

Commencement Address
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First off, congratulations to the Class of 2000, also to the parents and families and to the faculty and staff of this magnificent School. Let me take you back to the thrilling days of yesteryear – St. Andrew's 1964. Some things were different. Real time information about the outside world like the assassination of President Kennedy, which happened in November of our senior year, came to us through a television in the Common Room, up there. It was black and white. To adjust the volume or to select one of the four channels that were available, you actually had to rise from your chair, cross the room, and turn a dial on the set. We didn't smoke during a varsity sports season, but otherwise it was cool, "bitchin" we said. We wrote our papers, first in outline, then in draft, then a final smooth in pen and ink. We listened to the Beatles ("I Want to Hold Your Hand," "She Loves You") on record players. We managed to win the St. Andrew's first baseball championship, and we used wooden bats. Knee operations put us out for a season; they left six-inch scars. Oh yeah, and I almost forgot, there were no women here.

But some things were the same. Bob Colburn was the baseball coach. Larry Walker helped him out and directed the band. The school buses we rode to away games were yellow with a black stripe. Sixth formers always sat in the back. Soap operas were the hottest daytime TV shows. Some of us sneaked into the Common Room to watch them. We went to chapel in the basement. We didn't get any sleep before commencement exercises, and we had a hard time staying awake for the commencement speaker. We thought Middletown was in the middle of nowhere.

Well, let me bring you up to date on what has happened in the 36 years since then, and then try to tell you what I have learned from it. When we graduated in 1964, the American phase of the Vietnam War had just begun. Some of us would serve; some of us would avoid service, and it preoccupied us for about the next decade. But we worked our way through that decade, with it some of us finishing college, some of us marrying, some of us starting families.

And there were major social movements during that time that affected our outlook and some of our lives. The Civil Rights Movement, which had started while we were here at St. Andrew's, progressed from civil disobedience through city burning. Revolution was a popular term. You saw it mostly in the media. There was a sexual revolution with the pill becoming widely available. The Equal Rights Movement took off with challenges to unequal status in the workplace, later on the sports field. Women came to St. Andrew's in 1973. The Environmental Movement gained strength built on scientific research and people's feeling that we were just running out of clean air, clean water and green space.

Then in 1982, most of you were born. That year I purchased my first personal computer. A clunky thing called an Ozbourn, for word processing and databases. Those computers rapidly became more powerful, more interconnected. They made it easier and quicker to do a lot of individual functions, but the sheer amount of information and the connectivity made our lives much more complicated. About this time, geographers began systematically mapping the planet, establishing locations to the square meter through global positioning systems.

Then in 1989, you all turned seven. The Berlin Wall came down. The United States and its allies had won the Cold War without a major

conflict and without using those huge nuclear weapons arsenals, which both sides had developed.

Nineteen ninety-one, you are nine years old. The United States began an economic expansion which continues to this day, the longest period of growth in our history. And during the 1990s, biologists discovered nearly all of the hundred thousand or so human genes. We learned that it would take nine and a half years to read aloud the three billion bases in a person's genome sequence.

Now it's 2000. You all are graduating and leaving Middletown. What can I tell you? As a great philosopher, Yogi Berra said, "Predicting is really hard, especially when you're talking about the future." But I will venture a couple of predictions.

I predict these big social movements of the day will work themselves out in unforeseeable ways – sometimes for the better, but sometimes for the worse – and it will take a lot longer than you thought. I mentioned the sexual revolution and the equal rights movement.

Both have successfully changed attitudes and behaviors, but they have created their own problems. Along with other factors, they have affected the family. The divorce rate from my generation is over 50 percent. The whole concept of the family is still evolving.

A prediction in my current line of work: there will not be another World War – hot or cold. There are no big "isms" like colonialism, fascism, communism, that stoked the great confrontations of the past world rivalries that led to world war. There will be smaller conflicts, smaller threats, and as Vietnam taught us, small wars can have great impacts on the country and the people in it. Our challenge as the only current superpower is to use that power right, to build an international security structure that will keep that peace for a long time.

