

## Commencement Speech Harrison College 2017

President Clampitt, Dean Newhouser, faculty, Families, honored guests and above all graduating students

I am honored to be here at the 2017 graduation ceremony for the students of Harrison College.

לֹא לָנוּ יְהוָה, לֹא-לָנוּ: כִּי-  
לְשִׁמְךָ, יִתֵּן כְּבוֹד *Not unto us, O Lord, not  
unto us,  
but to thy name give the  
glory.*

*Non nobis, Domine, non  
nobis,  
sed nomini tuo da gloriam.*

**This was the motto of the Knights Templar, but taken from Psalm 115 of the Hebrew Bible and used according to legend by Henry V after the successful battle of Agincourt.**

**From Shakespeare to Rudyard Kipling these words have inspired the very notion that human success must at some level be referred back to the Almighty One. And we follow this tradition**

**today. All our academic and professional achievements...**

***Non nobis domine non nobis....***

**this is the foundation of our spiritual struggles and strength.**

Now the only words of wisdom I have today is from the great sage of our time Stephen Colbert who had 2 pieces of advice:

1. Being approved for a credit card does not mean that you have to apply for it and...
2. The best career advice is to get your own TV late night show and become rich.!

I first became aware of your program when my office manager received a call asking whether we might host students who were in need of exposure to patients in a clinic setting.

We have been delighted to have students from your college pass through our clinic and have benefited from their excitement and zeal,

You know my clinic specializes in neurology and chronic pain management and our patients paradoxically, coming to us for treatment and relief, end up being our greatest teachers.

What have they taught me? What could they teach me? What have I learned?

I am the son of a Holocaust survivor, not one who endured the horrors, but one who escaped in the *kinder-transport*, a humanitarian train bringing some 2000 refugee children from Europe to Britain in 1939.

Leaving his parents on that fateful day in the *banhoff* train station in Vienna my 17-year-old father's world collapsed as he was never to see his parents again.

He never spoke about it, but I am sure he felt much guilt having left them, and that trauma has somehow percolated down, and taught me the price one pays for survival is also transmitted to one's children. Yet he remains eternally optimistic in the face of such loss and looks only to the future and his great grandchildren.

My mother was a concert violinist who practiced hours a day but who never felt she was good enough (even though she won the all-India violin competition!)

I remember her telling me how she performed for Vaughn Williams at the Royal College of Music in London 1941. Her desire for excellence made her appear as a seemingly brutal mother since I was denied the usual sport activities after school, being forced to practice the piano daily for an hour. Yet she was harder on her own self.

My mother is 93 and my father is 96. They have taught me that with passing time all the resentments of childhood fade as you look after them in their old age, as they become dependent on you, and the filter of time and love forces you to confront your own mistakes in child-rearing.

My father's optimism I did not inherit; my mother's self critical drive I did!

Every morning there is a little voice in my head I call it the *Kritik* that screams...this is another day! You have accomplished nothing! Get out of bed and get to work! It sounds like my mother's voice but I cannot be sure! It has driven me and never allows me to lay-about or waste a single day of my life.

Coming back to our mission, our approach to patient care has radically changed during my professional life. When I trained in medicine the doctor knew best, his word was not to be challenged and there was a reverence when the doctor in the white coat walked into the room followed by his entourage of residents and students. He pronounced the diagnosis and the patient was directed to follow the course of therapy...no questions asked.

Today our function is healthcare whether it be medical assistant, nurse, allied health professional, lab technician or surgeon is to provide information and benefit/risk analysis so that our patients can make intelligent choices themselves, about their healthcare. We used to make life and death decisions at the beginning and end of a person's voyage on this earth...no longer...we now bow to the religious spiritual ethnic and cultural norms of the patient and their family in deciding whether to extend life via artificial means.

The old style hierarchical approach has been replaced by a new type of collaborative one.

Back to Old Henry V

In Shakespeare's albeit fictional account, King Henry V begins his speech in response to [Westmoreland's](#) expressions of dismay at the English army's lack of troop strength. Henry rouses his men by expressing his confidence that they would triumph, and that the "**band of brothers**" fighting that day would be able to boast each year on [St. Crispin's Day](#) of their glorious battle against the French.

At that moment he became the inner king as well....not just in title.

I learned what the meaning of "**band of brothers**" meant, not in medical school but in the camaraderie and human commonality I share with my patients, the "perfect imperfections" to quote a popular love song... the human values and foibles we share.... It is the common good of the doctor patient relationship that has shaped my values and attitudes over decades.

My patients have taught me the following:

1. Life is fragile.... all too often I read their obituaries and am reminded of this single fact, due to the very nature of chronic illness I am privileged to follow my

patients for years, developing a knowledge of their lives successes and failures. I share in their joys and more often their human suffering and tragedies.

2. I have come to learn that pain is one's best friend...despite the human need to relieve physiological pain, it tells the body that something is wrong, and anesthetizing the pain with opioids, which we do as physicians, has a dark side to it. I am humbled by those who endure stoically the vicissitudes of the ravishing nature of neurological disease.

