# YOUR SECOND ACT

President Fleming, Regents of the University, Distinguished Faculty, Guests, Friends, Relatives and last but foremost members of the graduating class: One is much honored to be commencement speaker at the great University of Michigan. Appropriate acknowledgement of such a honor would, it seems to me, consist of a commitment to be clear, to be concise and to be condensed. I shall be faithful to that commitment today.

At the outset, let me say that as a Michigan boy who learned to sing "The Victors" and "Hail to the Colors" in early elementary school days along with countless other Detroit and Michigan youth of a half century ago, I have a warm feeling of special pride in being so honored today. It was a matter of tradition, I think, that those who grew up in Michigan in my generation were allowed to believe that by right of citizenship in this wonderful state the University of Michigan belonged to us and we somehow belonged to the University.

I have, too, a sense of concern that these emotional feelings of belonging and of pride may not be fully understood or fully appreciated by today's youth who have grown up in the current period of unprecedented societal mobility. Pride and loyalty to either

persons or things may well be no longer regarded as popular virtues.

I am persuaded that this sense of belonging is an essential ingredient in a totally healthy personality and in a totally healthy society. The University of Michigan has been blessed with this loyalty and pride for many years. Wayne State University needs it and I am going to do every thing I can to help develop those processes which nurture it. The development and growth of pride and loyalty in the university I believe are necessary for an administration to benefit from the widest and wisest possible input and involvement of students and faculty and alumni so important in the significant growth of a university.

All of this I have said by way of introduction and support for what I want now to say to you of the graduating class; that it is my ferverent hope that your years at the University of Michigan have provided for you more than just an educational experience for facing again the world outside the campus with only a heightened sophistication.

To be more specific, I hope (for one thing) that your years at "Michigan" have been also an experience of the heart--that the

University will be for you a meaningful place for all of your life.

In referring to the heart I mean of course in the emotional not the physical heart. I speak here of the heart "as the seat of life". Knowing now all that you have learned as a graduate in your special field, I suggest to you that there is still room for trusting your heart as well as your head. The wisest of the Greek Philosophers believed that, "The heart has reasons that reason knows not of."

For another, I hope that your years at the University have been for you an experience of the spirit. I refer to spirit not in the sense of ethereal detachment but rather as:

> "The very breath of life--The power of motion within us--Our agent of vital and conscious function--Our temper or dispositions of mind--Feelings about ourselves--Our motivations,"

or of what my father chose to call "my morale." In his judgement good morale was no accident. It was (on the contrary) a result of an educated effort to discover that zeal and enthusiasm and energy of purpose that changes the drugery of existence into the joy of achievement.

When I graduated from college I was hired by George Bethune Duffield

who wrote me an unusual letter in which he said:

> "Dear George:
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> These depression years are probably the most difficult times ever in which to work and live. If I have learned anything in my fifty years it is this--important as aptitudes are, attitudes are even more important. I am employing you in the belief that your attitudes are at least as strong as your aptitudes."

I doubt that Mr. Duffield either read or quoted William James who also believed in the power of an effective attitude. William James said,

> "Human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes."

Dr. John M. Dorsey (noted psychiatrist, author and lecturer who was once an important part of the University of Michigan and who has for years been our University Professor at Wayne State University) makes this challenging statement, "After all, I am all there is to my world. How therefore can my world be right if my disposition of mind is not right." He suggests that sometimes it is more helpful to understanding to express an idea in humor than in sobriety. His story about "Engine Charley" Wilson expresses it well. (tells story)

President Theodore Roosevelt once replied to an over zealous admirer who in a fan letter credited him with unusual and remarkable powers

> "Almost all of those splendid qualities attributed to me are bunk, but I finally learned that if I was to get any where in this life I would have to find the courage to stand where I was-with what I had-and do what I could."

I hope for you that your years at Michigan have been an affair of the spirit for the stimulation of motivation and morale and that will help you find the courage to do what you can do in your world.

Finally it is my hope that your educational experience at U of M has provided for you an exciting sense of a new beginning.

A St. Louis friend, Clinton Hawkins, tells me that there is a restaurant in Greenwich Village where playwrights meet and where their casual greeting is uniquely not "hi" or "howdy", but is this--"How's your second act?"