It is certain that the information revolution will continue. Your generation will be even more awash in information and data, and you risk knowing more and more and understanding less and less than ever before. The key will be turning that data and information into knowledge and understanding. And last I predict the current economic expansion will not go on forever. Start saving soon. Now those are my predictions. What advice can I give you?

First, start with the basics: be honest. I learned a lesson in honesty from the legendary Bill Cameron here at St. Andrew's. Three friends and I were playing bridge one day in my room up in the corner here. A few minutes after the card game broke up a teacher walked by, saw that there was a bed pulled away from the wall, a couple chairs on either side of it – obvious card-playing arrangement – and gave me a bunch of demerits. I marched into Mr. Cameron's office and protested.

"The teacher," I said, "had not seen a card game. There were no cards as proof. It was all circumstantial. I was the only one being punished. That's not fair."

Mr. Cameron looked at me a while and said, "Were you playing cards?" "Huh...Yes."

"Then what are you complaining about?" he explained. Don't self justify. Don't be a spin-doctor. Don't take a legalistic approach. Play it straight. And oh, by the way, if you tell the truth, it's a lot easier to remember what you said.

Second, what about your profession? Your job? Your passion? Choose one of service, service to others. It can be a service profession like mine. In the armed forces, we are a team working to defend a country and support its interests. It can be another service profession: teaching, nursing, environmental protection. They are all working for the common good. It can be part time: Big Brother/Big Sister,

community volunteer activities like a food bank. Habitat for Humanity, supporting St. Andrew's through the alumni association. It can be on the international level, the national level, the local level, the personal level. The common thread is serving others.

Robert Kennedy said a year after I graduated from here:

Let no one be dismayed by the thought that there is nothing that one man or woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills. Few will have greatness to bend history itself, but each can give some small act and then some of these events will be written in the history of our generation.

One of the really great accomplishments since 1964 has been to reverse completely America's attitude towards smoking. A similar campaign has made driving drunk unacceptable – a practice my generation accepted as a birthright. And these accomplishments were done by individuals, working together in formal and informal organizations over a long period of time.

Third, keep your balance. At the end of a very bad day on my first shift, my wise, old commanding officer said to me, "Remember things are never as bad, or as good, as they seem."

He was absolutely right. But balance is not just an attitude, it's an agenda. Eliot Richardson, another hero, died not long ago. In his book called *Reflections of a Radical Moderate*, he wrote these words:

Being problem solvers, moderates put a premium on solutions. Moderates have ideals, but they aren't starry-eyed idealists.

*Moderation is not a fighting faith, but a faith worth fighting for.
The radical moderate will not have the best sound bytes.
He will not oversimplify an issue. He will not use sports quotes like
"winning is the only thing."
The radical moderate navigates by his or her ideals, develops skills for
pushing
them forward through hard work, compromise, respecting the views of
others,
seeking common ground, always looking for progress.*

Fourth, I advise you to go international. The rest of the world is coming to the United States through information, immigration, education, commerce. But you will not understand what is going on in the world unless you spend some time outside your own country, and you won't understand your own country until you understand how it is similar to and different from others. We are interconnected and we are interdependent in information, in the environment, in economics, and yet we are different. We are diverse in culture, in fear and concerns, and ambitions. So take that junior year abroad. Join the Peace Corps. Take that job overseas.

Fifth, and last, I urge you to write. I learned to write here at St. Andrew's from Chester Baum, who I saw earlier today. And I'm sure you have great teachers here. I don't mean I can create poetry or write fiction, but St. Andrew's teaches good expository prose, outlining ideas, writing topic sentences for each paragraph, using mostly short sentences with subject and verb and agreement.

I have found one of the best ways to turn data into understanding, to bring order out of this welter of information that washes around us, is to write something down. In writing this essay for your graduation,

for example, I came to understand a great deal more about these past 36 years on my American experience.

That's it. Be honest. Choose a job or spend time serving others. Pursue moderate solutions relentlessly. Go international. Write.

Nope, one more thing: 28 of us graduated from here in 1964. I have three very close friends from that class today. I can ask them anything, anytime, and they can ask the same of me. I have 25 other good friends. Hold on to your friends from St. Andrew's. You're going to need them over the years.

So again, congratulations and a sailor's blessing of fair winds and following seas to each and every one of you.