Commentary

Graduation Address to Loma Linda University School of Dentistry

Arthur A. Dugoni

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Guest Editorial

Graduation Address - Loma Linda University

June 8, 1984

Arthur A. Dugoni, D.D.S., M.S.D.

President Olsen, Dean Klooster, University Officials, Faculty and Staff, Families, Friends and Distinguished Graduates:

Congratulations to the Class of 1984 on the successful completion of your dental education. I want to thank each of you for allowing me to share this special moment in your life. Your faculty has prepared you well for the practice of dentistry and you have responded in a magnificent way. When you think about the hard work, effort, stress and the pain and yes the frustration, I hope that you will look back and take time to remember the accomplishment. Savor it - You have earned it - You deserve it! I know that this faculty will miss you. They have taken the time to be part of you and they have given you the best that they had. Believe me, you had some wonderful role models. When we reflect on your education and its costs - well over \$50,000.00 - there is a need to thank a lot of people who made it possible. We all know it has been worth it because it produces at least four very proud people - the student, some very special person, the Mama, and the Pauper.

Many of you have seen the award winning film, *Kramer vs. Kramer*. In it you witnessed the debut of Justin Henry, who at the age of seven was really the star of the show. As you recall, in that movie, Justin had to play a very moving role when his mother was going to take him away from

his father. It was a scene that was going to demand a lot of tears and crying and Justin having the opportunity to watch many actors prepare for difficult parts, walked over to an empty room on the set and tried to think of sad thoughts. He thought of Chipper, his golden retriever dying and so when he did the crying scene it was fantastic - it was so good that it only took one take.

When the scene was over, co-star Dustin Hoffman walked over and picked him up in his arms, but little Justin did not stop crying, and Dustin Hoffman thought, "What have we done?" Maybe this little boy's forgotten what is pretend and what is reality. Dustin tried to tell him that he was brilliant, but he was still crying his eyes out and finally, Dustin Hoffman asked him how he felt, and little Justin looked up and said, "I feel fantastic" with tears rolling down his face. And somewhere in that moment our seven-year-old had become an actor.

Now I am not sure at what precise moment you graduates became doctors. Was it during the preparation for state licensure? Was it when you tried to get your final bridge checked off, or was it sometime during the rehearsal? Or will it be today when the President of the University gives you your degree? I am not sure at what precise moment that you became a doctor, but I hope that like little Justin Henry that yes, even through the tears, the tears of joy, or the tears of frustration,

of struggle, of accomplishment, that you can say, when they ask you: How was it? How do you feel? - that you can look back at your education, at Loma Linda University, its Faculty, the School of Dentistry, and like little Justin says: Fantastic, Fantastic, Fantastic!!!

Another reason you are here this morning is so that I, the University, the Faculty, and Staff could welcome you to a profession - to the profession of Dentistry. You have been given a great heritage and a fine profession. But what of the world that you are about to face? What kind of future does it hold for you? Let me quote from a noted television commentator - Walter Cronkite:

"It is a gloomy moment in the history of our country, not in the lifetime of most men has there been so much grave and deep apprehension - never has the future seemed so doubtful as at this time. The domestic economic situation is in utter chaos, our dollar is weak throughout the world. Prices are so high as to be utterly impossible.

The political cauldron seethes and bubbles with uncertainty. Russia hangs like a cloud, dark and silent upon the horizon - it is a solemn time. Of our troubles no man can see the end!"

Then Mr. Cronkite adds:

"That was published over 122 years ago in Harper's Weekly Magazine - October, 1857. And with all that trouble that sounds *so* familiar, our nation survived and prospered. There's no reason we should be of faint heart today."

Certainly inflation and other problems of the new age of expensive and scarce energy will place tremendous pressures on our profession, our nation, and their respective economies. While tackling the herculean task, our profession and nation must demonstrate anew the daring and flexibility that were once its hallmark. Capitalism may not be working well enough, but there is no evidence to show that the fault is in the system or that there is a better alternative. For all of its obvious blemishes and needed reforms, capitalism alone holds out as the most creative and dynamic force that any civilization has ever discovered - the power of the free, ambitious individual.