The explanation for their greeting is logical enough. In their judgement (as playwrights) any one can write a good first act. In your first act you set the scene. You identify the characters and their roles. The second act sets the plot in motion. It is a "going on with it" that really takes skill and ingenuity. My

friend, Clint, philosophizes that the real rewards in writing or any thing else comes from the "going on."

I have a notion that most of us learn such lessons the hard way, if at all. We bought a farm a number of years ago with an apple orchard. Knowing nothing about apple growing or about sprays, pruning or any other fundamentals necessary for producing a good apple crop, we asked a friend at MSU's agricultural college for information. He told us about the need for the kinds, quantities and frequency in application of fungisides, insectisides and combinations thereof. His prescription called for spraying about every ten days from the first show of green in the spring until about thirty days before harvest in the early fall. By mid-summer our fruit seemed well covered with spray material. So we stopped spraying. We didn't go on with it. We got off to a great start but in the end the fruit was not marketable. We stopped spraying too soon. It was the hard way to learn that a good beginning really is only half the battle.

Even a poor beginning can be corrected by right attitudes if William James is right about it. Life magazine some years ago told the story (trite but true) of Arnold Palmer's first victory in a Masters golf tournament. He had gotten off to a poor start and was far enough "down" at the completion of the first nine holes that a lesser player (or one less determined) would have given up as a bad job.

But of course he turned in a superb performance in the final round and went on to win the tournament. Even a poor beginning was then turned into a splendid result with the application of attitudes and effective skills in "going on."

A half a century ago, Lloyd Douglas was an important figure in Ann Arbor. He will be remembered as the author of a number of best sellers including, "Magnificant Obsession," "The Robe" and others. He was at that time the Congregational Minister at the Stone Church not a half a dozen blocks from Hill auditorium. Students, faculty and towns people literally stood in line to hear him. I heard him once tell an audience his formula for writing a great second act. I will spare you the sermon. It will be enough to illustrate the theme of this commencement talk to give you his key words. To write a great second act Dr. Douglas said, "It takes compassion--having your heart in it. It takes persistence--keeping everlastingly at it and it takes an unswerving faith--in yourself--in your goals--in your competence."

He quoted Emerson:

> "To believe your own thought--To believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men--that is genius."

I said at the beginning of this talk that my concerns for the values of pride and belonging and for the development of heart and spirit

were perhaps too old fashioned for today's modern world. I am re-enforced, however, in my continuing belief in their importance by a recent article in the New York Sunday Times.

James Reston, the widely read editorial writer for "The Times," said in his editorial for August 6, 1972 that he feels there is "cause for alarm" over the national rootlessness of today's modern American. He writes:

> Great numbers of inhabitants feel uncommitted to either people or places and throughout much of the nation there is a breakdown of community living. In fact, there is a shattering of small group life. A number of forces are promoting social fragmentation. We are confronted with a society that is coming apart at the seams.

What I have just quoted is not only Reston's editorial comment it is as well his reactions to some thoughts of Vance Packard who also expresses in his new book called "A Nation of Strangers" a sense of "anxiety and of depression about deepening trends toward a widespread feeling of loneliness and frustration resulting from a life of almost chronic movement separated from traditional male--female relationships, from traditional religious beliefs and from steady work because of rapid technological social change."

Mr. Reston, recognizes in his editorial that his concern about American society and what it can or what it will become is not a new problem. He reminds his readers that Mr. Lincoln, a hundred years ago, expressed concern about the kind of society we were to have in America believing that internal dissention and confusion

were greater threats to the Republic than foreign armies. It is Mr. Reston's conclusion that even today,

> "We may very well be coming into a new phase of world history where the major question of security lies not in a confrontation of armies but in a confrontation of societies."

Your leadership as educated citizens will have much to say about the kind of society we shall have in America. My hopes for you as graduates are then selfish hopes about the kind of society in which my children and their children will live. It is therefore, a selfish and a feverent hope that your years at the University of Michigan will prove to have been for you more than just an affair of sophistication, but will prove also to have been for you an affair of the heart, and affair of the spirit and a place of new beginning for a "going-on" with education and values and attitudes that will produce for you (and thus for society) a great second act in the drama of your life.

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Commencement Address, University of Michigan
Sunday, August 20, 1972