MESSAGES TO GRADUATES

Commencement Addresses
From the Johnston Center
Graduation Ceremonies

MESSAGES TO GRADUATES

The Johnston Community
1999

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PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As part of our thirtieth year celebration of Johnston education, we have assembled here ten messages that were given to graduating seniors of Johnston Center at their commencements in the 90s. We have followed no systematic criteria for selecting these messages except for the first, in which Barney Childs connects the history of Johnston College with that of the Center.* Otherwise, they are randomly harvested leaves, well drenched in California sun and the adventure of emancipatory education: final offerings to departing seniors.

The Johnston Community, like any community, has created a cycle of events which represent and perform its symbolic, nearly sacred, self-defining features. As such they are meant to set the community apart from its neighbors, near and far. Our unique commencement ritual is one of them. Included in the ceremony is the brief sharing of thoughts and sentiments by one or two speakers selected by the graduating seniors, frequently their favorite faculty. These brief speeches deliver familiar "messages" from and to the Johnston Community; they transmit fresh yet familiar versions of its mission, inspiration, and celebration of learning. We are grateful to all the Commencement speakers, whether represented here or not, as their messages relate us all as members of the same community of learners regardless of separation by age and location.

We dedicate this volume, which we hope to be the first of many, to Eugene G. Ouellette, the second Chancellor of Johnston College, and to the memory of Frank Blume, on the first anniversary of whose untimely death we celebrate the thirtieth birthday of the Johnston Community.

12 February 1999

Yasuyuki Owada
Editor

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The Obligatory Inspirational Commencement Address

Barney Childs
May 25, 1980

Well, you are the last ones. That's all there is, there isn't any more. Not only are you at a moment of suddenly having finished a considerable chunk of your years, but the institution itself has been whisked into another dimension. Like the rube at the carnival shell game, watching his money vanish, about all you may be able to say now is "Duhhh—wha hoppen?" What would be welcome would be a few minutes to be by yourself for some hard quiet thinking: what you're getting is many minutes surrounded by others, caught up in a resistless ongoing of time. Where have you been? what are you now? and maybe why has it all been so?—this is worth a look. Perhaps even at this eleventh-plus hour there may be some sudden illumination?

Johnston College was always expecting this kind of illumination; it might arrive at any moment. As each semester ended we hoped that the next time around was the occasion for the caterpillar to metamorphose into something wondrous, something extra-special, but all that appeared was yet another caterpillar. In keeping with our age's fascination with record-keeping, perhaps it might all be codified into statistics and wrought thence into analytical prose—and there was certainly no lack of statistics, thanks to such projects as the one funded by NIMH—but somehow none of this seemed to provide durable answers. Maybe a few fixed landmarks can be recognized, however, if we look.

First, we invented Johnston as we went along. Nobody ever really knew what was going on in the long run. Its rough-and-ready build-it-yourself quality was reflected not only in the program but also in the shifting directions of our own insights. As those other peculiarly New World manifestations—the American long poem, for example (Pound, Williams, Olson), never finished, or America's contributions to music, jazz and indeterminacy, both ephemeral, never the same twice, affirming in the act, in the performance: what counted was just, and fully, the *doing*, not the illusions of long-range potential results. As the sea in Valery's poem, it was eternally re-begun. Each moment was a new beginning, a fresh start. And we chose to make it as it was, by nature self-reaffirming.

Second, much of its strength was in its imperfections. We prided ourselves on our visionary and innovative nature, but perhaps more important were the flaws—uneven, fanatical, arrogant, lumpy, fatuous, pretentious. And how very fortunate we all are to have this to cherish, all these cliches and flaws! We had, blessedly, the inalienable right to make damn fools of ourselves. I hope each of you has had that invaluable chance,

the chance to fail, because here we had the equal chance to remake ourselves, with new insight, and we all helped. One of the most valuable revelations that somehow never seems to be given to people about to attend college we have to find for ourselves: Nobody said it wasn't going to be fun.

Notice that in my list of flaws I did not mention mediocrity. Whatever Johnston was, it wasn't mediocre. Part of what we have learned was of this, too; we have seen that mediocrity never comes by flash revelation, be it right or wrong, by the big Sunday punch: no, it corrodes slowly, it crumbles and undermines, until one day we wake up and find that it has insatiably leveled all around us. Mediocrity cannot abide excellence. In your quest for whatever of value you seek, you will remember this, because you have seen it happen, and you have heard its blurred voices giving, through the mask of good counsel, bland and cautious and temporizing and mealy-mouth reasons why its courses of action are all for the best. You'll recognize it again. You've been there. As the Civil War soldier after his first battle, you have seen the elephant and you have heard the owl.