Welcome to the world of free enterprise! You did not make a mistake in selecting dentistry as

your profession - it is free enterprise at its best. It is filled with remarkable opportunities for individual growth, initiative, innovation, and satisfaction. You have been well prepared to meet the challenges of the 1980's.

The future holds many exciting opportunities. Opportunities to serve your community, your profession, and your patients. Look forward to the future as an opportunity for continued growth. There are many skills to perfect, and special areas of knowledge to pursue. Maintain your inquisitive searching mind and your quest for excellence.

Look towards your profession as an opportunity to serve your fellow man. Learn that to give is, in itself, a reward and that to care for one another is the real purpose of life. Continue to develop your skills so that you can be an outstanding physician/healer.

Albert Sweitzer said, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know, the only ones among you who will really be happy are those who have sought and found *how* to serve." Go out into your communities and learn the real meaning of service, by treating patients with skill, concern, compassion and integrity. Involve yourselves in your community so that you can be a builder of the future for our country and its citizens. Set goals for continued growth in your professional life, by designed and consistent continuing education programs. Remember, education has only opened the opportunity for knowledge and the talent that you can expect to develop. You are not at the finish line, you have earned the right to be at the starting point.

True enough we all have obligations and duties toward our fellow men. But, it does seem curious enough that in modern, neurotic society, men's energies are consumed in making a living and rarely in living itself. It takes a lot of courage for a man to declare, with clarity and simplicity, that another purpose to life is to enjoy it. Remember - where you place your time, you place your life, where you place your life, you place your love.

Do not bury your heart and souls in the practice of dentistry so that you exclude all else, but rather learn to live, as well as making a living. Grow, participate, communicate, for the achieve-

ment of a career is not an end, but only a means.

If I were to wish for anything for you, I would not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye, which every young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints - possibility never, and what wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating, as the possibility. I disagree with the late Mayor Daley of Chicago, who once said, "I look toward the future with nostalgia." Instead, we should savor the future and its challenges, because they open up opportunities and they allow us to *invest ourselves* in the future. Robert Kennedy reminded us that, "some men see things as they are and ask why - you should dream things that never were, and ask why not."

More than 5,000 years ago a sumerian found a better way. He invented the wheel, perhaps the world's greatest single technological achievement. Since then, millions of individuals - some celebrated and some unknown, some by design and some by accident, have found a better way. Thomas Edison found a better way: the incandescent lamp. Henry Ford: the mass produced automobile. Alexander Graham Bell: the telephone. Elisha Otis: the power elevator.

The challenge for the dental profession in the 1980's and the 1990's will be to find a better way. A better way to reduce barriers to care, a better way to fund education, student aid, and research, a better way to increase dental care awareness and the dental health of all of our citizens. We need to continue to reach out for high technology and quality education and research - for innovation which has been the source of our wealth and for standards and quality of care which have made our profession the envy of the rest of the world.

But, first we need to renew our faith in ourselves and in our profession. Walter Cronkite appeared in San Francisco, before the Commonwealth Club, several months ago, and stated: "More than a century ago Walt Whitman wrote a poem about his country that began - I hear America singing - it has been a long while since any one claimed to hear America singing. There is a noise in the land, but it is made, mainly, by Americans

blaming each other for the mess we are in. As the decibel level rises, our confidence in ourselves and in our institutions falters. But, what I want to say is - *shut up* for a minute. Listen carefully and quietly for a while: you can still make out America singing, although the sound may be a little faint. The tune is there, and the spirit and the purpose are still there. This nation, groaning economically with unemployment, in a monstrous unprecedented deficit, nevertheless, puts out an annual product worth almost three trillion. The gross national product of the next greatest economy is only 55% of that. Our national image has, indeed, been tarnished in recent years, but nobody is trying to crash the gates of the third world these days. A barbed wire around the Warsaw Pact is not there to keep immigrants out. America remains the beacon of liberty, the hope and model for most of those able to exercise any choice, at all. About half of the world's people enjoy no freedom at all: no political and civil rights, nor economic freedom.

