development of what is believed to be a second hole in the ozone layer?

I hope we will have created practical alternative life-styles which help us care for this planet and honor the environment which we share with all other forms of life.

4) And, finally, closely related to the need for economic equity, world peace, and environmental care is the need for an attitude which honors all people as human beings. I trust as we look back, we will see that even before we accomplished further exploration of the frontier of space, we will have explored, far more extensively, the frontier of human relationships.

We already face the dehumanizing realities of apartheid in South Africa; of terrorism in the Middle East; of dictatorship in Latin America; and of lingering caste separation and conflict in Sub Asia.

These parallel the disturbing realities we face at home in our own nation: entrenched racism; the increase of AIDs and homelessness; the erosion of ethical relationships from Wall Street to televangelism; and the terrorizing power of drugs that virtually hold our whole society hostage.

Over the next 50 years, I hope our generation will have played a key part in learning how to honor other human beings and to establish a lasting pattern of respect for those who are different from ourselves.

This is what gives possibility for a human future. Certainly in 2038 we will understand that this has not come about without cost to ourselves.

Printed on our program tonight is a quotation by James Allen which suggests the importance of our thoughts about tomorrow:

"You are today where your thoughts have brought you; you will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you."

In closing I would like to add a line from William Irwin Thompson which I feel represents the point at which we stand tonight:

"AT THE EDGE OF HISTORY, THE FUTURE IS BLOWING WILDLY IN OUR FACES,
SOMETIMES BRIGHTENING THE AIR, AND SOMETIMES BLINDING US."

My hope is that in risking creative thoughts, our actions across the next 50 years will serve to brighten that future and to enhance the quality of life for all people everywhere.

THANK YOU.