The decade of which Johnston was a part was a curious one, maybe a bit more foolish than usual, but it was ours—we were stuck with it. And perhaps Johnston was suited to resolve its time. This was a time of ME: love ME, hear ME. It was a time of self-dramatizing, of talk, of "risk," of "There, there, it's all RIGHT to . . . ." When else has the recent cult of public suffering been more opulently demonstrated? politically? in the lyrics of our popular music and in the lines of our popular poets? Well, curious times produce curious remedies. Maybe something learned from this for you (and I devoutly hope this is so) is to put no value on current events, on show and tell, on ordering and arranging in binary options, on cheapjack medicine-show remedies to invented self-cherishing ailments, on devotion to any capital-letter Cause. I submit for your consideration Childs' Law (there are really any number of these, depending on the occasion and the topic): If it's becoming popular, avoid it. Does this sound as though you will become a nuisance? Very well, be a nuisance, don't be mute inglorious Miltowns.

This may begin to sound suspiciously as though I am giving advice. There hasn't been a graduation speaker who didn't exhort the graduates to do this and do that when they went out into the "real world" (and what a fake *that* phrase is, by the way). Johnston *is* the "real world" in one of its presences. It's full of real people. You aren't imaginary, are you? Nor I? Are our concerns and involvements play? Or dreams? Sure, I'm giving advice. I'm not even going to "share" with you, I'm *telling* you. Yet there is a fallacy in this kind of advice: every graduation speaker wants you to do what *he* thinks will be of benefit, not actually what

might be of benefit. Whatever handy dandy tips I am providing, therefore, are as close as I can come to those which might work for *you.* You live in a state of comfort and opulence that would have been incomprehensible to anyone but nobility several hundred years ago, and *is* incomprehensible even now to large swatches of the world's population. I hope this bothers you. Fortunately, you are also, thanks to this very circumstance, highly specialized, not just in trades or disciplines, but as human beings, especially suited for what you have to do. Your time in any college can see to that; your time here has seen to it in a peculiarly unique fashion. The potential for waste, for destruction, isn't simply ecological, it is personal. All of value you have received is that much more you owe. And the only genuine response to this is to use yourself well, and this means use yourself hard. Doubt, worry, worries over personal concerns, all must go by the board. Who needs it? Who voluntarily wants to be unhappy? You have more time than you imagine: no hassle, no panic, simply relax, enjoy, and DO.

King Lear, his senses turned, wandering in the storm, suddenly in a transfiguring flash of insight, says, "O, I have ta'en/Too little care of this." We must similarly cry out when the insight comes to us. It is the discovery, the final discovery that makes us human, that we are imperfect, that we are shabby counterfeit of all the ideals we have sought to defend ourselves with, to embody ourselves in, here and wherever else we may have been and may be, and that *we know it.* Each of us may be someone, but who now? Simply ourselves. And it is only with this insight that we strip ourselves bare of our kingly lendings, as Lear, and can come, asking nothing, to our work. Father Zossima, in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, says this:

> For know . . . that every one of us is undoubtedly responsible for all men and everything on earth . . . each one personally responsible for all mankind and every individual man.

And W.H. Auden says in a poem, "We must love one another or die." Maybe that's the best of what we may have learned: to care, to love one another. I hope so.

So Johnston College, as such, ceases. Now we have Johnston Center, which isn't even a place any longer. It's a center with no location. That is fitting. The center is nowhere; the circumference is everywhere. Johnston College is a state of mind. It's wherever you are. The last metamorphosis has taken place. The caterpillar has finally become a butterfly.

GO GIT 'EM!

Nathaniel B. Budington

May 29, 1993

In the 1961 Redlands catalog, under the heading *Redlands* is a *Christian College,* the following paragraph describes the college's mission:

"The University stresses the obligations of unselfishness, stewardship, cooperation and service. Believing that education without Christian emphasis is incomplete and inadequate for our day, the college encourages church affiliations and obligations. Self-discipline is fostered through student participation in self-government . . . . The aim of the University is to establish a reputation as a thoroughly Christian institution. While it is an institution with Baptists behind it to support, maintain, control and insure its success, the University of Redlands will avoid sectarianism and narrowness in its teachings and policy. It is a school to which anyone may come for college training without having his denominational preference interfered with in the least. Its aim is to educate the heart as well as the head, and to develop the student physically, intellectually and morally."

Now does that sound like Redlands in 1993? Well, maybe a little. Redlands is not the same place it was in 1961. Now let me read that statement in a slightly updated form.

"The Johnston Center stresses the obligations of unselfishness, stewardship, cooperation, and service. Believing that education without Community is incomplete and inadequate for our day, the Center encourages spirituality and scholarship. Self-discipline is fostered through student participation in the life of the Community and an obligation to ensure its good health . . . . The aim of Johnston is to establish a reputation as a thoroughly egalitarian institution. While it was founded by a University with a Baptist heritage to support, maintain, control and insure its success, the Center will avoid narrowness and celebrate differences. It is a school to which anyone may come for college training without having her lifestyle or beliefs interfered with in the least. Its aim is to educate the heart as well as the head and to develop the student's intellect and commitment to Community."

