

Chalkboard

By

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In times past, my last article is usually the written text of my address to the graduating seniors when they have chosen me for their speaker. In some years, the graduating class opts for someone else. This is such a year. I commend their choice; the person they chose has devoted an adult lifetime to serving the needs of young men and women. While not an educator per se, the person they chose is indeed a teacher of the highest calling. I have heard the person speak before and I can attest that the seniors have made a great choice.

Hence then comes this *Chalkboard*, the last of the year, for you, the parent. In a few short days after you read this article, your child will walk across the stage to receive a diploma from Gentry High School. The certificate, suitable of course for framing, represents roughly 18 years of your life as well as theirs. When you watch them cross that stage you may very well remember the moment when they graduated from the safety of the womb into the safety of your arms. Maybe the pride and fear you felt then are similar to your feelings now- fear and joy because you know your graduate, now a young adult, is still a baby going out into the big wide world.

Like a church hymn wafting “Precious Memories”, I suspect images of your child growing up will indeed flood your soul as graduation day approaches. Slobbery baby kisses. Colic and ear aches. Sitting on your lap reading a Golden Book. Skinned knees. Family vacations. First pets, now gone. Curls and ribbons. Bicycles without training wheels. Prayers at bedtime. The first baseball over the fence. Bunking parties. Fingernail polish using liquid paper. Maybe a broken bone or two or an unexpected surgery. The tiny perch thought to be a whale. High fever and trips to the emergency room. Checks to the orthodontist. Birthday parties and children’s laughter. That first crush. That first date. Whispering on the telephone. Tears over being grounded. Making the team, not making the team. All A’s, B’s & C’s. Best Citizen. A call from the principal. The death of a loved one. Jeans too tight to button that were just bought two months ago. First broken heart. Tongue rings. 1000 times 1000 “I love you’s”.

Your memories will be your own. Reading the above list probably caused a few synapses to fire but your memories of your child are forever your own. I hope they were all good, but I doubt it; every rose has its thorns.

But then that long awaited day will come and you will see your child standing in line waiting to be called. For yet another time, you will notice that she looks like you in some ways and like that other contributor of DNA in some ways;

and you will realize that a part of yourself, perhaps a chunk of your heart, is standing over there in that line. And you will know it doesn't stop there. You've seen the same expression on his face you saw numerous times on your mother's face. And doesn't that unruly twist of hair look just like that other one's grandpa's unruly twist of hair.

And for some, strange as it might seem, the child that doesn't share a drop of your blood still is as much yours and is as much like you as if stamped out by a cookie-cutter shaped just like you. The Power that Is has His own special delivery service and sometimes he sends a son or daughter that was just meant to be yours to raise.

"Yes," you will think on Graduation Day, "Life does go on and Life is Good". People come and go, children graduate and spread their wings. Life goes on with a bit of the past hard-wired into chromosomes of the present and a glorious hope for the genomes carrying the future of your grandchildren's grandchildren.

But all those thoughts of past and future will fade to the present moment where your child stands next in line with a smile beaming more candlepower than that big yellow plug-in-your-cigarette lighter spotlight Aunt Sue got you last Christmas at the Dollar General store.

You will know right then it was worth it all. Everything. Each sacrifice. Each hug. Each joy and every heartache. This is your child and she or he has made it to a landmark occasion in his or her life.

You did your job as parent. Maybe you wish you had done it better, most of us do. But you did your best and, as your superintendent, I offer my congratulations to both to you and to your graduate.

Graduation belongs to the one on the stage but the one on the stage belongs to you.