

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

FRANK SHANKWITZ

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

AUTUMN 2015 GRADUATION CLASS

DECEMBER 20, 2015

PRESIDENT MICHAEL DRAKE, MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, FACULTY, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, PARENTS, AND ESPECIALLY FOR TODAY, MEMBERS OF THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY AUTUMN GRADUATING CLASS OF 2015.

I AM VERY HONORED AND HUMBLED TO BE INVITED TO SPEAK TO YOU TODAY ON YOUR VERY IMPORTANT OCCASION. I AM A RETIRED HOMICIDE DETECTIVE FROM THE ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY. I ONLY MENTION THIS BECAUSE DURING MY 41 YEAR CAREER AS A POLICE OFFICER, I CONDUCTED THOUSANDS OF BACKGROUND INVESTIGATIONS ON SUSPECTS. THE NEW WORD FOR BACKGROUND CHECKS IS "VETTING", WHICH LEADS ME TO WONDER HOW THE COMMENCEMENT SELECTION COMMITTEE EVER SELECTED ME TO SPEAK TO YOU TODAY FOLLOWING THEIR VETTING PROCESS.

ISSUE NUMBER 1 - I'M FROM PAC 12 COUNTRY. AND ISSUE NUMBER 2 - AS A VERY YOUNG BOY, I USED TO LIVE IN WHAT I BELIEVE YOU CALL - "UP NORTH" OR "MICHIGAN". I'M NOT SURE HOW THAT SLIPPED THROUGH THE VETTING PROCESS.

THE ONLY THING AT THE MOMENT THAT IS PREVENTING YOU FROM RECEIVING YOUR MUCH EARNED AND DESERVED DIPLOMA, IS MY PRESENTATION. WITH THAT IN MIND, I PROMISE TO KEEP MY REMARKS SHORT, HOPING I WILL OBTAIN YOUR FORGIVENESS FOR HAVING LIVED, "UP NORTH".

I WAS PREDOMINATELY RAISED IN SELIGMAN, A SMALL TOWN IN NORTHERN ARIZONA. IF ANY OF YOU RECALL THE DISNEY ANIMATED MOVIE "CARS," THE FICTIONAL TOWN OF RADIATOR SPRINGS WAS MODELED AFTER SELIGMAN, ARIZONA. BEING THE SON OF A VERY POOR SINGLE MOTHER, I STARTED WORKING FULL TIME AT THE AGE OF 10, AND LEARNED HOW TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF. I SOON LEARNED THAT WHATEVER NEGATIVES I ENCOUNTERED IN MY YOUNG LIFE, I COULD WORK TO TURN THOSE NEGATIVES INTO POSITIVES. THAT'S A THOUGHT I HOPE TO INSTILL IN YOU TODAY. IN YOUR FUTURE YEARS, WHENEVER YOU ENCOUNTER A SITUATION, OR WHEN SOMEONE TELLS YOU THAT YOU CAN'T DO SOMETHING, OR IT CAN'T BE DONE, LOOK FOR A WAY TO TURN THAT NEGATIVE INTO A POSITIVE. MORE IMPORTANT, SURROUND YOURSELF WITH POSITIVE PEOPLE. SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE, THEY DON'T ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BECOME NEGATIVE. THE POSITIVE PERSON IS RELIABLE AND WILL WORK HARD TO COMPLETE A TASK. AND MORE IMPORTANT, A POSITIVE PERSON IS A PERSON OF HIGH CHARACTER.

CHARACTER IS DEVELOPED, NOT INHERITED.

I ALSO LEARNED IN MY YOUTH THAT RESPECT IS VERY IMPORTANT IN THE WORKING WORLD AS WELL AS YOUR PERSONAL LIFE. AS YOU MOVE ON TO YOUR FUTURE ENDEAVORS FOLLOWING GRADUATION, REMEMBER TO RESPECT THOSE AROUND YOU, BUT MORE IMPORTANT, RESPECT YOURSELF IN YOUR THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS, WHICH WILL HELP YOU EARN THE RESPECT OF OTHERS.

HOW PROUD YOU MUST FEEL TODAY AS YOU ARE ABOUT TO COMPLETE ONE OF THE GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN YOUR LIFE, YOUR DIPLOMA. IN TODAY'S WORLD OF ENTITLEMENTS - REMEMBER, NO ONE GAVE THIS TO YOU. THIS IS SOMETHING THAT YOU WORKED HARD FOR, AND YOU EARNED. THIS IS SOMETHING THAT CAN NEVER BE TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU. BE PROUD TO BE A GRADUATE FROM THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY. WEAR THAT ON YOUR SLEEVE FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE WITH PRIDE. PROUDLY DISPLAY YOUR DIPLOMA, AT HOME, IN YOUR FUTURE OFFICE.

