

The Journey

Ceccano, Italy

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Distinguished guests, faculty, parents and most of all, students, I am honored to be here at this wonderful school that is growing in size and prestige.

When I was in second grade the teacher asked, "What is the strongest thing on earth?" I raised my hand wildly and said, "A woman with a bottle." The teacher was puzzled. I explained. The day before my father took me on a trip to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Thousands of people were gathered around a gigantic thing of metal, perched on a platform of wood. Suddenly a band played and a lady with a hat filled with feathers, took a bottle, broke it on the back of the ship and pushed it into the ocean. As far as I was concerned, there was no one and no thing stronger than that lady with a bottle.

I asked my father where the ship was going. He said it was bound for a round the world voyage and would stop at ports thousands of miles away. "But they can't see those places," I said. "You are right", said my father, "but if the captain follows his route, follows his maps, follows the rules and follows the stars, he will get the ship to each port safely, soundly and happily. He will

avoid the rocks and navigate through the storms. His voyage will be a success.

Today there will be a new launching. After listening to my words today, each of you will begin your own journey. I know a little about you and the words that seem to come to mind are “determined, ambitious, active, disciplined, self-motivated, sensitive, kind, thoughtful, clever and global thinkers.”

My voyage is slowly ending, yours is about to begin. What can I tell you to help you arrive safely, soundly and happily to all the many ports and harbors you will visit? What do you need to know to prepare you for your journey? You already have a great deal that you received from this excellent school and from your parents and family. What more do you need for your trip?

- **Understand time:** Chances are you will live another 100 years. Your journey will be long. Your life will span more than any other human beings that have inhabited our planet. As a result, make sure you do something important with it. Don't throw it away. Remember, “The fool counts the days; the wise person makes the days count.”
- **Know who you are:** Success and leadership in life are based on being able to lead yourself first and foremost before you can lead others. To do so, you have to go through a period of self-examination. You need to discover what you like, dislike, are good at and what you are passionate about. If you do what you love, it is not work. Success is not about race, creed, color or nationality. It is about you.

- **Know “where the ball is going to bounce”:** When I was living in Brazil, I got to know a soccer player. His name was Pele. He was the greatest of his time. He had the record for goals scored. One day, I asked him what the secret to his success was. He said he always knew “where the ball was going to bounce.” He explained that even if the ball was “there” he knew that in a few seconds it would be “there” so he would position himself in such a way that he would always put the ball in the net. His experience, training and knowledge gave him this ability. Knowing “where the ball is going to bounce” regarding the field you want to go into is vital. Following what is happening in the world and trying to understand trends is essential. Knowing what will happen tomorrow is often explained by the data of today. It’s about separating “**noises vs. signals.**” It is about loving learning a making it lifelong experience.
- **Get the best possible education:** No one can steal this from you. The diplomas you earn today, the degrees you earn tomorrow are yours for life. The knowledge you acquire cannot be taken from you. The more you know the better. Those who earn the most are those who make decisions or are in sports or entertainment.
- **Constantly Improve:** Read self-help books and information about self-improvement. You will need to reinvent yourself in the years to come. Some of these guides will show you how, like Dale Carnegie’s “How to Win Friends and Influence People” which I read at your age. Your journey will require

constant learning and the use of technology. At the same time, remember not to let your studies get in the way of your education.

- **Understand that facts are our friends:** To make good decisions you have to have facts. Never make choices based on emotion. Look for the truth and separate fact from fiction.
- **Find your models for life:** Each of us needs models for guidance as we make our way in the world. When I have to make a moral decision, I ask, “What would Christ do?” A Buddhist would ask, “What would Buddha do, a Jew would ask what Moses would do?” When I need to make a political decision, I ask, “What would Lincoln do?” “What would Franklin and Theodore Roosevelt do?” “What would Martin Luther King do?” These are my models. Find yours.
- **Understand what passion means:** A boy from South Philadelphia, born to poor Italian immigrant parents found his passion was lyric opera. He became one of the greatest tenors and singers of all time and was the idol of Pavarotti, Domingo, Carreras, Elvis Presley, Josh Groben, Michael Bubble’ and many others. He became their benchmark. He was able to cross over from opera to popular songs and movies with great success. He was passionate about what he did and sang with all his heart and soul. His name was Mario Lanza.
- **Know how to turn problems into opportunities:** Problems are like a coin. On one side is the problem and the other is an opportunity. Tackling a challenge turns it into an

opportunity for experience and success. Even if it results in failure, there is a lesson learned.

