

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

BILL GEIST COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

MAY 15, 2005

(AS WRITTEN, NOT VERBATIM)

THANK YOU, CHANCELLOR HERMAN.

THIS IS SOMETHING OF AN EMOTIONAL MOMENT FOR ME. AS I SAT HERE ON THE ROSTRUM, LOOKING OUT AT YOU, IT SEEMED LIKE IT WAS NOT SO LONG AGO THAT I SAT WHERE YOU ARE SITTING ... AND THEN I REMEMBERED, SIX WEEKS AGO I WAS! SITTING EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE, AT THE LAST HOME GAME OF THE SEASON AGAINST PURDUE - WE CRUSHED THEM. I WISH THE ORANGE CRUSH AND THE CHIEF WERE HERE TO CHEER YOUR GRADUATION THE WAY THEY CELEBRATED THE BASKETBALL TEAM. YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES DESERVE IT.

((P.M. ONLY)) THE CHANCELLOR MENTIONED MY 3D PLACE FINISH IN THE ILLINOIS STATE FAIR BAKE-OFF. IT'S TRUE. APRICOT SOUR CREAM COFFEE CAKE. I BAKED IT FOR 30 DAYS STRAIGHT TO GET READY FOR THE BAKE-OFF, FINISHED 3D AMONG 14 FINALISTS WHO ALL BAKED ON STAGE IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE AT THE STATE FAIR IN SPRINGFIELD. ONLY MISSED SECOND PLACE BY ONE POINT ON A 200 POINT SCALE, AND WOULD HAVE HAD IT ALL EXCEPT THE JUDGES SAID I HAD: UNEVEN NUT DISTRIBUTION. I'VE HAD TO LIVE WITH THAT)

NOT TO BE IMMODEST, BUT THERE IS AN IMPORTANT HONOR THAT I FORGOT TO INCLUDE IN MY BIOGRAPHY THAT NEEDS MENTIONING ... WHEN I WAS HERE THIS WINTER FOR A BASKETBALL GAME, A PHOTOGRAPHER TOOK MY PICTURE FOR THE PRESTIGIOUS "WALL OF FAME" ... AT HOOTERS ... ON SOUTH NEIL. YOU MIGHT WANT TO DROP BY AND PAY YOUR RESPECTS.

IT IS AN HONOR TO BE YOUR COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER ... PERSONALLY, I WOULD HAVE GONE WITH A KOFI ANNAN OR A BISHOP DESMUND TUTU ... BUT YOU WOULDN'T HAVE REMEMBERED WHAT THEY SAID EITHER. AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO. ONE OF THE JOYS OF GRADUATING IS YOU CAN NOW LISTEN TO BORING SPEECHES WITHOUT TAKING NOTES

BESIDES, THOSE OTHER SPEAKERS WOULD HAVE CHARGED MORE. I AGREED TO GIVE THIS SPEECH FOR TWO TICKETS TO THE FINAL FOUR. TRUE. ... THE CHANCELLOR CHARGED ME AN ARM AND A LEG. CASH. MET HIM AT 2 A.M. IN AN ALLEY. THERE WAS QUITE A LINE, EVEN AT HIS SCALPERS' PRICES.

IT IS ESPECIALLY AN HONOR TO BE ASKED TO SPEAK AT THIS GREAT UNIVERSITY, AN INSTITUTION THAT HAS ACCOMPLISHED SO MUCH AND GIVEN SO MUCH TO THE WORLD, WITH SO MANY ADVANCES IN THE COMPUTER SCIENCES, THE LARGEST PUBLIC LIBRARY IN THE WORLD, 18 NOBEL PRIZE WINNERS, SIX ASTRONAUTS, MOLECULAR BEAM EPITAXY (WHATEVER THAT IS) ... DERON WILLIAMS ... DEE BROWN, LUTHER HEAD, REVEREND ROGER POWELL, JAMES AUGUSTINE, JACK INGRAM, NICK SMITH, AND OTHERS.

