

Chalkboard

By

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For the past several years I have published my “graduation speech notes” in the *Chalkboard* that has followed the graduation ceremony. This year will be no exception. If could not attend or if it was too hot to listen, here is a second chance if you so desire.

“To the parents, relatives, friends, and school staff that have assembled here today to honor this 2003 graduating class, our largest ever, I offer my sincerest congratulations. Truly this is a fine group of young men and women that sit before you tonight. You have every right to be proud of their and your accomplishment.

I was in a meeting about a month ago when a gentleman made an off-hand remark about how fast time flies and how soon it would be time for Dr. Barrett to make another “march off into the future” talk to the Seniors. He was right about one thing. Time does fly fast. It is hard for me to believe that most of you were 2nd graders when I became your superintendent.

As a group, you have reached the first major milestone in your life. I hope you realize what an accomplishment this is that you have made. You have moved from the playground, to the playing field, and tonight you move into the world that your parents, your teachers, and all these adults who have come to honor you have been living in live for some time.

It is sometimes a hard world to which you are coming. Sometimes it can seem to be unfair. But for the individual that wants to be a success, there are countless opportunities to be successful.

Two hundred years ago in 1803 Thomas Jefferson and the new nation that was America made a purchase from France of 800,000 acres for about 4 cents an acre. One of the 15 states made from that Louisiana Purchase is Arkansas. Try buying an acre of land around Gentry for 4 cents. I say opportunity abounds.

One hundred and fifty years ago in 1853 a man named Levi Strauss decided what the world needed was something he called “waist overalls”. Today the whole world wears his jeans. I say opportunity abounds.

One hundred years ago in 1903 a farm boy with the first name of Henry made what many called the “horseless carriage”. Today the roads are filled with Ford automobiles and trucks. I say opportunity abounds

Yet while opportunity abounds the world is still a hard place. It is a world that needs you right now. That bears repeating. The world needs what you have to offer and it needs it now.

Is that a strange thought to you? Are you sitting there thinking, “Dr. Barrett, you are wrong? I’m just graduating. I’m not even 20 years old. I have nothing of value to offer the world that it does not already have enough of. I don’t even know what I am going to be in life”

If you are thinking that, you may not be thinking deep enough. I repeat myself to you again. The world needs what you have to offer and it needs it right now.

I began this speech saying I had shared this school with you for 11 of your 13 years. Let’s take a quick look at a few things that have been going on in the world in those 11 years.

Major Events of 1993 (You are a second grader)-Waco siege in Texas by FBI, mass suicide of Branch Davidians and David Koresh-First World Trade Center bombing. Terrorists detonate bomb in underground car park. Major Events of 1994 (You are a third grader)-Nelson Mandela is elected President of South Africa. In Central Africa in the small nation of Rwanda genocide occurs when their brothers the Hutu kill 800,000 Tutsi natives. Major Events of 1995 (You are a fourth grader)-Terrorist bombing kills 168 in Oklahoma City. O.J. Simpson Trial. Simpson is acquitted. Major Events of 1996 (You are a fifth grader)-Bomb kills 19 US servicemen in Saudi Arabia. Prince Charles and Princess Diana divorce. Major Events of 1997 (You are a sixth grader)-Princess Diana dies in road accident in Paris, France. Major Events of 1998 (You are a seventh grader)-Prosecutor Kenneth Starr pursues President Bill Clinton for alleged lying about extra-marital affairs. US and Britain bomb Iraq (Operation Desert Fox). Major Events of 1999 (You are an eighth grader)-President Bill Clinton acquitted in Senate impeachment trial. NATO begins bombing Serbian forces in Kosovo. Mass expulsion of Albanians from Kosovo. Y2K scare. Computers predicted to crash at the end of the year. Major Events of 2000 (You are a ninth grader)-Air France Concorde crashes near Paris. US Supreme Court decides in favor of George W Bush in split decision over 2000 Presidential election. Major Events of 2001 (You are a tenth grader)- Terrorists hijack 4 US airlines, and crash them. World Trade Center in New York destroyed. Major Events of 2002 (You are a eleventh grader)-Accountancy and auditing scandals engulf Enron, WorldCom and other US businesses. Washington D.C. Snipers kill 10. Major Events of 2003 (You are a Senior)War in Iraq.

SARS Virus. Bridgette Millsap and Ann Cripps are killed in a tragic car wreck.

Again, I say that the world can be hard. In fact life can sometimes seem to reach right inside to where your heart is breaking and even squeeze it harder. So what does the world need so bad right now that you have to offer? In a world where the estimated population is 6,000,000,000 people and growing, how can 100+ Gentry students offer anything of value? The world is full of doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, preachers, and every other job title that you can imagine. Whatever you are to become in the world, it already has.

Listen carefully. What you are to be is very important. Your education is important. What job you will have is important. Who you choose to live with is very important. But what the world needs right now and what you can offer right now has nothing to do with any of those things.

In the words of an old song sung by Jackie DeShannon, written and composed by Hal David and Burt Bacharach, "What the world needs right now is love. To that I add, what the world needs right now is patience. What the world needs now is understanding. What the world needs right now is kindness. What the world needs now are people who are genuine friends to each other.

The world doesn't need another win. It needs men and women that the children of tomorrow can model their lives after. It needs men and women who are honest, faithful, and true. It needs men and women who will do right when others are doing wrong.

Do not miss my point. These things I say you have to offer are not weak things. Love is never weak. True love is so strong that it will take you to the gates of death and on through them if the need ever exists.

Love is the soldier spilling his blood on foreign soil so that his children can grow up in a free country.

Love is a mother running into a burning house to save her child.

Love is a young girl getting off a bus and stepping into the arms of God to try and help a friend. Love is the boy who knelt beside her.

Love is two people who stand together through the good times and bad.

Love is the man who gives his life so that others may live.

My challenge for this class is for you to let your love spread like a virus. Go out and infect the world tonight with a smile and a kind word. Be a true friend. Let someone know that you care.

In your life to come the money you make, the diplomas you hang on your wall, the cars you drive, the clothes you wear, are things of fleeting value. How you treat other people will last forever.

What the world need right now is the love I have seen you exhibit this year. What the world needs right now is the love you have for others.”