We are living today, through a technological revolution, potentially more profound, socially, politically and economically than the industrial revolution. We have scarcely begun to identify its implications and adapt our institutions to cope. We can get this country moving with a full head of steam again, if we look at our problems with a kind of principle pragmatism that this nation's founders had to employ. It has been a while since anyone has claimed to hear America singing, but they knew something that we seemed to have forgotten: "to hear the music, you also have to sing along."

During the last forty years we have seen great advances in our profession. We have been "singing along" - listen to the tune! Through scientific research, we have been able to realize how to care for and essentially prevent man's major dental diseases. We have gone from ignorance to understanding in periodontal disease and dental decay and we have advanced dramatically in terms of the comprehensive care we are now able to offer each patient.

Although the 1980's will undoubtedly bring periods of retrenchment, this decade also promises

the opportunity to use our knowledge, experience, and understanding in new and innovative ways, but we need to continue to "sing along." Perhaps one of the greatest things that will happen to our profession will be the reduction of the restorative needs of our patients, by fluoridation and preventive dentistry techniques. Dentistry's future will be in periodontics, functional occlusion, oral pathology, chronic pain modalities, temporomandibular joint dysfunction, implantology, oral medicine, genetic engineering, behavioral sciences, care for the handicapped, care for the aged and disadvantaged, and preventive, functional and adult orthodontics.

When these eventualities fully hit the profession, the horizons for service to mankind will be opened remarkably, and the opportunities for personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment will truly reflect what it means to be a part of a learned profession - a doctor.

This is an exciting time for our profession - it is a time of change and challenges. We should welcome change and savor the challenges, because they open up opportunities to shape the future.

My God, what a fantastic time to be alive! But remember to be alive - to live life in wonder.

As you travel through the rest of your life, serving mankind, growing personally and professionally, do not lose sight that another purpose of life is to *enjoy it*. Learn to live, as well as to make a living. There is an essay that is a favorite of mine called "The Station" by Robert J. Hastings, and I think it would be appropriate for you to keep it in mind, as you travel on the road of life:

"Tucked away in our subconscious is an idyllic vision. We see ourselves on a long trip that spans the continent. We are traveling by train. Out the windows we drink in the passing scene of cars on nearby highways, of children waving at a crossing, of cattle grazing on a distant hillside, of smoke pouring from a power plant, of row upon row of corn and wheat, of flatlands, and valleys, of mountains and rolling hillsides, of city skylines and village halls.

But uppermost in our minds is the final destination. On a certain day at a certain hour we will pull into the station. Bands will be playing and flags waving. Once

we get there so many wonderful dreams will come true and the pieces of our lives will fit together like a completed jigsaw puzzle. How restlessly we pace the aisles, damning the minutes for loitering - waiting, waiting, waiting for the station.

"When we reach the station, *that will be it*" we cry! "When I'm 18." "When I finish dental school?" "When I buy my dental building?" "When I buy a new 450 SL Mercedes Benz!" "When I put the last child through college." "When I have paid off the mortgage!" "When I get a promotion." "When I reach the age of retirement, I shall live happily ever after!"

Sooner or later we must realize there is no station, no one place to arrive at once and for all. The true joy of life is the trip. The station is only a dream. It constantly outdistances us.

"Relish the moment" is a good motto, especially when coupled with Psalm 118:24: "This is the day which the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it." It isn't the burdens of today that will drive men mad. It is the regrets over yesterday and the fear of tomorrow. Regret and fear are twin thieves who rob us of today.

So stop pacing the aisles and counting the miles. Instead, climb more mountains, eat more ice cream, go barefoot more often, swim more rivers, watch more sunsets, laugh more, cry less, forgive more, pray more, thank more, love more. Life must be lived as we go along. The station will come soon enough.

Well, it is time to get on with it - I won't wish you luck because luck won't do it. Making the most of what you have will. I wish each and every one of you all the happiness you can pack into one lifetime and "May the road rise to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face. May the rain fall softly upon you, and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand."

Editors Note:

This guest editorial was brought to our attention by Dr. Logan Barnard, Associate Professor of Orthodontics and Speech Pathology, Loma Linda University. Dr. Barnard was one of the pioneer members of IAOM and we are indebted to him for his continued interest and for sharing this inspirational message with us.