IN THE YEARS TO COME, YOU WILL PROBABLY ENCOUNTER SOME TYPE OF HICCUP IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL CAREER, AND MAY QUESTION WHAT YOU HAVE ACCOMPLISHED. THAT'S WHEN YOU LOOK AT YOUR DIPLOMA AND REMIND YOURSELF THAT YOU ARE A GRADUATE FROM THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY AND A BUCKEYE, AND YOU CAN DO AND ACHIEVE ANYTHING.

DURING MY TENURE AS A MOTORCYCLE OFFICER WITH THE ARIZONA HIGHWAY PATROL, I WAS HIT BY A DRUNK DRIVER WHICH RESULTED IN, AS I WAS LATER TOLD, A SPECTACULAR CRASH. FELLOW OFFICERS TRIED TO REVIVE ME WITHOUT SUCCESS, AND I WAS REPORTED DEAD AT THE SCENE.

AN OFF-DUTY EMERGENCY ROOM NURSE STOPPED AT THE ACCIDENT SCENE AND FOR OVER 4 MINUTES PERFORMED CPR AND HEART MASSAGE, BRINGING ME BACK TO LIFE.

WHY WAS I SPARED? DID GOD HAVE A FUTURE PLAN FOR ME?

THE QUESTION WAS ANSWERED IN 1980 WHEN I WAS INTRODUCED TO A 7-YEAR OLD BOY NAMED CHRIS, WHO HAD A "WISH." HE WANTED TO BE A HIGHWAY PATROL MOTORCYCLE OFFICER LIKE HIS HEROES PONCH AND JOHN FROM A POPULAR TELEVISION SHOW AT THE TIME CALLED "CHIPS". CHRIS HAD TERMINAL LEUKEMIA AND THE ARIZONA HIGHWAY PATROL MADE HIS "WISH" COME TRUE, BY MAKING HIM THE FIRST, AND TO THIS DAY, THE ONLY HONORARY HIGHWAY PATROL OFFICER IN THE HISTORY OF THE HIGHWAY PATROL, COMPLETE WITH A CUSTOM-MADE UNIFORM, BADGE, AND MOTORCYCLE OFFICER WINGS. CHRIS PASSED AWAY A FEW DAYS AFTER RECEIVING HIS "WISH" AND CHRIS WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR ME TO CREATE AND FOUND THE MAKE-A-WISH FOUNDATION.

I LEARNED WHY I WAS SPARED.

DURING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOUNDATION, I WAS TOLD BY NUMEROUS PEOPLE THAT THE IDEA WOULDN'T WORK BECAUSE NO ONE HAD EVER HEARD OF SOMETHING LIKE GRANTING WISHES TO CHILDREN WITH LIFE-THREATENING

ILLNESSES. I WOULDN'T GIVE UP ON MY IDEA AND I MADE IT WORK, AGAIN TURNING THE NEGATIVE INTO A POSITIVE, RESULTING IN WHAT HAS BECOME THE LARGEST WISH-GRANTING FOUNDATION IN THE WORLD, GRANTING WISHES TO OVER 350,000 CHILDREN SINCE INCEPTION IN 1980.

AN INTERESTING STATISTIC FOR THE MAKE-A-WISH FOUNDATION IS A WISH IS GRANTED TO A CHILD SOMEWHERE IN THE WORLD EVERY 26 MINUTES.

RECENTLY I WAS TOLD THAT I HAD "STICKABILITY" IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOUNDATION. STICKABILITY MEANS YOU'RE NOT GIVING UP ON YOUR THOUGHT, IDEA, PROJECT OR GOAL.

I'M REMINDED OF A GENTLEMAN WHO BECAME ONE OF THE MANY HEROES DURING THE 9/11 ATTACKS ON THE TWIN TOWERS AT THE WORLD TRADE CENTER IN NEW YORK CITY. THE COAST GUARD AND NEW YORK HARBOR POLICE PUT OUT A CALL FOR ALL BOAT OPERATORS ON THE HUDSON RIVER TO PROCEED TO BATTERY PARK AND ASSIST WITH THE EVACUATION OF PEOPLE FROM THE WORLD TRADE CENTER AREA. EVERY TYPE OF BOAT RESPONDED, FROM TUG, SIGHTSEEING, COMMERICAL, PRIVATE, AND EVEN SMALL FISHING BOATS.

ONE OF THE COMMERICAL BOAT OPERATORS WORKED OVER 20 STRAIGHT HOURS, TRANSPORTING PEOPLE FROM BATTERY PARK TO THE JERESY CITY SIDE OF THE HUDSON RIVER.

WHEN ASKED WHY HE DID IT, AND WOULDN'T STOP UNTIL HE KNEW EVERYONE WAS EVACUATED, HE REPLIED;

1. I NEVER WANT TO SAY THE WORDS , "I SHOULD HAVE".
2. IF I DO IT AND FAIL, I TRIED.
3. IF I DO IT AND SUCCEED, BETTER FOR ME.
4. IF YOU WANT TO DO SOMETHING, DO IT.
5. NEVER GO THROUGH LIFE SAYING, I SHOULD HAVE.