Now does that sound like Johnston? Yes, it does. Johnston embodies many of the values Redlands was founded upon. Here, in these two buildings, in a community of flawed but well-meaning idealists, something very powerful takes place. Gay students feel safe, eccentric students feel appreciated, women and men learn how to talk to each other, people sit for hours in community meetings to listen, to react, to compromise, fighting to find a way to live in peace with people they may not even like. In these buildings, men are strengthened by feminism and

women by sisterhood. And when things get hairy around here, when tempers explode and people break down, there are always arms to fall into. Because even at its most dysfunctional, this is a place of intimacy and love. In many important ways, you could say that Johnston is one of the more Christian parts of the University Community. But that may be a stretch. It is, whether Christian or not, one of the most humane environments I and many others have ever experienced. The older and more conservative I get, the more I'm convinced that the values of this community, this 60s retro, deadhead, talk about your feelings, don't call me a girl community creates in people what is absent in so much of what surrounds us: peacefulness.

This happens, I think, because we have managed to live together in a community with wholeness. We don't just have breakfast, then classes, then lunch, then sports, then dinner, then studying, then partying, then sleep. We cook communal meals and feast on the food and conversation that ritualizes an otherwise mundane daily exercise. We take classes where it matters if everyone is getting the material, where group process is scrutinized, we camp at Joshua Tree to feel quiet and darkness together, and when we have parties the non-users may be as uninhibited, and funny and honest as the people who have had a few too many margaritas. This doesn't happen all the time and it may not even happen enough, but it is enough a part of our lives to give us a sense of what matters in life and to help us make decisions with a sense of perspective. I've seen in myself, my Johnston friends and in current students who have been here awhile, an ability to avoid being overwhelmed by the trivial inconveniences of daily life because we've experienced at its purest, the inner peacefulness that comes from feeling real connectedness with other people.

It's a hard-earned peacefulness. This is not an easy place to go to school. There are fights and confrontations, intense and unhealthy relationships, lapses into self-abuse, and oppressive academic insecurities. This can be an awfully heavy place to live and the lessons here can be hurtful and scarring, but that's what the Redlands founding fathers meant when they talked about educating the heart. They knew, as does anyone who has been in love or lost a parent or lost faith, that educating the heart is hard. But if we see that through to the point when we know ourselves and the people we love, deeply, we become something else, something stronger and ultimately more peaceful. That's a liberal arts education, that's what we do here, that's what most of you guys are taking with you. I thank the University of Redlands for sticking by something that was so unintended and so rare and I want to thank you all for keeping it alive.

Douglas C. Bowman

May 29, 1993

I consider it a real honor to be asked to address this gathering, although I must confess that the very notion of a commencement address strikes terror in the heart, given the loads of appalling drivel spewed forth each year on the innocent and unsuspecting by academically bedraped moral pigmies, bent on doing Polonius one better on thousands of campuses, and who succeed in delivering up blends of noxious Dale Carnegian, Horatio Algerian, Buccaneer-Capitalist American swill that goes down hard but is easily discharged and forgotten by nightfall, thank God! Commencement address? You'll not catch me in that line waiting to be asked. Of course, Johnston is different, so I accepted the invitation, and different you'll get from me. And I am honored. I was told that when you seniors decided to ask me, someone said, "I hope he doesn't talk about God!" Fear not. I'll tie that arm behind my back and still slay this dragon.

Actually, I want to talk about you people, music, fundamentalism and the soul relying in part upon Thomas Moore, my musical training and that great expositor of Whiteheadian Philosophy and Rinsai Zen master, Yogi Berra.

After all, why shouldn't I talk about you: this is your day, isn't it? Remember when you first came to Johnston, and we did to you the only thing we really do to you here, which is the only thing we have ever done to any of our students and that is: we set you free. We turned you loose upon yourself with the not so subtle Socratic suggestion that you get to know yourself while you are here with a view to commencing an earnest, responsible endeavor to become your many possible selves with intelligence, courage, and to do it along with everybody else. Today is your day, Seniors, and it should be a day of grand celebration and relief. Just think of it: you have taken time out from whatever else you could have been doing to spend four years in close proximity with yourself and have lived to tell about it. Today should be considered a bench-mark that documents an act of genuine risk and courage: you have faced up to yourself in freedom. As a result, I doubt you will ever forget these years, nor will you forget those who stood by you as you took on your own formidable self and soul.