I CONGRATULATE ALL OF YOU FOR STAYING IN SCHOOL FOR FOUR YEARS AND GETTING YOUR DEGREES TODAY, AND I WANT TO STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF STAYING ALL FOUR YEARS ... TO DEE BROWN.

ONE DAY DERON, YOU'LL REGRET NOT "PLAYING" - I MEAN "STAYING" - FOUR YEARS AND EARNING YOUR DEGREE. IT MIGHT HIT YOU WHEN YOU'RE FLOATING IN YOUR SWIMMING POOL, SIPPING AN UMBRELLA DRINK ... OR ABOARD YOUR PRIVATE JET, OR IN YOUR HUMMER LIMOUSINE - BUT YOU'LL REGRET IT, BELIEVE ME.

IT COMES NOT ONLY AS AN HONOR! FOR ME TO BE HERE, BUT ALSO AS A COMPLETE SHOCK TO MANY, NAMELY SOME OF MY OLD PROFESSORS, MANY OF WHOM DID NOT REALIZE THAT THEY WERE MY PROFESSORS BECAUSE I WASN'T IN CLASS ALL THAT OFTEN ... A SHOCK TO MY FAMILY ... MY FRIENDS ... AND CERTAINLY TO CAMPUS POLICE -- SORRY ABOUT THAT WHOLE VICTORIA'S SECRET LINGERIE -ALMA MATER STATUE THING. I MEANT NO DISRESPECT.

AND I AM MOST HONORED TO BE RECEIVING AN HONORARY DEGREE ... AND IN MEDICINE TOO! REALLY, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE ... MY WIFE GAVE ME A NEAT SCALPEL SET FOR GRADUATION, AND I CAN'T WAIT TO GET STARTED.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY AN HONOR FOR ME BECAUSE I AM AN ILLINI ... BY BIRTH. I WAS BORN A BLOCK FROM CAMPUS ... WITH ORANGE HAIR ... ORANGE IS THE IN COLOR THIS YEAR, I SEE IT ON THE FASHION RUNWAYS IN NEW YORK AND IN PRISONS EVERYWHERE. WHEN I CAME BACK TO THE ASSEMBLY HALL

FOR A THAT BASKETBALL GAME, I THOUGHT I'D WANDERED INTO A PEP RALLY FOR CRAZED HOME DEPOT EMPLOYEES ... SOLID, PULSATING ORANGE. FROM THE STANDPOINT OF TASTE YOU MIGHT HAVE CONSIDERED EMPHASIZING THE BLUE IN THE ORANGE AND BLUE, BUT I AM TOLD THAT NOT ONE ILLINOIS BASKETBALL FAN WAS HIT BY A CAR ON THE WAY HOME FROM A NIGHT GAME THIS SEASON .. NOR SHOT BY HUNTERS.

I'M AN ILLINI AND MY WIFE, JODY, WHO IS HERE TODAY IS ALSO AN ILLINI. I MET HER HERE ... IN KAMS ...SHE HAD ON A BEAUTIFUL WHITE WEDDING DRESS AND WAS CHUGGING A PITCHER AS I RECALL ... IT WAS A GOOD PLACE TO MEET A SPOUSE ... AT LEAST AS GOOD AS THOSE COMPUTER DATING SERVICES YOU HAVE NOW YOU KNEW YOU HAD A COMMON INTEREST ... AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE OF SORTS ... ARRANGED BY BUDWEISER ... I MET HER MY SENIOR YEAR ... MY SECOND SENIOR YEAR, I BELIEVE IT WAS.

MY PARENTS WERE BOTH ILLINI ... AS WERE MY ALL MY COUSINS, MY UNCLES. MY AUNT WAS SALUTATORIAN OF HER CLASS. AN AMAZING G.P.A. SHE ONLY RECEIVED ONE "B" HER ENTIRE COLLEGE CAREER ... AND SO DID I.

SEE, IT USED TO BE A LOT EASIER TO GET INTO ILLINOIS. IF YOU WERE A TOWNIE LIKE I WAS, AND DIDN'T NEED A DORM ROOM, YOU COULD PRETTY MUCH BE ADMITTED IN A PERSISTENT VEGETATIVE STATE.

