

Ohio State Commencement Speech by Erin Moriarty
Sunday 6/13/04 (draft 6-9-04)

Thank you, President Holbrook.

Congratulations to you--the proud graduates of the class of two thousand four--and your even prouder parents, family, friends.

What an honor and a thrill for me to be here!!

As a CBS News correspondent--it is not unusual for me to appear before an audience of thousands. But that's on television. Today is different. We are live, face-to-face..and here's the best part:

None of you has a remote control!

It truly is a great honor to speak to you--the first full class of the "millennium generation."

Since I'm a reporter, I'm going to start with the bad news:

You are going to face a much different world than the graduates in the last century....a world with far greater challenges.

--When many of YOU were poised to enter college in the spring of 2000---it seemed possible that you would someday join the ranks of those twenty-something instant internet millionaires..

and then BOOM--

the dot com world collapsed.

--And just as you were preparing to return to this campus for your sophomore year

--BOOM--

nineteen terrorists-- not much older than most of you-- took away our sense of safety and security forever.

--What's more, since you started college—the state of Ohio has lost more than a quarter of a million jobs—

--The federal budget SURPLUS when you entered college---is now a DEFICIT as you leave...

--And, of course, there's a war going on in Iraq.

With all this bad news, now you're probably sorry you DON'T have that remote control.

But I am giving you this dismal news--not to frighten or discourage you—but to assure you—you are prepared for whatever comes your way.

Before you even walk up to accept your diploma, you've already got what you need to succeed. After four years here at Ohio State (or a little longer for those of you on the five or six year plan)

you have what I call—for lack of a better term—your **"inner buckeye"**.

Before I explain, may I digress for a moment? Have any of you ever wondered why our mascot is a buckeye?

At my high school just up the road —there's a huge 8 foot stuffed bear—A golden bear— standing nearly 8 feet tall in the lobby, baring its teeth. Now that's a mascot!

But a buckeye?

This is the biggest university in the country—with arguably among the best medical, law, veterinary and business schools.

There are the top programs in political science, dance, geography, engineering and more...

And, of course, that National Championship Football team.

all this excellence...

And our mascot is a nut.

But I'll say this for the buckeye: it's a TOUGH nut to crack.

The Buckeye tree adapts so easily to weather conditions that-- not only does it grow where other trees can't--it is very difficult to kill.

That's not such a bad mascot after all.

And while you may not realize it yet..You've developed a similar trait yourself:

The ability to adapt to circumstances to tenaciously pursue your dreams.

Let's face it:

It hasn't been easy to make your mark on a campus the size of a small city. You've been forced to be more enterprising, more creative...and more charming to stand out.

And you've had to take risks.

Whether you came here from halfway around the world, from East Liverpool, Ohio or just a mile up the road like I did...getting to this day required strengths that you didn't even know you had.

--You've had to battle the university bureaucracy.

--You've taken chances and tough classes from some very demanding professors.

--You've risked writing a check that you weren't sure your bank balance would cover.

--And you've eaten leftovers found in the back of the refrigerator after scraping the "fuzz" off the top.

Now that's a risk.

But somehow-- you've not only survived it all...you're stronger for the experience.

And now you're about to leave here to enter the ultimate Reality Game:

An "Amazing Race" with a high "Fear Factor" in hopes of avoiding the most dreaded words in Reality TV: "You're Fired!!!"

and it may not be easy:

Since I left Ohio State,

I've had to make significant sacrifices to pursue my career..and forced some sacrifices on others.

I've made incredible mistakes--sometimes in front of millions of people.

And I've slept in more strange beds than I'd like to admit.

Hotel beds--of course.

I've taken innumerable risks--my mother would say UNNECESSARY risks--in pursuit of a story.

Case in point:

On April 20, 1995--I was shooting a story inside the Intensive Care unit of an Oklahoma City Hospital when administrators were told there was a bomb on the floor. This was no ordinary threat. Less than 20 hours earlier-- a bomb had gone off a mile away and killed 168 people in the Murrah Office building... And now--those who survived--many critically injured children on ventilators--were threatened with another blast. The building was evacuated immediately-- but it was too risky to move the kids--so police brought in dogs to try to sniff out a bomb before it would detonate.

If you've never been through something like this...let me tell you --it's terrifying...it also made me angry..how could someone do this to these children and the medical teams? As reporters--we had a choice: we could leave and be safe-- or we could record the tense moments as these heroic doctors and nurses--some of them weeping--continued to care for these kids.