Our Emeritus Vice-Chancellor of Johnston College, Dr. Ed Williams, would point out that this setting free for self-exploration in the Socratic mode gives the lie to those who in ignorance would say that Johnston was little more than "an *avante-garde* fad perpetrated by a bunch of education miscreants and 'hippies'." There is nothing *avante-garde* about Johnston's pedagogy; it's as old as the hills and it's utterly conservative. Its perpetrator is none other than Socrates himself. Seniors, you may thank him for your intense, confusing and wonderfully instructive

and challenging years here. He was the one who insisted that "the unexamined life is not worth living," and that means nothing short of investigating your many selves with the provocative prospect of possibly becoming your many selves in freedom. And just think of it, while you were doing that, the bulk of the student population of the world, that also is graduating with you this Spring, was dutifully doing and becoming what its up-to-date instructors were telling it to know and do and become according to the most current academic styles. All of that it dutifully swallowed without much examination and without so much as a hint of genuine freedom. So! it is quite a day we mark here, isn't it? Your Day!

And why shouldn't I talk about music? Likely it is the only human artifact we have all shared in common during your tenure here. Music is a language all its own that is built upon a range or spectrum of energy vibrations that succeeds in speaking banalities or profundities to everyone regardless of their age, ethnicity, philosophical, religious or political persuasion; regardless of their gender or sexual preference; regardless of their major emphasis, intelligence or vocation; regardless of their health, shape, size or weight. That strange language can connect us, irritate us, make us melancholy, nostalgic or sentimental. It can inspire, goad and challenge us. It can comfort and reflect our every mood. WHAT A WONDER! Odd, isn't it, this artful work of non-discursive speech we call music? It can feed the mind or penetrate beyond the mind to the heart and affections and manages to run even deeper, at times, into those hidden channels within that some have called the soul. Why not recall our music today?

Fundamentalism? Why shouldn't I mention that too? That is the one thing I hope to gosh we have saved you from at Johnston. I notice that our world is turning increasingly fundamentalist and it is turning increasingly violent. There is a correlation, me thinks, between those two things, especially as that correlation has gripped America, South Africa, the Near East, Ireland, Bosnia—Nay, the entire Globe.

But what is fundamentalism, really, and how might this address bring together three themes of you: music, fundamentalism and the soul? To be sure the term was coined and still denotes a particular moment in American Protestant church history (1914 to 1919) when certain Baptists at the University of Chicago and Professor John Gresham Machen of Princeton resurrected the old canons of the sixteenth century Synod of Dort in Holland as being the fundamental, Protestant Christian doctrines and used these doctrines as weapons against the growing hords of threatening "modernist" and "liberal" Christians now filling the pulpits of Chicago and New York.

But Thomas Moore reminds us that "fundamentalism," as the word is developing etymologically in our vocabulary today, does mean many more things than the pathology of a religion gone rigid with old creeds. It is more than the phobic-reborn clutching an inerrant and divinely dictated Scriptures postulated at the Synod of Dort (a Synod whose canons still inform the righteous in South Africa and the righteous in Northern Ireland, and, alas, many righteous in Southern California). Likewise, fundamentalism means more than the impoverished and phobic muslim youth holding fanatically to the war *Kerygma* of some hate-filled Mohammedan Mulla.

Thomas Moore uses music to illustrate his thesis about the broad connotations now to be found in this evolving word fundamentalism. If I strike a low C hard on a good, well-tuned piano, the room will fill with that C and the tone will sound resonant and rich, deep, even moving and mysterious, because what you hear actually is much much more than a simple C. You will hear multiple Cs up the scale, plus the harmonics of Gs, Es and even a B Flat. This rich brew musicians call the harmonic overtones of the low C. Remove those overtones, as one now can electronically, and you will still hear a recognizable low C, but it will be a very different C indeed: shallow, thin, non-resonate, lacking timber and depth. The soul will have no mystery. It will be shrill and cutting. It will neither fill the room with sonority, nor surround and enfold you. No, it will pierce you like a lance and buffet you like a hammer. It will lack what Thomas Moore calls soul. (With that ingenious analogy, Moore, comes out to a clear and most perceptive understanding of the complex Hebrew word *Nephesh*, which has been translated as "soul" in English Bibles.)

Soul is never simple. It is complex, deep, mysterious, always beyond reach and explanation. It is rich with overtones of life, experience, success, failures, ponderables, imponderables, pains, muddles and joys. Soul resonates with the overtones of an entire universe. Thus, soul is a universe within that is deeper than self, more mysterious than simple identity. It stands for the enigmatic root of what makes you tick as the unique being you are always becoming.