SO, I WANT TO THANK YOU ALL FOR RAISING THE STANDARDS AT THIS GREAT UNIVERSITY, THEREBY MAKING ME LOOK SMART BY ASSOCIATION.

PEOPLE ALWAYS HAVE ME PEGGED AS MORE OF A MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE KIND OF GUY ... A SCHOOL WE PLAYED IN FOOTBALL IN RECENT YEARS. BEAT EM TOO. WE NEED TO PLAY MORE SCHOOLS WITH WORDS LIKE "MIDDLE" AND "EAST-CENTRAL" IN THEIR NAMES. BUT OUR FOOTBALL TEAM WILL BE BACK! THE FOOTBALL TEAM HAD SOME VERY DIFFICULT YEARS WHEN I WAS HERE TOO. HOW DIFFICULT? WELL, ONE YEAR, WE LOST THE SPRING INTRASQUAD SCRIMMAGE GAME ... 14-13. THAT WAS A TOUGH LOSS.

MY PARENTS DEBATED WHETHER OR NOT I WAS EVEN COLLEGE MATERIAL ... YOU PARENTS AREN'T GOING TO LIKE HEARING THIS, BUT TUITION THEN WAS \$135 A SEMESTER ... AND MY PARENTS WEREN'T SURE IF THEY SHOULD SEND ME TO COLLEGE OR PICK UP THE DRY CLEANING.

AS FRESHMEN, YOU ALL PROBABLY ARRIVED PRETTY NAÏVE AND UNSOPHISTICATED. I CAME TO ILLINOIS A VERY PROVINCIAL KID ... YOU GUYS FROM CHICAGO KNOW WHAT HAYSEEDS WE DOWNSTATERS ARE ... I MEAN GROWING UP IN CHAMPAIGN WE RARELY WENT TO URBANA ... DID GO TO PARIS ONCE ... WE DROVE. (IT'S DOWN BY MATTOON)

HOW PROVINCIAL WERE WE? WELL I WAS LEAFING THROUGH MY CHAMPAIGN HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK RECENTLY AND I DISCOVERED THAT OUR FOREIGN EXCHANGE STUDENT WAS FROM ... AMERICA ... HAWAII ... WHO KNEW?

BUT I LEARNED A LOT AT ILLINOIS ... I LEARNED THAT THE EARTH IS NOT FLAT, AS I HAD ASSUMED GROWING UP HERE IN CHAMPAIGN ... THAT THERE ARE MOUNTAINS AND THESE BIG BODIES OF WATER, GREATER THAN THE BONE DITCH AND THE IMPE POOLS ... I MEAN IN LAND-LOCKED CENTRAL ILLINOIS WE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE FISH ... CATHOLICS ATE SPAM ON FRIDAYS ... IT WASN'T MEAT ... I DIDN'T KNOW FISH HAD EYES. I THOUGHT THEY WERE THESE LITTLE STICK-LIKE OBJECTS THAT SWAM AROUND IN A PERPETUALLY BREADED STATE UNTIL FROZEN.

IN COLLEGE YOU LEARN MANY THINGS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM TOO. LIKE MATH: PROBLEM: IF A VEHICLE LEAVES A BAR IN DANVILLE AT 12:30 A.M. TRAVELING IN EXCESS OF 55 MPH, CAN IT ARRIVE AT A WOMEN'S DORMITORY IN URBANA BEFORE THE 1 A.M. CURFEW? ... YES, THERE WERE CURFEWS BACK THEN FOR WOMEN. AS IT TURNED OUT THE CURFEWS SHOULD HAVE BEEN FOR MEN ... AND THOSE ANKLE BRACELETS TO TRACK OUR WHEREABOUTS.

BUT BACK TO THAT MATH PROBLEM. YES, A MOTOR VEHICLE LEAVING THE DANVILLE BAR AT 12:30 CAN MAKE IT TO URBANA BY 1 - UNLESS IN HASTE AND INEBRIATION, SAID VEHICLE TURNS THE WRONG WAY ON I-74, IN WHICH CASE IT WILL ARRIVE ON TIME BUT IN INDIANAPOLIS RATHER THAN AT THE LINCOLN AVENUE RESIDENCE HALL.

