



*Mr. Roy*

SENIOR CLASS SPEECH

ADAPTATION TO LIFE

by

JEFFREY N. ROY 83

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AS GRADUATION GETS CLOSER AND CLOSER, THERE IS ONE THOUGHT THAT STANDS OUT IN MY MIND -- THAT BEING, THE NOTION OF SUCCESS. CONDITIONED FROM BIRTH, WE ARE TAUGHT TO GO OUT AND BE "SUCCESSFUL" IN THIS WORLD.

BUT WHAT IS THIS SUCCESS?

THE OLD SUCCESS STORY BEGINS WITH THE NOTION THAT ONE STARTS FORMAL EDUCATION AT AGE FIVE OR SIX AND IS TOLD TO ACT WELL AND DO WELL AND YOU WILL BE WELL (EASIER SAID THAN DONE, BUT WHO CARES, YOU ARE YOUNG AND YOU'LL BELIEVE ANYTHING!). WHEN YOU ARE DONE WITH THAT 12 YEARS OF SCHOOLING -- FOR SOME OF US A LITTLE BIT LONGER -- YOU GO ON TO COLLEGE TO PREPARE FOR THE "BIG STEP." WITH A COLLEGE DEGREE ONE IS TOLD, YOU ATTACH TO YOURSELF THE STIGMA OF SUCCESS AND YOU ARE READY TO PURSUE A CAREER IN THE "REAL WORLD" SHALL I SAY.

WELL, NOW THAT MOMENT IS NEAR, IN JUST A FEW DAYS, THAT PARCHMENT SAYING WE ALL HAVE DEGREES WILL BE IN HAND. I NEVER STUCK AROUND TO LISTEN FOR THE REST OF THE SUCCESS STORY SO, ESSENTIALLY, WHERE WE GO

FROM HERE IS UP FOR GRABS. FOUR-HUNDRED FIVE NEW  
SUCCESS STORIES WILL EMERGE FROM BATES COLLEGE IN  
LEWISTON, MAINE ON MONDAY. WHAT DO WE HAVE TO LOOK  
FORWARD TO?

LET ME BEGIN WITH A LITTLE STORY ABOUT A  
CHARACTER FROM A BOOK ENTITLED ADAPTATION TO LIFE  
BY GEORGE VAILLANT. HIS NAME IS ALLAN POE. HE IS  
A REAL LIVE CHARACTER AND CURRENTLY LIVES IN  
CALIFORNIA.

ALLAN POE HAD GROWN UP IN WHAT HE TERMED A  
"WASP CUCCOON." HE HAD GONE FROM PRIVATE SCHOOL IN  
LAKE FOREST, TO ANDOVER, TO COLLEGE. SOUNDS LIKE A  
LOT OF BATES PEOPLE I KNOW. AT LEAST HE HAD A "GOOD"  
START.

BUT LET US NOW LOOK AT ALLAN POE IN MORE RECENT  
YEARS. HE IS NOW IN HIS FIFTIES OR SIXTIES. HE CHAIN  
SMOKES, GULPS COFFEE, MARRIED THREE TIMES, MAKES UNDER  
TEN THOUSAND A YEAR, PLAYS NO GAMES, TAKES NO VACATIONS,  
AND HAD ONLY GRUDGINGLY ENJOYED HIS PREVIOUS CAREER.  
HE ABUSED ALCOHOL AND IS IN A VERY POOR STATE OF  
PHYSICAL FITNESS. (ALSO SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF BATES  
PEOPLE I KNOW).

GOING ON, ALLAN POE IS HOMOSEXUAL AND REFUSED TO FIGHT IN WORLD WAR II -- HE WAS A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR.

BY STANDARDS OF SUCCESS MOST PREVALENT IN SOCIETY TODAY, THIS GUY IS A LOSER -- FOR LACK OF A BETTER WORD.

IN MANY MINDS, POE WOULD BE A MAN DESTINED FOR HELL!

BUT THERE IS SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT THAT IS MISSED IF WE FOCUS JUST ON THE CHARACTERISTICS I POINTED OUT ABOVE ABOUT ALLAN POE. MOST IMPORTANTLY, BUT NOT READILY APPARENT IN THE DESCRIPTION OF HIM, POE, HIMSELF, SAYS THAT NOW HE IS HAPPIER, MORE CREATIVE AND BETTER ADJUSTED THAN AT ANY TIME IN HIS LIFE.

POE WROTE IN A LETTER AFTER READING PARTS OF VAILLANT'S WORK THAT SUCCESSFUL ADAPTATION, ACCORDING TO THE BOOK, CAME DOWN TO HAVING "A GOOD INCOME, A STABLE FAMILY, REASONABLE JOB SATISFACTION, A CAPACITY TO LOVE AND A CAPACITY TO PLAY."

HE CONTINUED, "I CAN IMAGINE SOME POOR BASTARD WHO'S FULFILLED ALL (THE) CRITERIA FOR SUCCESSFUL ADAPTATION TO LIFE, AND LIKE MAYBE CHARLES COLSON OR JEB MAGRUDER (SOME WATERGATE FIGUREHEADS), SITTING IN

A JAIL AND STARING AT THE WALL, OR UPON RETIREMENT TO SOME AGED ENCLAVE NEAR TAMPA JUST STARING OUT OVER THE OCEAN WAITING FOR THE NEXT ATTACK OF CHEST PAIN, AND WONDERING WHAT HE'S MISSED ALL HIS LIFE."

