

5/19/11

President Von Arx, Deans and Faculty, distinguished graduates of 2011, esteemed parents, families and guests. Thank you for allowing me to share in this special occasion of your graduate school commencement. For the graduates, this is another beginning of your career and what will be your *magnum opus*. I asked my six year old son, Connor, what advice I should give to graduate students. He said, “Don’t tell them they might trip on stones and then tell them some stories that happened to you.” I have to disappoint him and tell you that there are going to be some stones out there that you will trip on, and if I were to tell stories they would be my personal opinions and not reflect the policies or positions of any Branch, or Department of the United States Government.

I want to congratulate all of you in the class of 2011 for your great achievement here at Fairfield. I also want to congratulate and thank all the parents, family and friends

here today for your roles in helping these graduates arrive at this milestone.

As you may have heard, I am an alumnus of this university. I enrolled here 33 years ago as a member of the undergraduate class of 1982. Fairfield University is something of a tradition in my family. My mother worked for many years at the University. My two sisters, Kathleen and Ann, are both alumna of Fairfield, and my daughter is a current student. My brother Kevin had to be different—he went to Georgetown, where I believe he encountered Fr. Von Arx in one of his earlier incarnations.

When I came to Fairfield, I was the first person in my family to attend college. My parents, Martin and Mary Monahan, who are here today, are both authentic Irish-Americans from County Claire, Ireland. They always emphasized education and I feel a profound gratitude to them for always supporting me.

Like most of you, I commuted to Fairfield University. In those days, I drove a yellow Volkswagen Super Beetle. Like many of you, I worked full time, in my case at late Shaw's Supermarket on Black Rock Turnpike.

Like many of you, I spent time in the University Computer Center, but it was a little different in those days. It had the latest mainframe computer, which you programmed with Fortran. That was accomplished by writing the computer program instructions to solve the task, typing these instructions on hundreds of Hollerith cards with a keypunch machine that you had to reserve time on in advance. You then could drop off your stack of cards with Fr. Frederick Kelly SJ, and he would feed the cards into the computer, the Fortran instructions compiled, and perhaps the program ran (unless you typed a single errant character in one of the 80 columns of the 300 or so cards you had to type. Then, you would pick up the results of your computer program a little later in the week. Or more likely, his sympathetic, but unambiguous, message would be that "the severity of your errors prevented successful compilation"

and it was back to the keypunch again. This process didn't lend itself at all to procrastination. Fr. Kelly would look at every single one of those cards for dozens of students, every day, to put each of them on the right path. The people who are getting a degree in information technology are probably shuddering with horror.

When I came to Fairfield, I had an email address on Compuserve.com but since almost no one else did, I almost never got an email. Today, of course, we all get hundreds of emails a day. Probably many of you have updated your Facebook status two or three times since I've been talking. While I was here at Fairfield, Illinois Bell deployed the first Cellular Mobile Phone System and a 24 hours news channel was launched on cable television. We did not understand why someone would want to walk around with a purse/telephone or who would want to watch television news all day, but then again, we thought The Bee Gees and Disco were innovative.

My graduation was inside in the Alumni Hall. (We called it the gym then) We had a Jesuit speaker, the late Thomas R. Fitzgerald, President of Fairfield University and builder of the Recreation Center and creator of the School of Business “There are seven ways to listen,” he said... He talked for 45 minutes. We were on the edge of our seats, but I don’t believe he ever told us what the “seven ways” were.

But the more things change at Fairfield, the more the important things stay the same. A Jesuit education still means “*Cura personalis*”—the education of the whole person, body mind and spirit. A Jesuit education also means that you are called to be “Men and women for others.” What that means is you’re your academic achievement brings with it a responsibility to examine social systems critically and to become directly involved with those who are underprivileged and underserved.

For those of you receiving degrees or certificates in Education, Psychology and Nursing, you’re thinking that

you've got that "men and women for others" thing covered. And you may well be right. But those of you who are receiving degrees or certificates in American Studies, Communication, Creative Writing and Mathematics, Business, Accounting, Finance, Taxation, and Engineering, you're men and women for others too.

As is customary at a commencement, I would like to provide you some life encouragement and advice to help you on your path.