SO, O.K., DERON WILLIAMS WILL PROBABLY BE FINE. BUT WHAT ABOUT THE REST OF YOU, GOING OUT INTO THE COLD, CRUEL WORLD WITHOUT AN NBA CONTRACT? SOME OF YOU WILL GO ON TO GRADUATE SCHOOL ... OTHERS

WILL TRAVEL ... SOME WILL TRY TO PAWN YOUR GRADUATION WATCHES AND JEWELRY ... OTHERS WILL RETURN TO YOUR PARENTS' BASEMENTS, WITH THE COUCHES AND THE GAME BOYS ... AND MOST OF YOU WILL PROBABLY BEGIN ACTIVELY - OR SEMI-ACTIVELY -- SEEKING JOBS.

IN EVERY JOB INTERVIEW THEY'LL TELL YOU THAT YOU NEED EXPERIENCE BEFORE THEY CAN HIRE YOU - AND EVENTUALLY YOU WILL SAY TO ONE OF THEM "HOW IN THE HELL DO I GET EXPERIENCE WHEN NONE OF YOU WILL GIVE ME ANY?" ... HOPEFULLY THIS WILL NOT BE AT YOUR FATHER'S FIRM.

AND WHEN YOU DO FIND AN OPENING IT WILL PROBABLY BE FOR AN UNPAID INTERNSHIP - PREVIOUSLY KNOWN AS A FELONY VIOLATION OF THE FAIR MINIMUM WAGE ACT ... BEFORE THAT, SLAVERY ... AND IF YOU DO WELL YOU MAY BE OFFERED A JOB, WITH A SMALL STARTING SALARY, ENOUGH FOR FOOD, SHELTER, OR CLOTHING - YOUR CHOICE.

IT IS ALWAYS DIFFICULT GETTING THAT FIRST FOOTHOLD. BUT DON'T DESPAIR ... EXCEPT THOSE OF YOU WHO MAJORED IN THINGS LIKE ENGLISH OR PHILOSOPHY ... WHO WILL QUICKLY COME TO REALIZE THAT, FINANCIALLY SPEAKING, YOU'D HAVE BEEN BETTER OFF ATTENDING THE ACME SCHOOL OF PLUMBING SCIENCES OR ANITA JEANS ACADEMY OF THE NAIL ARTS.

MY SON GRADUATED WITH HONORS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND FOUND A GOOD JOB RIGHT AWAY -- DELIVERING LIQUOR. WE WERE ACTUALLY SORRY

WHEN HE MOVED ON TO HIS CHOSEN FIELD BECAUSE WE LOST THE 40 PERCENT DISCOUNT.

MY DAUGHTER ALSO MAJORED IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AND FOUND A GOOD JOB ... IN MARKETING - CALLING PEOPLE ON THE PHONE AND ASKING THEM IF THEY WANTED TO BUY WHITE SOX TICKETS. USUALLY THEY DIDN'T. SHE NOW LIVES IN A VERY SMALL NY APARTMENT WITH A ROOM-MATE, BUT MIGHT BE MOVING INTO HER CAR FOR MORE SPACE.

I MAJORED IN COMMUNICATIONS, WHICH WAS SORT OF IN MY BLOOD. MY PARENTS OWNED A SMALL COUNTRY NEWSPAPER NEAR HERE COVERING A LOT OF SMALL TOWNS WITH FUNNY NAMES, LIKE OBLONG, ILLINOIS, AND NORMAL ILLINOIS. MY DAD'S FAVORITE HEADLINE WAS: "OBLONG WOMAN MARRIES NORMAL MAN".