POE'S POINT WAS THAT AN IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF SUCCESSFUL ADAPTATION IS THAT LIFE NEEDS TO BE ENJOYED. AND WAS ESSENTIALLY IGNORED BY VAILLANT. HE NOTED, "I'M NOT OPPOSED TO SIMPLISTIC MIDDLE CLASS VIRTUES. IN FACT, I RATHER ADMIRE THEM, BUT I THINK TRUE ADAPTATION HAS A LARGER DIMENSION."

THE MORAL OF THE STORY SIMPLY SAID IS: TAKE DELIGHT IN BEING HAPPY DOING WHAT YOU ARE DOING.

WHEN I THINK OF THAT LETTER, I AM DRIVEN TO THINK ABOUT WHAT I HAVE DONE PERSONALLY, AND WHERE I AM GOING. WHEN WILL I KNOW IF I'VE MADE IT? -- IF I'M SUCCESSFUL?

HENRY DAVID THOREAU REMINDS ME: "IF ONE ADVANCES CONFIDENTLY IN THE DIRECTION OF HIS DREAMS, AND ENDEAVORS TO LIVE THE LIFE WHICH HE HAS IMAGINED, HE WILL MEET WITH A SUCCESS UNEXPECTED IN COMMON HOURS."

SO, IT IS WITH THIS THOUGHT IN MIND THAT WE ENTER,

ON JUNE 7, 1983, INTO WHAT IS COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS THE "REAL WORLD." WHEN I HEAR THAT TERM -- REAL WORLD -- IT GIVES ME THIS KIND OF ILLUSION THAT WHAT I HAVE BEEN DOING UP TO NOW HAS ALL BEEN FAKE. AT TEN-FIVE A YEAR, GOD I HOPE THAT ISN'T SO!

IN THE "REAL WORLD" WE'LL FACE CONFLICTS -- THE BIGGEST BEING OUR DEFINITION OF AND STRIVING FOR SUCCESS. VERY OFTEN, MONEY WILL CONFLICT WITH HAPPINESS. THE COLSONS AND MAGRUDERS AMONG US WILL CHOOSE THE FORMER --- THE MONEY. THE ALLAN POES OF COURSE, THE LATTER -- TRUE HAPPINESS.

OUR YEARS AT BATES, NOT TO BE SLIGHTED IN OUR CONSIDERATION OF "REAL WORLD" ACTIVITIES HAVE SHOWED US CONFLICT, RESOLUTION AND SUCCESS. THEY HAVE SHOWED US TIMES OF HAPPINESS, SADNESS AND FRUSTRATION. THEY HAVE TRAINED US TO DISCIPLINE OURSELVES AND HAVE TAUGHT US HOW TO LEARN. IT IS NOT THAT WE NECESSARILY WALK AWAY FROM BATES ANY SMARTER, ALTHOUGH HOPEFULLY, SOME OF US WILL, BUT WE WILL, IN FACT, WALK AWAY BETTER EDUCATED.

AS I WROTE IN AN EDITORIAL IN THE APRIL 8, 1983 ISSUE OF THE BATES STUDENT (I COULDN'T GET UP HERE AND TALK FOR SEVEN MINUTES WITHOUT AT LEAST MENTIONING THE

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NEWSPAPER, MY GUIDING LIGHT FOR THE YEAR), THIS PAST YEAR, ESPECIALLY, HAS BEEN A LESSON IN VALUES. IN 1982-83, NOTABLY, WE VALUED EXPRESSIONS OF BASIC HUMAN FREEDOMS AND CIVIL RIGHTS WHEN THEY WERE TESTED IN THE OPEN FORUM OF IDEAS. WE LEARNED THAT CONTINUED GROWTH IS NURTURED THROUGH THE COMMITMENT OF INDIVIDUALS TO VALUES AND THE COOPERATION OF A COMMUNITY IN UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF THOSE WHO WISH TO SPEAK.

IF WE ARE ABLE TO LOOK BACK AND REFLECT, AND LOOK AHEAD AND DREAM, WE MUST KEEP IN MIND OUR COMMITMENT TO VALUES AND OUR COMMITMENT TO SUCCESS. A TRUE BALANCE BETWEEN THE TWO CAN LEAD TO SUCCESSFUL ADAPTATION AND THE REALIZATION THAT ENJOYING LIFE CAN PRODUCE A GOOD LIFE.

KEEP IN MIND WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED, NOT THE GRADES WE GOT. KEEP IN MIND THE WORK WE HAVE DONE, AND NOT THE REWARDS WE HAVE RECEIVED. AND KEEP IN MIND THE ALLAN POES OF THE WORLD.

THIS IS NOT MEANT TO SAY THAT WE SHOULD ALL  
BE CHAIN-SMOKING, ALCOHOL ABUSING, POOR, BORING,  
UNHEALTHY, DIVORCED HOMOSEXUALS, BUT WE SHOULD BE  
HAPPY! WE MUST REMEMBER THAT THERE IS MORE TO LIFE  
THAN A LARGE INCOME, A SPLIT-LEVEL HOME, A TWO-CAR  
GARAGE AND THREE KIDS. THERE'S A LOT MORE TO BE  
ENJOYED, SO LET US GO OUT AND HAVE A GOOD LIFE!

THANK YOU.