Tending the soul, which Moore advocates in the name of Jungian psychotherapy, means watching over and keeping a multitude—nay keeping all of life's dimensions or, shall we say, "all of life's harmonics" under simple observation and instructive appreciation. All the little things, all the mundane, all the seemingly negative things as well as all the expansive, positive and wonderful things are kept and nurtured and brooded over and treasured and learned from. All things in the external universe feed and nurture the internal universe that is the soul. All things are manifest in the soul and may manifest the soul. Thus the soul learns from and feeds upon failures as well as successes. It relishes ambiguities

and the unresolved issues. It can appreciate and learn to live with the depth and refinement of questions over simple answers. It includes a B flat with the Gs and Es that resound to its lowest C! Thus it looks for the both/and beyond the either/or. It thinks and feels and intuits its way into all sorts of novel relationships and connections. And so, its posture before life is happily and courageously open, sensitive, absorbent, even vulnerable. It seeks and favors always perspective over position; vision over opinion; subtlety and depth over a system. It pushes beyond decisions past and deeds done to complex ethical matters still remaining that are outstandingly ambiguous. It does not end or close systems; it opens windows and takes new paths. It thrives on novelty and trusts adventure. The soul holds out hope for the ten thousand things it may always be becoming. That soul, thus described, is the inexhaustible profundity and the indefatigable wonder that is you in the depths of your becoming. We are now told that it took some fifteen billion years for that wonder to emerge. And here you are.

Ah, but the fundamentalist is the one who cannot endure, tolerate—much less appreciate or dare—a soul's ways and needs, mysteries and depths. The fundamentalist attempts life without the overtones of a living, growing, expanding universe aflame with suns and exploding stars without, and without a corresponding universe evolving and resounding and aflame within. It fears vulnerability and so attempts erecting impregnable fortifications. It cannot absorb, it shuns. It insists upon the regimented, the strict, the rigid and so, above all, what is safe. It is unteachable because it must always be right and righteous and so can never be humane, gentle, ethical or compassionate. It fears, and so will not permit itself to fall and so can never understand forgiveness. It fears a universe of becoming and so attempts planting itself in cement. Its ontology is static and has no room for movement, novelty, the unexpected; for variables, much less the flexibility life demands. It fears a universe of change and growth and so locks itself to what it believes is immovable. It fears! . . . it fears . . . it fears. And so it becomes shallow, thin, non-resonate and at base hostile and potentially violent.

Fundamentalism, then, is a posture more than it is a philosophy, ideology or religion. It is a stance that may inform any ideology, philosophy or religion. It is a way of approaching life. So too, the soulishness I have attempted to describe and illustrate manifests an approach, a posture and stance for one's life's act. I personally favor it, if for no other reason than it permits one access to the overtones of the universe without and within, and thereby, enables one to join the human race fully alive. Both approaches may make music for life; one piercing and hammer like, the other lush and complex with overtones.

At Johnston we have played for you the music of the universe in the grand and daring context of your own freedom and have looked for you

to begin tending the overtones that make you rich with soul. There is no end to a venture like that. That is, there can be no graduation. There can be only commencement.

Seniors, maybe we have indeed set you free these past four years. Maybe we have provided context for your care of your own souls. Maybe we have played the music. If so, you have become a little more gentle and humane. If so, you have become more vulnerable and thereby more absorbent, sensitive and courageous. If so, you have acquired appreciation for depth, refinement, the subtle and the endlessly novel. If so, you have learned to live with questions and have actively sought out perspective and vision. If so, you have acquired a measure of that mature capacity which can distinguish between fear-driven violence and productive moral outrage, between bravado and the assumption of an informed authority and leadership. Maybe . . . if so . . . we, your friends, mentors and families salute you. Johnston **IS** different, and we, your families and mentors, did not have benefit of your mode of education in our own lives. We were not delivered over into our own freedom when so young most likely. What a treasure you have. Think of it: everything our fear-filled, violent world insists you be given to arm yourselves for the battles ahead, we have scrupulously downplayed, outright ignored or have taken from you. In place of all that we have played some music of the universe together, and now we send you, soulish, out into the world: vulnerable, or to change the image, we send you out as sheep among wolves.

So be it. We the faculty make no apology either to you or to your families for this dastardly switch of pedagogical tactics. Unless I miss my guess, the likelihood is that you (very soon now!) will join the ranks of many other sheep, known as Johnston Alums, who are currently growing fat and are thriving upon a rich diet of wolves. And wonder of wonders, those alums are giving the people of the little worlds where they live and labor new ears capable of hearing and appreciating a rich and novel music that sounds within and without with an abundance of overtones—nay! with a sonority that enfolds one on a clear night when the sky is ablaze with stars.

You, Music, Fundamentalism . . . the Soul.

Now what quasi-Polonian touch might one add at the end of this excursus, so as to make it challenge for the future and thus sound a little like a commencement address. I give you this profound Zen Koan from Yogi Berra, that free and honest shepherd of the soul, who one starry night after a ball game courageously and daringly won, said in the name of the adventure I have described, "If ya ever come to a fork in the road, take it!"

Daniel Kiefer

May 27, 1995

Honored Graduates of Johnston; Loyal Family Members, Friends, and Colleagues:

You have asked me to interrupt these proceedings so they don't get too boring. Or else, to add an instrumental interlude, something *really* boring so you can stretch your legs, have a drink of water, or go to the loo without missing anything. Barney Childs, when he heard the plan, said something like this, that I'm meant to fill in between the acrobats and the elephants, like all those clowns pouring out of that tiny car.