MY FIRST JOB WAS IN THE ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT OF THE LIBBY'S FOOD COMPANY ON MICHIGAN AVENUE IN CHICAGO, WHICH SOUNDS FINE, BUT IT WAS WRITING RESPONSE LETTERS TO CUSTOMERS, LIKE THIS ONE:

"DEAR MRS. JOHNSON. THANK YOU FOR YOUR LETTER. WE HERE AT LIBBYS FINE FAMILY OF FOODS SINCERELY REGRET THAT YOU FOUND A ... THUMB ... IN YOUR CAN OF FRENCH STYLE GREEN BEANS. BE ASSURED THAT THIS WAS AN ACCIDENT AND NOT A SERVING SUGGESTION. ENCLOSED PLEASE FIND THREE 50-CENTS-OFF COUPONS ON YOUR NEXT PURCHASE OF LIBBY'S FINE LINE OF FRESH AND FROZEN FOODS ..."

THREE 50-CENTS OFF COUPONS IN LIEU OF WHAT TODAY WOULD BE A \$500 MILLION DOLLAR LAWSUIT, THE CLOSING OF 10 PLANTS AND THE LOSS OF 50,000 JOBS.

MY GOAL WAS TO BECOME A HARD-HITTING REPORTER, AND I FINALLY CAUGHT ON WITH THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE DURING THE WATERGATE ERA, BUT INSTEAD OF WINNING PULITZERS FOR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING, I SPENT YEARS AND YEARS IN THE SUBURBAN BUREAU COVERING SEWER BOND REFERENDA AND LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD DEBATES THAT RAGED ON INTO THE WEE HOURS OVER WHETHER OR NOT TO PUT PIMENTOS IN THE CORN IN THE CAFETERIA.

SO, MY FIRST WORDS OF ADVICE: BY ALL MEANS PURSUE YOUR GOALS AGGRESSIVELY, BUT KNOW THAT IT MIGHT TAKE A FEW YEARS FOR THE WORLD TO RECOGNIZE YOUR GENIUS.

I WAS LUCKY, I FINALLY GOT A JOB WITH THE NY TIMES. AND THEREIN LIES ANOTHER LESSON FOR YOU: BY ALL MEANS, BE LUCKY.

I STILL DON'T KNOW WHY THE TIMES HIRED ME ... ALTHOUGH IT MAY HAVE BEEN MY RESUME ... WHICH STATED THAT I WAS 1ST RUNNER-UP FOR THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE - THE NOBEL COMMITTEE NEVER ANNOUNCES THE RUNNERSUP. SO THERE'S ANOTHER TIP, FOR YOUR RESUME'.

AS YOU GO FORTH INTO THE WORLD - AND THAT'S WHAT GRADS DO, THEY GO FORTH -- MY NEXT PIECE OF ADVICE IS: ASK YOURSELF: DO I REALLY

WANT TO GO FORTH? YOUR PARENTS JUST MIGHT STOP PAYING YOUR BILLS. YOU'LL GET A JOB WITH LIKE, ONE WEEK OF VACATION, NO SUMMER BREAK, NO CHRISTMAS BREAK, SPRING BREAK, SEMESTER BREAK. IT'S RIDICULOUS! CONSIDER STAYING HERE SOMEHOW.

ANOTHER SMALL TIP: DON'T TAKE OFF YOUR CAPS AND GOWNS - EVER, IF YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH IT. NOTICE HOW PEOPLE ARE SMILING AT YOU, CONGRATULATING YOU, TAKING YOUR PHOTOGRAPH, GIVING YOU GIFTS? YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONSIDER RENTING A CAP AND GOWN FOR A FEW DAYS EACH MAY.

THERE ARE LOTS OF COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS CLICHES WE COULD GET INTO, AND SOMETIMES THEY'RE RIGHT AND SOMETIMES THEY'RE WRONG. FOR EXAMPLE: "IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP" THAT'S INCORRECT.

BUT THE COMMENCEMENT CLICHÉ ABOUT YOU BEING THE FUTURE AND THE HOPE OF THE WORLD IS ACTUALLY QUITE RIGHT. YOU MAY NOT THINK IT TO LOOK AT SOME OF THE PEOPLE SEATED AROUND YOU, BUT YOU ARE THE INTELLIGENTSIA OF THIS WORLD. YOU'VE GOT TO KEEP THINKING OR WE'RE DOOMED. IF YOU DON'T NOBODY WILL.