- **Learn gratitude:** During the last part of the 19th century, two poor boys studying at Stanford University in California needed money to pay for their education. They invited the greatest pianist of the era, Ignacy Jan Paderewski from Poland to give a concert and promised to pay him his expenses and a fee. He accepted. The concert was a failure. They could not pay him so they gave him a promissory note and said they would leave college to earn the money to pay him their debts. He tore it up and told them the debt was paid. He even helped them pay for their education.

Years later, World War I broke out. Poland was devastated. Paderewski became Prime Minister. His country was dying. His people were starving.

He went to see the person designated as the Relief Czar for Europe to plead for food. He was a young American. He welcomed Paderewski warmly, gave him all that he asked for and saved the people of Poland.

The Prime Minister was overwhelmed. He asked how he could thank him. The young man said he already did, years earlier when he allowed him to continue his education after a failed piano concert. That young man went on to be President of the United States.

We need to be grateful to those who have helped us especially those who gave us a chance for an education.

Your parents are special in this regard. Mark Twain said that when he was sixteen he thought his father was a fool. By

the time he reached thirty, he found the old man had learned a lot. Appreciate the wisdom and love of your family now. Don't wait until you are thirty. Be grateful for even the smallest gifts. This is the secret to contentment.

- **Understand what greatness is about:** Someone is great if they have a positive influence on a large group of people and institutions and are remembered for their achievements.

An ancient Roman Emperor wanted to honor the greatest Roman. He sent out an aide to find the person. He returned with three men. They were the richest Roman, the most famous lawyer and the most distinguished general. The Emperor interviewed each but found that they lacked the quality of greatness he sought. The aide returned with a woman in her fifties. She seemed familiar. She was tired but noble. The emperor asked his assistant who is this person. "She is the one you have been looking for," he said. "How could this be," asked the emperor. The aide responded, "She is the greatest of all because she is the teacher of the other three and she was your teacher," he explained. Greatness is also knowing when it is time to give back after you have been given so much.

- **Know what heroism is:** There may be a time when you are called on to do something over and above the call of duty. Will you have the courage to act? In February, 1933, Franklin Roosevelt had just been elected President and went to Florida to meet supporters. Among them were mayors of cities that had campaigned for him. During his speech, a

man took out a pistol and began to shoot at him. The mayor of Chicago received a bullet destined for FDR.

Roosevelt accompanied him to the hospital. Mayor Anton Cermack told him, “Mr. President, I’m glad it was me and not you.” Cermack died and FDR lived to guide us through the Depression and World War II.

There are many examples of heroism like Mr. Simpson. He was a teacher in New Zealand who brought his students to swim on the Great Barrier Reef. A storm came and his students were drowning. He saved them and lost his life in the process. Teachers in the Philippines are entrusted with ballot boxes filled with votes to be counted after elections. Some lose their lives carrying the votes to centers where they will be counted. Life is filled with heroic acts. We need to recognize them and be courageous enough to know when it applies to us as we continue our journey.

- **Stay healthy, physically and mentally:** Remember your body has to last another 100 years.
- **Develop a sense of spirituality:** An American pilot wrote a book in WWII entitled “God is my co-pilot.” It is about his challenges and how he never felt alone because he believed in something bigger than himself in the universe.
- **Search for mentors:** Those who believe in you will help you be the best you can be. Take their advice and let them open doors for you. Do the same for others.
- **Be kind:** Know each person is fighting a battle. They deserve to be treated fairly, justly and kindly.

- **Start a network:** Relationships are the ultimate key to success and becoming leaders. Have a few good friends. You do not need many but a few real ones to sustain you during the storms of your journey.
- **Learn to love:** This may be the most important quality to have. Think first of the happiness of others and yours will be assured.
- **Be careful, be happy and all will be well:** The best is ahead of you.