

Endicott College Commencement

May 21, 2016

Bill Cummings' Remarks

President Wylie, Trustees, Faculty, Special Guests, Families –

We thank you for the **honor** of addressing you on this **wonderful** day.

Our **deepest** congratulations to the –

almost 900 brand new alumnae of Endicott College!!!

And while you are **cheering**, folks, let's give it up once more! Look around, graduates, and recognize all of the family members, teachers, and friends who have **done so much to help you reach this exciting day!** Let's hear you!

If you had one of the **big-budget speakers**, you might be **listening** quite a bit longer, but you will be **pleased** that President Wylie determined that a **combined 10 minutes** would be just about right for us this morning.

Dr. Wiley, by the way will soon begin his remarkable **30th year** as **president** of Endicott College, **and his 50th year** as an academic leader. What a record!

You have all been part of one of the most **enterprising** and successful colleges in New England, during its **finest years, so far**.

Endicott College has challenged and changed you all.

Like a **nourishing mother**, Endicott is your **Alma Mater**, for a lifetime to come.

Many of you will go on to **graduate schools** locally, or elsewhere, and some of you, hopefully, will return to become academics, **right here**.

Many others have decided they do not **want** graduate school.... I made that decision, immediately **after** I was rejected from Harvard Business School.

Eventually, most all of you will be part of a workforce, some of you starting very soon. Perhaps even **Monday morning**?? When you begin your first real job, treat it with respect, because you will never have another first job.

My first position was a national sales job, selling **Vicks Vaporub**. That firm had me "**on the road**," staying in hotels every night, during my first six full months, all over the country. That included every single weekend!

My salary was just \$280 per month, plus all expenses, **but what a time I had, and I learned so much.** For any Jack **Kerouac** readers, my Vicks job was the exact same one Kerouac held with Vicks three years earlier, and then wrote about in his best-selling book, “On The Road.”

After my **next** job, for three years with **Gorton’s of Gloucester**, it was time to be on my own, and I soon found a great home in commercial **real estate**.

Along with **working hard**, and building some financial capital, remember that **we all must take chances** sometimes. Don’t be so afraid of taking **smart** chances. That will **usually be necessary**, to get you **wherever** you want to be.

You are coming into your real **adult world** at a **dangerous** time. Political **discourse** is spewing more and more **hateful** anti-immigrant, anti-Hispanic, anti-gay, and other derisive talk all over the country. That talk spreads fear and distrust.

Some liken this political talk *to a plague*. The same plague that spread through Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

Never forget, my friends... **Never forget**, that **when prejudice and INTolerance are tolerated, they are as well, condoned and encouraged.** (Repeat)

Try to be the force that helps to **build bridges**, especially for our marginalized neighbors. So much more than bridges over rivers and highways, these can be **bridges of love**, and **bridges of hope**, and **bridges of understanding**.

Hopefully, these will always be **BRIDGES OF OPPORTUNITY**, too. Let bridges such as these **take us all**, where we otherwise could not go.

Cherish your values, graduates – all of the things that make you **who and what you are**. But be ready also to learn from this new world around you, and **be open to new ideas**.

Cherish your friends, too, and cherish your **relationship** with your **Alma Mater**. Both will become ever more precious as the decades begin to pass.

Set your goals high, Class of 2016, and then just **make them happen!**

Joyce Cummings’ Remarks

So, while Bill was busy building businesses and making money, MY goal was to get through each day with four children, and my **job** was to SPEND the money. Don’t get me wrong – we didn’t have much when we married, and most of it went to the necessities, as Bill put the profits back into the business. His take-home pay at that time was \$25 a week!

We have joked over the years that he married me for my money, because I had the **worldly** sum of \$2,000 in the bank. But, we didn’t care. We both learned at an early age how to be frugal, and our parents emphasized the importance of saving.

Soon enough, business was booming and we could afford a few luxuries, but to this day, we are still pretty frugal in many ways. We ALWAYS fly coach class – that is until this coming August when Bill announced we should fly business class on our way to Venice, to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary. He decided after 50 years of LIVING with him, I **deserved** an upgrade.

As the years passed, Cummings Properties prospered, and in 1986 Cummings Foundation was formed. It has grown substantially and is now one of the several largest PRIVATE foundations in New England.

Bill and I have often been asked why we became deeply involved with philanthropy.

Although it sounds rather Polly Annish to say, Bill and I were both active in church youth groups, and he was a Boy Scout and I was a Girl Scout. Those activities were integral parts of our formative years. And, as I said before, our parents were VERY frugal and supportive in their communities. Simply put, it was how we were raised and, as adults, we chose to continue living that way.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of Liberia, is the world's first elected black female president and Africa's first elected female head of state. She said, "The size of your dreams must always **exceed** your current capacity to achieve them. If your dreams do not **scare** you, they are not big enough."

Well, we have had some dreams, and although I don't think they actually scared us, they did at the time exceed our capacity to achieve them. But, another saying I like is "You can't walk on water if you don't get out of the boat." So we GOT out of the boat and have managed to achieve a great deal.

I read about the symbolism in the Endicott **seal**: circles symbolize unity and commonality. A sailing vessel, quill, book, and map all signify that Endicott welcomes students from all corners of the globe, and spreads knowledge throughout the world. A lion signifying the leader in life, and lines that symbolize a badge of honor, complete the seal.

You, students, are the future leaders of the world. You need to be welcoming to ALL parts of the world and remember that badge of honor. **Get out of the boat** – dream big dreams and work toward fulfilling them, even if it scares you.

Find a way to enrich the world. You don't have to do something big and flashy, but as you begin to give, you will discover there are infinite ways to "do philanthropy." – After I gave a talk in a church setting, a woman came up to me and said she wanted to give but didn't have the resources I have. I didn't know her well, but I did know she was a very caring person and said something about everyone doing what he or she can, etc.

In retrospect, what I wish I had said was that I didn't have the resources of Bill and Melinda Gates – that it didn't matter what we had as long as we gave something – time and talent are often as helpful as money.

Bill and I recently heard a former homeless man tell a story about living on the streets. He said almost every Thursday two college students would come to him with tuna fish sandwiches. They

would sit down and eat with him and talk to him. That was the **best** thing that happened to him every week.

He said those short visits meant more to him than getting big dinners during holidays. The people supplying **THOSE** dinners came once or twice a year and then disappeared. The students came **EVERY** week, for years.

You, yes **ALL** of you, can make the world a better place with your time, your talents and your money.

The only thing I remember from my own college graduation was the advice to read one book a month. That is still good advice, but if you remember only **ONE** thing from **YOUR** commencement speech, let it be this – Gandhi’s directive – “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” That is the best advice ever given – **BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD!**

Again, congratulations – **we wish you well with the rest of your life.**