YOU ARE HEADED OUT INTO THE GREATEST STORM OF ... WELL, BS, FRANKLY ... IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND. ((PAUSE) I WANTED TO SEE HOW SHE (SIGN LANGUAGE TRANSLATOR) WAS HANDLING THAT ONE) ... THE GREATEST STORM OF BS IN THE HISTORY OF MANKIND ... HIGH GRADE, THOROUGHLY

RESEARCHED, CRAFTILY WRITTEN, SLICKLY DELIVERED BS ... THROWN AT YOU BY POLITICIANS, ADVERTISERS, AND YES THE NEWS MEDIA, WHO WANT YOU TO VOTE FOR THEM, BUY THEIR PRODUCTS, AND STAY TUNED.

BUT YOU WHO HAVE ATTENDED A UNIVERSITY WHERE YOU CAN ACTUALLY SMELL BS, WHEN THE WIND IS FROM THE SOUTH, ARE UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO RECOGNIZE IT.

WHEN YOUR LOCAL NEWS ANCHOR ASKS QUESTIONS LIKE: "DOES YOUR ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSH CAUSE INOPERABLE BRAIN CANCER? STAY TUNED." DON'T.

AMIDST THIS STORM OF B.S., CONTINUE TO THINK. CONTINUE TO QUESTION. IF YOU DON'T QUESTION AUTHORITY YOU'LL FIND YOURSELF ONE DAY WRAPPING YOUR HOME IN SARAN WRAP AND DUCT TAPE BECAUSE HOMELAND SECURITY TOLD YOU TO. YOU'LL RECALL THAT WHEN THE AGENCY TOLD US TO DO JUST THAT, DUCT TAPE BECAME THE FASTEST-SELLING PRODUCT IN THE NATION, OVERNIGHT. GIVEN THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ECONOMY MAYBE WASHINGTON SHOULD PROMOTE A NEW PRODUCT EVERY DAY IN THE WAR ON TERROR.... "LEAVE THOSE TERRORISTS IN THE DUST IN YOUR NEW CADILLAC ESCALADE, WITH ZERO PERCENT FINANCING"

AND HOW ABOUT THOSE COLOR-CODED ALERT LEVELS? SOME TV STATIONS WERE ANNOUNCING THE ALERT LEVEL EVERY NIGHT, JUST LIKE

NEWS, WEATHER, AND SPORTS. "TONIGHTS TERRORISM FORECAST BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE MAKERS OF PAXIL AND EVERCLEAR 190 PROOF GRAIN ALCOHOL".

GO FORTH UNAFRAID. THINK. QUESTION. AND DON'T SUBCONTRACT YOUR OPINIONS TO TV AND RADIO TALK SHOW HOSTS.

I APPLAUD ALL OF THE SCHOLARS GRADUATING TODAY WITH HONORS, WITH GREAT HONORS, WITH THE GREATEST HONORS, AND THOSE RECEIVING SPECIAL AWARDS ... AND I SYMPATHIZE WITH THE MAJORITY OF YOU WHO WEREN'T EVEN CLOSE.

FOR YOU, I COME BEARING GOOD NEWS: THERE IS HOPE FOR YOU, THE C STUDENT, EVEN FOR THE C-MINUS STUDENT WHY, ONE NEED LOOK NO FURTHER FOR INSPIRATION THAN THE WHITE HOUSE. ... O.K. MAYBE THAT'S A BAD EXAMPLE.

PERHAPS THERE SHOULD BE "ALTERNATIVE AWARDS FOR THE AVERAGE" AT GRADUATION, FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE DISTINGUISHED THEMSELVES IN WAYS OTHER THAN ACADEMICS DURING THEIR 4,5,6 YEARS AS UNDERGRADUATES HERE

MAYBE AN AWARD FOR ... THE LONGEST KEG STAND ... IF YOU'RE HERE, PLEASE STAND TO BE RECOGNIZED ... AN AWARD FOR THE STUDENT WHO GOT THE MOST SLEEP HERE AT ILLINOIS ... THE STUDENT WHO MOST OFTEN SAID THESE WORDS: "I'LL PAY YOU BACK LATER FOR MY SHARE OF THE PIZZA" ... AN AWARD FOR THAT STUDENT WHO EXPERIENCED THE GREATEST DIFFERENCE

