

**Indiana University of Pennsylvania Miller  
Field  
Indiana, Pennsylvania**

**Saturday, May 10, 2003, 11 a.m.**

Good morning, Class of 2003. I stand before you today a very envious person. The great adventure is now about to begin for all of you. I now know how grand it can often be and every day I want to grab every minute I can to continue the symphony. Moments of realization, triumph, challenge, bounty and magic are waiting along the road. It is now time to begin to travel.

Thanks for having me as a guest on your special day. Everyone has told you it's a special day and believe it or not, it actually is. Your graduation today is one of the very few events that take place in life that is touted as being important that actually IS important and also on a pre-set timetable. That combination doesn't happen very often after this. So whether you did it in four years or were on the five, six or multi-year plan, congratulations. Enjoy it. You deserve it.

One thing about college is that it rarely makes much real sense until after you are gone from here. There are people who you met here who became friends who will be with you forever, and each year you will embrace what a gift that is. Some people who are now your friends and so vital to you will just vanish, with an occasional faint memory being triggered --maybe -- down the march of time. It could even be that the person who bails you out in the distant future with a helping hand or a creative idea when you most need help may be someone you disliked here. My best friend today, Anthony Solomita, is the guy who was my freshman year roommate and who I sat next to, bleary eyed and hung over, at our graduation in May 1975. My life is so much fuller and wiser because of him. You'll find that to be true with names of your own friends from your stay in Indiana.

Likewise at the oddest times you will recall some things that happened in college. Most likely those moments are totally insignificant to you now, something that you could not recall if \$1 million was on the line. But that memory will pop up and guide you to a decision. And suddenly, the time you spent at IUP will make a little more sense.

The lessons of the classroom will meld and blur into the what are lessons of lifetime and one day, college may seem to have been just a small part of your life. And that is right and wrong.

I would suggest that you probably have learned a lot more in college than you realize, beyond and in addition to the formal classroom instruction. There were rules you had to follow that may or may not have made sense. That's real life. You probably saw some of those rules broken and justice applied unequally. That's also real life. There are probably excellent professors here and other ones who you wonder how you managed to stay awake in their class -- and why they didn't pay you to sit there.

Your memories may be that of hard work and no play, of no work and lots of play, of lots of foreplay, of creativity of all forms and fashions for all sorts of reasons, or of joy or suffering. You may be eager to get out of here to go on to new challenges or eager to get out of here because four years of misery and cramming and studying dead authors and eating bad food are finally over.

Notice all those "probably-s" I keep saying? That's because **I** loathe the idea that we are all the same in every way. So what applies in some ways to me, will apply to all of you differently. If your time spent being educated here was fruitful at all, that is one of the most beneficial lessons you have learned. The first step is learning who you are -- because that is what your life and using your **TOTAL** education **will** be about.

Whatever your experiences at IUP, I will guarantee you have learned something valuable. Just trust yourself when the light comes on in your head to say, "Hmmm, this makes sense." In fact, this is the most valuable lesson I took with me from college, the one that has helped me the most through my life when I am smart enough to apply it: Your brain works best when it is working together, hand in glove, with what your gut instincts are often shouting. College and schooling are terrific for getting the brain going; they are not always good for teaching us how to us how to listen to and believe our gut instincts.

College can be counter-productive to some of the types of thinking that you will need to live, to survive, to prosper and enjoy the world, to defeat those scourges and the Lilliputians, to end-run the multitude of Tin Horn Authority toadies who every day will try and **put** you down because you have a brain and a burning desire to be yourself.

Individuality is often praised fabulously in word in this world -but not so often praised in deed and genuine gratitude or benefit. Beware -- they are all out there lurking to make your life debt ridden, boring and full of unnecessary instruction. They are jealous and lazy and abhor it when someone like you is happy and successful. You managed to get through here, hopefully, with your brain teased in the right ways and the seeds of curiosity and' determination planted deeply. Hold onto that and you'll be well.

So what are the lessons of life that I, since I was asked to speak, am to supposed to know and convey. My list is long and eclectic, which reflects my life. I'll pass along a few that I promise will make sense some day. Some are mine, some come from friends:

- Listen frequently to the singing of Buddy Holly, Patsy Cline, Billie Holiday, Judy Garland, Johnny. Hartman and Frank Sinatra.'
- Every chance you get, watch the movie "Casablanca." It has almost all the answers.
- When you lose, don't lose the lesson.
- Respect yourself and others, and take responsibility for all your actions.
- Remember that not getting what you want when you want it is sometimes a wonderful stroke of luck.
- Learn the rules so you know how to break them properly -- and cleverly.
- Don't let a little dispute injure a great friendship.
- Always dance slow and kiss slow. NEVER dance fast or kiss fast.
- When you realize you've made a mistake, take immediate steps to correct it.
- Spend some time alone every day.
- Open your arms to change, but don't let go of your values.
- Remember that silence is sometimes the best answer.