Wondering if at any moment they could all die.

They refused to abandon these bombing victims in the face of enormous personal risk---so we stayed. It was simply too good of a story--too important a story to walk away from.

And luckily—for them and for me, it was a false alarm.

And last year, while some of you were on Spring break —I was also in a place with sun, sand and plenty of action: Iraq.

My initial trip into the war zone was to cover the first food convoy going to the Iraqi people in the southern town of Safwan...

I arrived at the town ahead of the supplies.

This was early in the war so I still believed that the Iraqi people would greet Americans as liberators with flowers and warmth. Instead—I was surrounded by a group of angry men chanting pro-Saddam slogans. They surrounded me and began to grab at my clothing and roughly handle me. I was more than a little concerned about what was about to happen...

when suddenly there was a loud rumble of trucks and the men took off running.

It wasn't the cavalry coming to save me.

It was the food.

I straightened my clothes--brushed my hair-- and did my story for the Evening New that night.

Ok—I know what you're thinking.. *I know what your parents are thinking.* "There's no way that I'm taking a job that puts me anywhere near a war zone or scene of terror....and that may be true.....but then again, with the world the way it is, maybe not.

In my chosen line of work, risks can be dramatic and all too real...but they are worth taking. I believe that reporting on an event like the Iraq war is vital to all of us. American lives and interests are at stake. Most importantly--our American soldiers deserve it.

The point is: whatever life **you** choose, there will be risks. But whatever challenges you face—they will not be significantly different from what you have faced already..

It takes the same resiliency, clear thinking and determination to overcome them.

Then you straighten your clothes, brush your hair and finish whatever you're doing.

As is expected of a commencement speaker—I'll give you a little advice
Starting with

1. **FAILURE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SUCCESS.** When you succeed, you pat yourself on the back and move on. When you fail, you kick yourself and learn from it.

And TWO, Sometimes **FAILURE IS SUCCESS IN DISGUISE.** When I worked as a reporter in Baltimore, Oprah Winfrey was an anchorwoman at the same station..That was before she was just OPRAH, OF COURSE...but she wasn't a good anchorwoman. The problem was she had a serious handicap. She'd cry at some of the sad stories...and local news is 99% sad stories.

After she did a few too many newscasts like that...the news director took her off the news...She was devastated. As a consolation prize, he gave her a morning talk show...and we all KNOW how that turned out.

Failure can be success in disguise.

The important thing is to deal with it the same way you did when a test score was lower than you hoped...
Or a professor didn't quite see a point the way you did:
You kept going, had faith in your abilities and worked a little harder.

What worked for you here at the University will carry you far.

I know that some of you are sitting there right now thinking "I don't have a clue, not the foggiest idea of what I want to do with my life."

The truth is: finding your place in this world may be **the single most difficult obstacle you'll face.**

When I started law school, I was sure that I wanted to be a litigator, *trying* cases. But I found my true passion, *covering* cases.

Try anything and everything until you find that job that is a perfect fit with your skills and personality.

AND remember this is YOUR life..so YOU have to live it.. Not the way I am..or your mother did..or your father wants you to..but in your own, unique way.

For me, the choice is clear:

I don't want to **read** about Presidents, prime ministers or Popes.. I want to speak to them myself.

I don't want to **hear** about the fall of the Berlin wall—the Oklahoma City Bombing, the Columbine High School shooting or the events of 9/11—I want to be there. See it for myself...and tell others what happened.

I want to live my life as fully as I can.

And that brings me to one last piece of advice and it may shock you to hear it from me, a television newscaster:

Turn off the TV.

Let me say that again: turn off the TV.

What I mean is don't live your life as a spectator who changes the scenery with a click of that remote control.

Form your opinions on matters of culture, religion and politics from your own experiences...not from talking heads...

There are plenty of people on TV and radio—on an endless succession of talk shows and interview programs—who want to tell you what to think.

Don't be a ditto head. Think for yourself.

Here at Ohio State, you have learned how to learn. Use those skills to educate yourself.

Knowing you have those skills, don't be afraid to take some risks.

No dream is too big.

Ohio State has graduated judges, congressmen, writers and comedians.

CEO's and CFO's. NFLs and NBAs, great teachers and scientists, and this reporter.

And now, YOU!

What I wish for you is to really LIVE YOUR LIFE.

And never forget where you came from.

Thank you. Good Luck. And Go Bucks.