If you want diversion, I am happy to accept your request, but I'm not sure you've shown good judgment. First of all, what could be more interesting than your own graduation, where one by one you come up here to be lavishly praised by people who love you beyond all reason. Secondly, I'm hardly the one to provide comic relief, since I have such a melancholy turn of mind, especially these days.

But I will go ahead to praise the boredom you want to stave off and boredom in general, especially the boredom you have paid us teachers to inflict on you these four years. Really, education is very tedious stuff. I used to think that I should try very hard—even on those hot autumn afternoons in the Browsing Room—not to bore people. There was a student of mine at another school who kept falling asleep in class. One day I even brought him coffee. Another day I asked him, as he drifted off, "Jonathan, am I keeping you awake?" And without opening his eyes he replied, "Just barely." For a long time I thought that my performance in the classroom should aim at keeping your interest by surprising you, by saying something you hadn't thought of and wished you had. If the very word "professor" means "boring" to most people—stuffy, dull, musty, vague, abstruse, pompous—I was determined not to be that. Now I'm beginning to think it's just what I'm supposed to be.

On the face of it Johnston seems the very place not to be dull. Look at the array of strange clothing, hairstyles, pharmaceuticals, parties, and community meetings here. We have many peculiar ways of keeping ourselves entertained. Not to mention seminars, with their strange titles: Oracles and Divinations; Aesthetics and Resistance; Women Warriors in Literature; From the A-Bomb to the Magic Bullet; Good Night, Moon; The Levant: A Festival; The Beginning of the World; the Seven Ws; The Erotics of Reading; and here's the best—Weirdiality. A whole seminar devoted to weirdness. Why ever not?

It's here in Johnston that students have control of what takes place in class, and so if you think Eisenstein to Heidelberg, or whatever it's called, is a tedious seminar it's your responsibility. You should have invented a better topic, or chosen better readings, or sparked the discussion yourselves. If you're bored to absolute zero you can't blame the professor anymore; it's your own damn fault. You're boring yourselves.

Which is a real problem, if your complaints are well founded, for you gripe about the repetitive dullness of your fellow students more than you do about your teachers—at least in my hearing. If you look around at the teachers sitting on this lawn you'll find the most energetic, unpredictable, wacko professors at Redlands. But what if students and professors, even at Johnston, are *meant* to be boring? Kevin O'Neill is fond of saying that every day we professors can be confident we'll bore someone silly. That's what we do. We're windbags.

Perhaps the reason is that most thinking is slow and dull no matter who's doing it. None of us, students or teachers, can tell if a thought will turn out to be interesting until we've gone past it already, and then we have to back up and find it again, and then it's too late to retrieve it any more. It's all but lost. So we keep looking back vainly for a while, and then we give up and go on to another failure. That's thinking, and then there's writing.

Writing is dull, plodding work, filling up sheets of paper with words that don't make sense, and then going back to change them until they're not much better, in fact, they're worse. Even word processors don't help much. They speed up the production of words so that the gentle reader can receive 'em more quickly, but it's the same drivel, now oozing out in neatly printed streams, looking great, sounding just as banal.

Then there's reading. Can you imagine a duller pastime! Many a day I'll go rushing through the lobby of Holt past Katharine Anabo reading away and onto the porch of Bekins past another student reading away, and I want to interrupt them and engage them in something better. What a dreary passive task they have, sitting still for hours on end while words come in through the eyes. Recently in my office I handed one of you a book off my shelves, by Foucault or somebody, and here's what happened. You opened it at random and started in reading, and soon enough you became engrossed in something, lost in space, oblivious to my telephone calls or even my direct remarks. You were off in a whole 'nother world. I studied you a while and realized that this is the moment a teacher lives for, when you have found another source of intellectual stimulation and are forming your own judgments about it. What could be more mundane and wonderful?

Reading offers the pleasant tedium of repeating what we've done many a time before, the child's delight at having peekaboo repeated and repeated. Yes, boredom can spill over into anger when someone is holding us in place against our will, or into depression when we are holding ourselves against our will. But the boredom of reading is a cozy feeling, allowing for the hum of thought that's not quite conscious, a sort of meditation, as when we sink into half sleep during a symphony orchestra concert. The doldrums of television are nice, lazy after-lunch tasks, the droning speeches of commencement—but nothing gives such contentment as slipping into the rhythm of reading.