- Live a good, honorable life. Then when you get older you can think back and enjoy it for a second time.
- Share your knowledge and your smiles. It's a way to achieve immortality.
- Be gentle with the earth.
- It's not the wrapping paper. It's what's inside.
- Once a year, go someplace -- near or far -- you have never been before.
- The best relationship is one in which your love for each other exceeds your need for each other.
- Judge your success by what you had to give up in order to get it.
- Don't worry about grammar, spelling or punctuation. That is why we pay copy editors.
- And above all else, approach love and cooking with reckless abandon.

But I don't want to bore you with my lessons of life. After all, they are from MY life and we are here to talk about YOUR life. Candidly, in part I am here because I need you to help me. Even I am going to get old someday and I have a daughter and I want the world she is growing up in to be better than the one we have right now -- and I have to ask you to do that for me.

No generation since World War Two has come into college at the start of their four year cycle and left with so many profound changes on the world's stage as you did when you entered IUP in 1999. The new millennium of hope that walked hand-in-hand with you in your freshman year has quickly mutated into one of extreme challenge.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, have dramatically changed the role the United States -- and thus your generation -- will be called upon to follow in the decades to come. And terrorism is not the only great task you will be confronted with and I am asking you to solve. There are challenges from the massive mistakes of my generation and others in terms of fiscal and moral irresponsibility, to financial calamities here and abroad, to the pending collapse of international systems that exist so fragile today, to bold diseases like SARS to floundering political leadership. In other words --

you all have to rescue the world.

Maybe you want to reconsider leaving college?

Now, I admit I don't know how to perform all those miracles I have just asked you to do. I've have tried and won a few good fights. But that is one of the keys -- to fight. To paraphrase Shakespeare, there are no small battles, just small fighters. You'll find your part of the world, and then tackle the obstacles in that part. Do your fight there and we all win.

Be agile. Be "so on the ball." Smile inside. You'll know right from wrong when you see it. The difference is pretty clear despite the best attempts we and others do to fuzz it. Ask lots of questions. Be skeptical. There are at least THREE SIDES to every story. And please, please, please, don't take no for an answer. Don't buy the line those who are no longer hungry for life might say -- "It's always done THIS way," they say. "Mr. Columbus, you can't sail west because you will fall off the edge of the world!!!" they say. "That is just mold, Dr. Fleming, what possible what medical value can that have?" "You call THAT art, Mr. Warhol?"

Hogwash. Today the phrase is called "thinking out of the box. But it is just being hungry for knowledge that leads to more curiosity and more achievement -- dramatic or measured, quiet or triumphant. Nothing is impossible in this world -- with the possible exception of Edinboro EVER beating IUP on the football field.

And evolve. I read through and finalized these remarks Wednesday night in the kitchen of my home. A soft rain was falling outside, perfect for the rose bushes and beans and tomatoes and other things my 3-year-old daughter Gabriella and I had planted earlier in the week. She is upstairs sleeping as I type, and the joy she brings me and the fears and determination I have of being a good parent ignited things I never planned for, expected or envisioned the day I graduated. But life gave me this unexpected blessing -- hand in hand with the triumphs of my chosen profession -- and I am thankful I am wise enough to plant my nails deeply into it and not let go. I let myself evolve into places I never had any clue that I wanted to go. So should you.

And find something you value. When you care about something, you value it. And when you value it, you fight for it. If you don't care or fight for it, you will lose it -- and it is a zillion times harder to get back something once is it gone.

Believe in things. I so love being a reporter and what our First Amendment and our Constitution demands of people in my profession. I am passionate about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and doing my job truthfully and nobly.

All my life I have been a reporter. I deal with people every day. I am fortunate to have

done what I wanted to do in my profession, to fight for justice, to bring the truth to people, to expose villains and help those in need, to be a voice for the voiceless.

I found my path and despite bumps and holes, mistakes and regrets, it has been fulfilling. Yet not one class where I went to college directly taught me how to do this. BUT -- four years at Washington and Jefferson College prepared me to deal with people and soar with the marvels the world can offer. Stephen Crouse and Allan Lee taught me how to understand history and government and how things are SUPPOSED to work. Richard Easton and James Gargano taught me how words on a page can flow together like music in a symphony. Peter Skutches and Hugh Taylor showed me how to travel abroad -- how the entire world is indeed a stage -- and learn different perspectives and voices. Classmates and administrators and townies taught me about trust and betrayal, fun and sympathy, and how to offer a helping hand.