BETWEEN THE EXHORBITANT AMOUNT HE PAID TO BUY A NEW BOOK AT THE FRIENDLY CAMPUS BOOKSTORE, AND THE PITTANCE HE RECEIVED WHEN HE SOLD IT BACK ... AN AWARD FOR MOST APPEARANCES ON "GIRLS GONE WILD ON SPRING BREAK"... AN AWARD FOR THE GRADUATE WITH MOST SEMESTERS ON ACADEMIC PROBATION ... SOCIAL PROBATION ... AND CRIMINAL PROBATION ... THE HAT TRICK ... ONE FOR THE GRADUATE WITH THE HIGHEST BILL AT AN INTERNET TERM PAPER COMPANY ... AN AWARD FOR THE HIGHEST CUMULATIVE 4-YEAR SCORE ON GRAND THEFT AUTO ... AND MOST HOURS PLAYING MADDEN FOOTBALL ... AN AWARD FOR THAT STUDENT WHO NEVER! DID LAUNDRY ON CAMPUS, BUT EXCLUSIVELY ON VISITS HOME ... AND AN AWARD TO THE GRADUATING SENIOR WHO IS STILL UNSURE WHICH ONE IS THE LIBRARY.

BY NOW MANY OF YOU MUST BE WONDERING: WHEN WILL HE GET TO THE PROFOUND PART? I'VE ASKED ALL MY FRIENDS IF THEY HAD ANY WISDOMI COULD IMPART IN MY COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS. THE SMART ONES SAID NO, WHILE THOSE LESS GIFTED INTELLECTUALLY OFFERRED CLICHES LIKE "IT'S LONELY AT THE TOP".

BUT A COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER SHOULD LEAVE YOU WITH SOME PROFUNDITY ABOUT LIFE, BUT EVER TIME I TRY TO DRAW CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE HUMAN CONDITION, THINGS CHANGE, OR I DISCOVER SO MANYYY EXCEPTIONS THAT MY CONCLUSIONS ARE NO LONGER VALID.

I HAVEN'T FIGURED OUT THE MEANING OF LIFE, BUT I CAN PROMISE YOU THIS: EXPERIENCING IT ... OBSERVING IT IN ALL ITS WONDEROUS COMPLEXITY ... AND TRYING TO FIGURE IT OUT IS ENDLESSLY FASCINATING.

LAST WEEK, I SAW THE WORLD'S LARGEST PRIVATE YACHT, THE 460 FOOT RISING SUN, DOCKED AT "CAN" FOR THE FILM FESTIVAL. IT IS OWNED BY A SOFTWARE BILLIONAIRE, WHO ATTENDED ILLINOIS ... BUT DIDN'T GRADUATE. THINK HOW MUCH BETTER YOU'LL DO WITH A DEGREE!

HE HAS OBVIOUSLY ENJOYED SOME SUCCESS, AND BE ASSURED TODAY THAT ALL OF YOU WILL TOO, ARMED WITH YOUR WORK ETHIC, THE BRAINS THAT GOT YOU HERE, AND NOW YOUR DEGREE FROM A GREAT UNIVERSITY.

I CAN'T SAY IF IT WILL BE THE 460 FOOT LEVEL OF SUCCESS, OR MY LEVEL OF SUCCESS - I OWN A 21 FOOT OUTBOARD ... AND! HAVE MY PICTURE ON THE HOOTERS WALL OF FAME, WHICH HE DOES NOT.

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING. THERE WILL NOT BE A TEST ON THE MATERIAL ... EVER AGAIN! AND THERE IS NO HOMEWORK FOR TOMORROW OR THE NEXT DAY OR THE DAY AFTER THAT.

CONGRATULATIONS! EXPECT TO START HEARING FROM ALUMNI FUNDRAISERS IN A MATTER OF DAYS. ###