3. One of the more profound insights my patients taught me was that poverty makes illness worse, for without the resources to manage illness the usual stresses of work, family, and relationships are pushed to the breaking point and often the patient suffers alone with no partner, nor support mechanism. This little understood fact goes unnoticed by those in Washington wishing to tinker with the little government resources the poor enjoy currently.

(oops... I'm in uniform...no political comments allowed!)

4. Those who have faith are made softer by illness, for they have a narrative or larger myth by which to make sense of their pain and suffering. I am amazed as to how much more those with deep abiding faith are able to endure..I am envious of them at times.

I would go so far as to say that

The human experience of illness (whether psychological attitude or spiritual) is as much a determining factor of quality of life and outcome as the physical diagnosis and statistical prognosis. This is finally getting the attention it deserves in the literature.

5. Much of what I do is teaching my patients how to suffer, how to deal with chronic illness and pain, how to manage their lives all the while in pain. I was never taught this in medical school! I had to learn this on the job.

6. Suffering is more than pain. It is the human experience of pain and is determined by cultural religious family and ethnic influences. I have learned to be more sensitive to these influences and determinants as I make recommendations that might conflict with these values.



Finally....

7. In an age where most people have lost faith or merely profess, our job as healers is to provide a new framework or narrative of meaning to help our patients endure or suffer better. In a secular age this means at times providing a new mythical frame for our band of brothers to be inspired to lose weight stop smoking and change lifestyle habits to turn around the progression of their disease.

Many of you are going into the medical profession or its allied health-care practices business or law...

In all of these approaches the medical assistant, allied healthcare professional and other skills you have been taught here will be invaluable as you begin your careers, and join the team. The band of brothers concept means we are all on the same page. We treat the patient with respect and provide compassionate care at all times.

I want you to see your decision as a vocation. The word comes from the Latin which means to be called to....

It is not a mere job, an income producing trade, but a vocation, you are being summoned, to serve others in their pain and suffering.

The hallmark of this different attitude is one-word compassion.

You will be challenged I promise you...many times you will have to dig deep deep deep into your well of compassion, just like marriage, but if you can, it will make you a better person and will affect all your other relationships in life. 3 rings

I cannot teach compassion; I can only act it out.

As you all embark on your chosen careers, some of you have brought life experience to the table and have had other careers, some of you have failed and changed course in life, some of you have experienced dis-appointment already...I urge you to make use of all these experiences as you face the future as they are your best teachers.

I never got wise by my successes, only by my failures and boy do I have many of those!!! Ask my Jewish mother in law!!

I tell my children. If you need advice...ask me soon, for as I get older I know less and less and can advise you less and less, for the older I get the more I realize that you cannot teach life to another, you cannot guarantee success to another, you can only live your own life on your own terms, and if others are inspired by your experience they will learn from it.

Steve jobs

My best teachers were my failures not my mentors. True they pointed me along the way but only my own disappointments and failures taught me the hard way what not to do and what to do.

My biggest lesson was not to cut corners, there are no shortcuts, there is only one way the hard way, there is only one road, and it is a rocky one.

And so, as Neil Gaiman said,

“go and make interesting mistakes, make amazing mistakes, make glorious and fantastic mistakes, break rules, leave the world more interesting ofr your being here...make good art” to which I would add make your life a work of art...

If I sound pessimistic blame my mother!

I am not. I just try not to fool myself, about me, about others, about what is being fed to me by those selling something whether it be a drug rep or Fox News!

BUT I DO

have faith in the process. This wonderful thing we call life is so precious so fragile, please remember to wake up each morning and feel grateful, I promise you it goes very quickly, I think time accelerates and before you know it you will be attending your own children's graduation. As Allan Alda said

"the older I get the only thing that speeds up is time. It is true time is a thief, but time also leaves something in exchange, with time comes experience."

I ask you to at least stay young! This means allow opportunities to grab you and inspire you.

A couple of years ago a Colonel in the Indiana Guard Reserve approached me about forming a special unit, a medical command, to respond to mass casualty terrorism and natural disasters in the state. I was initially shocked (I am in my sixties with no prior service) then amused (I was overweight) and finally convinced he was being serious!

Since then I have gone back to school (FEMA courses) and officer training etc....at my age!!! I feel like I am an aging boy scout earning my ribbons (I was never allowed to attend as a child) ....

Grab opportunities as they arise, if you have faith the Lord is sending you a message, if you don't life is sending you a message.

As David Brooks once said:

“you have to give to receive, you have to surrender to something outside yourself to gain strength within yourself. You have to conquer your desire to get what you crave. Success leads to the greatest failure which is arrogance and pride. Failure can lead to the greatest success which is humility and learning. In order to fulfil yourself you have to forget

yourself. In order to find yourself you have to lose yourself”

I wish you all success in your future endeavors

And may you all be blessed to suffer well for suffer you will!!!

DON'T LET US DOWN

FULFIL YOUR OWN UNIQUE MISSION

*Non nobis, Domine, non nobis,  
sed nomini tuo da gloriam.*