Without the boredom of everyday college life we couldn't have the pleasures of reading for hours at a time—the unselfconscious delight of being immersed in a novel, *or* the angry determination to learn something repellent to us, whether it's Kant's metaphysics or dry sociological theory or calculus, whatever seems too abstract to be of any use. It takes tedium outside to make that kind of inside work satisfying. What a university does is to provide a boring emptiness, day after weary day, week after week, that we fill up with the most unexceptional obligations and activities: going to class, having coffee, reading, desk-sitting in a residence hall entrance, writing a paper, reading. We really have nothing to do. Our whole purpose is to empty out the actual events of our days and nights so that we can think instead. Our dull outward routine lets us move inward.

Inward into conversation. On the Redlands campus, like any campus, we have the chance to roam around and fall into conversation. In this way a college campus is old-fashioned, a small village where we know everyone, or we might, and if we leave our room we're bound to find someone to talk to. I predict that what you'll miss most about the dear ol' U of R, whose emblem shines afar, is this: the chance to fall into conversation. These United States offer us a bleak world of getting and spending. Our homes are too blank, our shopping malls are far too open, without the nooks and crannies that conversation needs. There's no public place to hide and no one to run into. In Johnston you always have someone to run into.

Or again you always have the chance to do some reading. That student who's sitting in my office or on the porch of Bekins, absorbed in her reading, now and then will say, "hmmm," in response to some passage. That's the sound of interest in reading: "hmmm," meaning "well, that's unusual, I never thought that." I remember the first time it happened to me: sophomore year of high school (I was a late bloomer). I was raised strictly to follow orders, and when I read Emerson I heard something directly *contrary* to orders, and I thought, "hmmm, maybe so; maybe

he's right and all that I've been taught is wrong." Here's the passage, from "Self-Reliance," predictably enough:

> There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till.

I started to live as best I could according to that dictum. Later on I learned that it's actually the great American credo: We want to believe in ourselves alone. After thirty years of trying to believe in myself alone, I'm finding myself pretty dull.

Lately I found another startling passage, this one a fragment of Freud's, scribbled about two months before he died: "The individual perishes from his internal conflicts, the species perishes in its struggle with the external world to which it is no longer adapted" (*SE* XIII, 299). It seems to me (here comes the final page and with it the exhortations) that we have to commit ourselves to the external struggle so that we can have the privilege of individual, internal death. We have to protect the species so that the individual can live a little longer, in boredom we hope rather than turmoil.

My job, and by your graduation now it has become yours, is to prevent Katharine Anabo from being disturbed while she's reading in the common room of Holt. We want to ensure boredom for her so she can fulfill it with reading. We'll let her read and when she's done give her more to read. We'll provide the humdrum emptiness in which thought can take place. But this will take great effort. She can't be too troubled or hungry or tired or poor, as Virginia Woolf has taught us. Just as a woman writer requires money and a room of her own to work in, so we all need release from external pain so that our internal pain can emerge through the boredom. That's the task ahead of us—to relieve others of the terror, hunger, fatigue, and poverty that keep them preoccupied with outward things. To prevent the death of the species in order to allow boredom to take over and reading to take place.

But the species suffers from *in*ternal dissension and strife as well, as we have certainly seen this year in our own community. We have to do more than protect the species from external hostility, for its internal hostility must be alleviated as well. The motto then is still that old insipid one, "love one another." Soothe one another, try to resolve the conflicts within the species, bore one another to death.

Not A Commencement, A Reincarnation

Kathy J. Ogren
May 27, 1995

I am honored to be asked to give this graduation address for the Johnston class of 1995. I extend a warm welcome to family and friends of the graduates, President Appleton, Deans Glotzbach and Carrick, faculty colleagues and other members of the University community. I extend a special greeting to Ron and Charlotte Walters, who are friends of mine from Baltimore, and who are here to help their son Nathaniel graduate.

I first began to think about this ceremony a few weeks ago when a student interviewed me for the campus newspaper; she asked me what I would talk about today. I told her I had no idea, that graduations were odd occasions because there really are two audiences here—the graduates—and everyone else, which makes it hard to decide on a suitable subject. Do I focus on what parents want to hear, or on their children's experiences? (These are not necessarily the same expectations.) And I am mindful of the fact that the majority of people I know cannot remember what any speechmaker said at their graduation—in fact, they are lucky if they can remember who the commencement speaker was.

For example, mine was a female attorney from Los Angeles—back in the days when lawyers were more popular. But I have no clue about what she said to us. This is a humbling memory. Commencement amnesia means that many hours of well-considered advice—advice that typically focuses on making the world a better place or extending education into everyday life—falls on deaf ears.

So I abandoned early all hope of crafting a memorable exhortation. But I do have some thoughts to share with this class. Perhaps my observations will help the rest of the assembled guests understand your unique educational experience. Because although a Johnston education has meant many different things to each *individual* student, *all* your efforts depended on two skills that will be crucial to your reincarnation: negotiation and fomenting opposition. I suspect that your ability to combine these two passions will make it possible for "living and learning" to finally make sense—in your next life.