THE GENTLEMAN HAD STICKABILITY. I ENCOURAGE YOU TO APPLY "STICKABILITY" TO BOTH YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIFE. NEVER GIVE UP.

AS I MENTIONED, I WAS RAISED IN A SMALL TOWN AND STARTED FULL TIME WORK AS A DISHWASHER AT THE AGE OF TEN. MY GOAL AT THE TIME WAS JUST TO SURVIVE, MEALS WERE ALWAYS A CONCERN, SOMETIMES FAR IN BETWEEN. THE POPULATION OF SELIGMAN WAS PREDOMINATELY MEXICAN AND AMERICAN INDIAN, WHO WERE ALSO POOR, BUT THEY WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY TO MAKE SURE THIS YOUNG BOY HAD SOMETHING TO EAT, PROVIDING BEANS AND TORTILLAS WHENEVER THEY COULD.

ONE DAY A GENTLEMAN IN TOWN, WHO BECAME MY FATHER FIGURE, COUNSELED ME AND ADVISED I SHOULD START "GIVING BACK" TO ALL OF THOSE WHO HAD HELPED ME. NOT UNDERSTANDING WHAT HE MEANT, HE EXPLAINED I DIDN'T HAVE TO HAVE MONEY TO "GIVE BACK". I COULD "GIVE BACK" BY PULLING WEEDS AND CLEANING UP THE YARD OF MRS. SANCHEZ. OR HELP MR. ORTEGA PAINT A RAILROAD TRAIN BOX CAR THAT WAS NOW THE FAMILY HOME.

IT WAS THE LESSONS IN MY YOUTH THAT PROBABLY LED TO MY LIFE OF SERVICE, FROM SERVING IN THE U.S. AIR FORCE, TO A 41-YEAR POLICE CAREER, AND CREATING AND FOUNDING ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST NON-PROFITS, ALWAYS HOPING TO "GIVE BACK", REMEMBERING THOSE WHO HELPED ME SURVIVE AS A YOUNG BOY

I RECENTLY READ AN ARTICLE IN USA TODAY ABOUT THE CONCERNS OF RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATES, RANGING FROM FINDING EMPLOYMENT, RAISING FAMILIES, AND MOST INTERESTING, HOW THEY CAN EVENTUALLY GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY. I FIND THAT A VERY UNSELFISH THOUGHT, THAT EVEN BEFORE YOUR AGE GROUP STARTS THINKING ABOUT THEMSELVES, THEY ARE THINKING ABOUT HOW THEY CAN HELP OTHERS AND GIVE BACK TO THE COMMUNITY. I'M NOT SURE WHO SAID THIS, BUT IT FITS: "YOU CAN MAKE A LIVING BY WHAT YOU GET, BUT YOU MAKE A LIFE BY WHAT YOU GIVE." EVERYONE CAN BE A HERO.

I HOPE I LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO HEAR, OR READ ABOUT MEMBERS OF YOUR GRADUATING CLASS WHO HAVE INVENTED THE NEXT GREAT THING, DISCOVERED THE CURE FOR THE INCURABLE DISEASE, DEVELOPED THE NEW ENGRY RESOURCE, OR BROUGHT CLEAN WATER TO UNDERDEVELOPED NATIONS. WHAT AN EXCITING TIME FOR YOU, AND OUR FUTURE. YOU ARE OUR FUTURE.

AS WE GET READY TO DEPART HERE TODAY, I'D LIKE TO PASS ON A QUOTE FROM A CLOSE FRIEND THAT I TRY TO APPLY TO MY EVERYDAY LIFE WHEN THINGS APPPEAR TO GET CONFUSING - "DELETE THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND. WE DON'T NEED TO UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING, SOME THINGS JUST ARE".

DURING THE LATE 1970S, THERE WAS A VERY POPULAR DISCO MUSIC GROUP CALLED THE VILLAGE PEOPLE, WHO HAD A NUMBER ONE HIT TITLED, "YMCA". DURING THEIR CONCERTS, AS THEY SANG THE WORDS, "YMCA," THE CROWD WOULD FORM THOSE LETTERS WITH ARM GESTURES IN TIME WITH THE MUSIC. I COULD NEVER SEEM TO GET THE HANG OF THOSE GESTURES. I MENTION THIS BECAUSE I HAVE A GRANDSON WHO THIS PAST FALL, STARTED HIS FRESHMAN YEAR AT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, AND HE HAS TAUGHT ME SOME ARM GESTURES THAT I THINK I HAVE DOWN AND WILL LEAVE YOU WITH. "O -H" "OHIO"

"GO BUCKEYES"

THANK YOU LADIES AND GENTLEMAN, AND GOD BLESS.