I have survived -- and lived -- a half century now and look forward to at least another 50 years. And I have been most happy and most fulfilled when I have followed my path. All along people have invested in me, as they have already with you. They are part of you now and they live through your actions. I have made mistakes and wish I could correct them; I can't. But I don't make them again if I remember.

A crying baby in Haiti sounds EXACTLY the same as a baby crying in Serbia, in Burundi, in Afghanistan, in El Salvador, in Thailand and in Pennsylvania. And their loved ones want the same thing for them and their families as we want. I say this because Americans can almost always travel anywhere they want and then leave when they want, get water and some kinds of food and health care and education when they want. But it is dreadfully misleading to think that everyone else has all the advantages you and I have. You have to understand others; then you really become wise and you really can move forward and learn who you are.

Ten years ago this spring, almost to the day, on a Friday afternoon that was as dreary as this morning is bright, was a dramatic discovery day for me. I was in Sarajevo, the second year of covering the most horrid war in Europe since World War Two. Unlike graduation day at college, I had no timetable for this event -- but that day I learned that, indeed, I had been well schooled.

It was a far off war and, for many members of my profession in my generation, it was the time to find out who we were and to make sure we did not repeat the mistakes of our predecessors. Traveling in a humanitarian supply convoy into Sarajevo we were attacked on, both sides and the truck I was in was hit by a rocket propelled grenade. The truck was set ablaze and the driver was knocked semi-conscious. Hot metal shrapnel pierced my head, arms and legs. My hearing was lost from the blast, blood clogged my eyes, smoke jammed my lungs and I had no idea where I was, totally disoriented in the smoky attack. But I ran my hands over my body and found my limbs were still thankfully attached. I inhaled

deeply several times, found no major holes in me -- and then it was time to act.

The driver who had been especially mean to me was helpless. I could have left then without him and easily taken care of my own safety but I knew that was wrong. So I carried this man -- more than six-and-a half feet tall and more than 250 pounds -- to safety, even though I didn't like him. On the now much slower way to safety a bullet-nicked my right arm. Only later, after people told me, did I realize I saved his life.

That day I had to speak two foreign languages in order to survive -- Serbo-Croatian and French -- and not one word of English. When the doctors from the French Foreign Legion plucked the metal out of my face, arms and elsewhere, they apologized because they had no anesthesia to spare. What could I say? It took me three years to get out of French One in high school. And anyway, they were helping me.

It was not a fun afternoon. But I had been truly tested--and I realized completely who I really was. That day there was no time or reason to deal with the superficial structures that other try to foist upon us. Being "ME" saved my life that day and opened the door to the. life in front of me. Large or small, dramatically or seemingly and I put in quotes "SEEMINGLY"--small events will happen that will be your continued education in life beyond college. Watch with your eyes, listen with your-ears, taste with your tongue, feel with your fingers and soul.

That day in Sarajevo, I picked myself up, dusted myself off and went forward.

Five years- ago, on this very day, May 10, I got married. Most of my friends were in more of a stunned shock over that event than my being wounded. But I knew in my brain and my gut -- and this time my heart joined in -- were showing me something wonderful in a way I never expected and I seized it.

Now today, here I am -- again doing something I never expected to have the chance or the courage to do. This is the first time I have ever given a commencement address, so like all those professors and colleagues and friends who are part of me, in every word I write and decision I make, now all of you are also part of me. Thank you for that.

Those three events -- the attack, the marriage and this commencement -- took place in the same season over the span of one short decade. Not one did I visualize happening to me when I sat where you all are sitting today. That day I wanted a full, exciting and meaningful life. Today, I have been rewarded for using ALL of my education and for still being hungry for life, and so shall you.

If I can do it, so can you. I don't believe I know a single one of you graduates personally, but I don't have to, to know that each of you have skills and smarts and creativity and talents in YOUR way--not the way your parents or friends or professors may have tried to define it -- but in ways that are you, that will make you happy and a good person to yourself, to those you care about, to those who need your help and to our world. It doesn't matter what you do in life, it is who you are.

Just remember that on those times when you fall into the dirt -- and everyone does sooner or later-- and when people are shooting at YOU in all kinds of different ways beyond just bullets, do what I did 10 years ago:

Pick yourself up, dust yourself off and go forward.

And one more thing, please. One small favor. Drop me a line in 10 years to tell me how you are doing. I'll be easy to find, I guarantee it.

So there you are, class of 2003. Congratulations, congratulations, CONGRATULATIONS !!!! Thanks again for this honor of letting me join you today. Welcome to the fight. I know we'll win. Now go celebrate.