

TRANSCRIPT

Kelsey Grammer address - 131st Commencement - University of Massachusetts - May 27, 2001

Thank you, Grace. Thank you very much. And my thanks to my dear friend Diane Bissonnette Moes, to the president and chancellor.

I actually took the trouble of writing down a few things which I'll attempt to share with you now.

And to the Class of 2001, thank you for inviting me to be a part of this day--this is your day. Congratulations!

[cheers] [applause]

You have accomplished something extraordinary--something I never could. I never went to college, although Grace mentioned I went to Juilliard--well, see, Juilliard is just a college in name, really. It's nothing more than a conservatory for the gifted.

[laughter] [cheers]

There are no academic standards at Juilliard and being of no discernable academic prowess myself, you'd think I might have thrived there;

[laughter]

but two years into it they kicked me out

[laughter] [cheers] [applause]

or "disinvited" me, as I prefer to call it.

[laughter]

Coming, as I do, from a long line of college graduates this was particularly painful to me. Which is why I am thrilled to receive this honor today--with this perhaps the noble bones of my ancestors can finally rest in peace. And so can I.

[laughter]

Once again, thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

[cheers]

Now, for the past several months I have been agonizing over what I might say here today. I am not a scholar. I am not an inspirational speaker. What can I impart to you that might enhance this occasion? Why was I even invited? Well,

[laughter]

for one, I am recognizable to many of you,

[laughter]

if not for the fact that I've been on television throughout most of your lives,

[laughter]

then for the fact that I've been in trouble throughout most of mine.

[laughter] [cheers] [applause]

How did you get through it? How did you survive? How did you prevail in what has been arguably a life full of challenges? Most often, these are the questions I am asked. It occurred to me that by answering them here today, I could also share some ideas that might prove helpful to you in the future.

It is my contention that to be successful, three things are required: talent, intention and tenacity. Once a person has discerned where his or her talents lay then a plan must be devised in order to achieve those talents, to realize those talents. The last part of the equation is the one that gets a bit tougher. Once we have decided what we wish to do with our lives and set out about the business of accomplishing it, we discover that impediments exist. Trials and complications jump out on life at the least opportune moments and tenacity comes very hard indeed without a sense of faith. Call it what you will—God, Fate, a higher power (as I call it), whatever. Without it I would not be here today. Now I'll try to explain. When I was a little boy, about 6 years old, my grandmother gave me a book. In the book she had underlined what she referred to as a daily prayer. It read, "Work out your own salvation, for to this end God worketh with you. Be not weary in well doing. If your endeavors are beset by fearful odds, and you receive no present reward, go not back to error, nor become a sluggard in the race." It was that word sluggard that really got my attention (I knew I didn't want to be a sluggard by any stretch of the imagination), but for whatever reason I took that to heart in a very profound way and it has sustained me to this very day. And I just wanted to pass it along to you. Work out your own salvation; do not go back; do not become a sluggard in the race. Among you are the future movers and shakers of the world. Among you are the politicians and the poets, the chefs and scoundrels, the artists and the actors that will delight and confound us all. Life will serve up staggering challenges as you go through it. You will find comfort and distress in the most unlikely places. In the eyes of a loved one, in the unexpected death of a good friend you will find faith. The sheer beauty of the world around you and the laughter of a really good joke will sustain you. What you most need in life will be given to you. In the face of unimaginable anguish there will be joy. I tell you this because I know it to be so. Take heart in that—and have faith.

I would like to share with you an excerpt from my favorite poem. It's called "Atlantis" and was written by W.H. Auden:

If, forsaken then you stand
Dismissal everywhere,
Stone and snow, silence and air,
Remember the great dead
And honor the fate you are,
Traveling and tormented,
Dialectic and bizarre.

Stagger onward rejoicing.

I would like to close by simply wishing you the very best in the lives that you choose.

There are so many wonderful things ahead of you. Hang in there. Don't give up. Fight the good fight. It won't be easy but it will be worth it. May you be the best generation ever.

[cheers] [applause]

One last thing—the truth is, the journey is the goal. I want you all to go out there and kick ass. Enjoy the ride. Thank you.

[cheers] [applause]