The first thing I want to talk about is your responsibility to act as mentors and teachers for others. One of my professors at Fairfield was the legendary Dr. Donald Ross in the Biology department. In the Fairfield tradition, Dr. Ross was a teacher who showed an acute interest in my future and who knew me well. He was also a mentor who allowed me to fail (through experiments that he must have known would not quite work out) and learn lessons from my failures. One of the important lessons I

learned in Dr. Ross's laboratory might seem to you to be a simple one—try not to burn down the building.

I know that it may seem as quaint as the Fortran in the computer lab, but back when I was an undergraduate we didn't have microwaves, so we heated liquids using a flame from a natural gas Bunsen burner. One day, I left my Bunsen burner unattended, just for a minute, and returned to find that the pressure in the gas line had fallen and sucked the flame back into the rubber hose that went between the burner and the gas line. So my formerly neat and tidy Bunsen burner had transformed itself into a flaming hose of burning rubber, soot and natural gas waiving throughout the room. Dr. Ross's lab was filled with black smoke and burnt rubber. I switched off the gas supply, shut the door and came back later to clean with humility and enthusiasm. If Dr. Ross went in there he surely would toss me down the Embden-Myerhof "parkway" he spoke so much about. For those of you who are not nursing students, that's a pathway for energy metabolism inside cells. If he was aware of this disaster, he

never told me. Instead, he worked tirelessly so that I and all his students would have not only a solid grounding in Biology, but a place at a graduate or medical school that would enable us to build on our knowledge.

Those of you who studied education and the allied professions already know what a profound potential impact you can make on your students. But everyone here will have younger or less experienced colleagues and friends. I anticipate that all of you will have a role as an educator in your future careers. I encourage you to repay the kindness of your professors and mentors here at Fairfield by mentoring others.

The next thing I'd like to tell you is that your graduate education has a profound outcome, but you always have to be open to life's possibilities. I decided to go to medical school in the summer of my third year at Fairfield.

Financing my undergraduate education, not to mention medical school, was a substantial obstacle. At that time, student loans had an interest rate of 21.5 %. A gallon of gas

cost an unprecedented sixty three cents. President Carter frequently spoke about the Misery Index of America, a summation of the unemployment and inflation rates, then at 19.2. Today it averages less than 11. My friends thought that a career in medicine, with the potential for \$100,000 or more in additional debt, was ill advised. We worried that we would need to select certain areas of medical specialization, unspecified by me, just to have an income capable of supporting our loan payments. I could not have imagined the great privilege I had in qualifying for a Navy Health Professions Scholarship, which took away many of my financial worries, nor the tremendous opportunities the United States Navy would have in store for me after my medical education was complete. If you had told me then that I would be on active duty in the Navy for 26 years and counting, that I would have traveled all over the world and worked in nations and meet individuals too numerous to count, I clearly would not have believed you.

Student loan interest rates are lower today, but—somehow—it seems that tuition has gone up -- a lot. I'm sure many of you looked at the state of the economy and

wondered if graduate school was worth the investment. I think that you'll find that your time at Fairfield has expanded your horizons and broadened your options. Fairfield has given you enduring knowledge, but you can't anticipate now what discoveries will arise or what opportunities they will present. You need to develop a resiliency for your base of knowledge going forward in the future. Stay open to new directions – you never know your ultimate course. You will find that areas of your educational experience that you may not have expected to rely on could someday become critically important to your success.

I have had the opportunities to:

- deliver patient care to our Nations heroes, wounded Marines, soldiers and sailors
- learn in the exceptional training opportunities offered in America
- share experiences with a individuals during extreme challenges in their lives
- discover new aspects of pharmacology

- lead academic organizations in undergraduate and graduate medical education
- collaborate in the Nation's large scale science endeavors in Medicine
- explore research questions with multidisciplinary teams
- work in both the Legislative and Executive Branches of Government

I want you to remember that the people who get their names on buildings were real people, like Fr. Kelly, doing their jobs to the best of their abilities, reflecting on their spiritual and moral responsibilities, always open to the pace of progress, and who always said “yes” to an opportunity to teach someone else. I hope all of you will have the opportunity to experience things you never would have believed were possible for you. I hope you will remember to integrate the intellectual and the spiritual aspects of your future achievements. I hope you succeed beyond your expectations and look back on your life with wonder.

I wish you every success, a great future, and an engaging life.