Students here at Johnston have concentrations that testify to the central task of the Center—negotiating an integration between academic subjects like philosophy and computer science. Paradoxically, despite their discreet nature, these are anti-specialist degrees. They reflect student desires to reformulate knowledge, to establish connections—not divisions—between ways of knowing the world. Breaking down the authority of established knowledge should open up new ways to see, describe,

and possibly, change the world. Furthermore, your educations also validate experiential—not just classroom learning. This year, we have senior projects based on internships in a battered women's shelter, a film made about the culture of rag pickers in Nepal, a class taught about conducting Biblical archaeology. Many contracts acknowledge your work as political activists, volunteers, community builders. Because you have rejected the rigid authority of hierarchical disciplines, surely you will know better than to use the arrogance of the academy as a weapon.

What else have you done in Johnston that might be of some value in the next incarnation? Raised hell. And at your best you challenged and supported each other as you tried to transform your educational environment. You battled campus politics, debated world affairs, developed your own computer center, slogged through community meeting after community meeting trying to take responsibility for your education. You proposed classes to faculty, insisted that your best learning strategies be honored in your contracts, cajoled us into reading books that we might otherwise ignore. We are better teachers because of the trouble you caused.

And, thanks also to your agitation, we have never reached a consensus on the boundaries for this community—where does the academic end and the social begin? Is this an intentional community or not? What should a Johnston curriculum really look like? Why can't I count "Symbolic Logic" as a quantitative reasoning course? Why is it harder to reach consensus about kitchen hygiene than about a reading list for a linguistics seminar? How can we get more vegan entrees out of Marriott? How do we resolve conflict? Can we?

We have explored and debated these ideas; we have fought about them together—sometimes to a state of exhaustion. We have laughed and grieved together. You honored these emotional dimensions of your education. The answers to some of these questions remain unresolved as you graduate, but your experiments in mixing affect and intellect made for effective learning. Your struggles here can be turned to innovative purpose wherever you are headed.

Your new lives will not, however, be lived in a center for individualized or integrative learning—even if you are headed for one of the Johnston expatriate communities in Portland, Seattle, or New York. You will have to invent such a process in your lives. You will prove the worth of your education if you can go on combining negotiation and opposition in creative ways. To help you make this transition, I have written a poem that may be of some use to you. The poem was inspired by my friend Wallace McRae—of course he is a cowboy poet, from southeastern Montana. Wally took an old Yiddish joke and turned it into his classic poem Reincarnation. I offer a special version just for you—it goes something like this:

What does reincarnation mean?
A Johnstonite asked a friend.
The pal replied it happens when
Yer contract has reached its end.
They sit you down and ask about
livin' in the commun-ity.
You must negotiate away all doubt
that you deserve a B.A. degree.

The committee might ask did you talk in class,
or sit in a corner and duck?
How 'bout that month in Bangladesh
where you survived on sheer luck
Are you glad you made films, threw pots in the kiln
built sculpture for the senior show?
Will you ever drive to Elko, Nevada, again,
for poetry sung in the snow?

Incredibly, everyone at your review
remembers the day they first saw you.
You, too, remember your first day here.
Did you read in your room or drink a beer?
Once you moved into Bekins or Holt,
the lawn blowers woke you up with a jolt
You discovered those ugly plaid couches and chairs looked great in the lobby, upended in air.

You'll explain that you wrote with a flair,
especially once you shaved off all your hair.
A faculty member thanks you for friendship;
they'll explain that you taught as you learned.
Was it onehundredthirtytwo units you earned?
Where will you be in ten years someone asks?
Did Lise the Registrar take you to task?
Your advisor sums up your expertise
and writes it down in a lengthy precis.

There may be some tears, flowers, and gifts,
From the classes, coffeehouse, roof, you'll be missed.
You crafted your own education unique
You entered a follower, you leave in the lead.
You talk about how you've changed so much
Someone makes a motion to the Board and such.
Then it's over, we clap, dance, act quite insane,
You face a new world, a beginner again.

Frank R. Blume

May 25, 1996

I am very pleased to be here to have the opportunity to deliver the Mother of all Graduation talks. This is an important day for me and for the Johnston Center students who are graduating today. While it took you in most cases only four years to accomplish this, it has taken me 25 long and good years to have the courage to leave the Johnston womb, and a total of 39 years to depart from an academic career that has provided a wonderful life for me. I want to thank you for selecting me as one of your faculty graduation orators. I consider it an honor, and your selection means much to me. It may surprise you to learn that you are the first Johnston graduating class in my 25 years here to select me as their graduation speaker. And this astonishing fact has led me to think that this is the most sensitive, the kindest, and the smartest class to ever graduate from this odd and magnificent place.

After all of these years here, and at my age, there is a temptation to reminisce. I'm not going to do much of that with one exception—a brief word about the good old days when the Johnston Center was Johnston College. Well, they were good and they were bad. When I first arrived on campus in 1971, the Vietnam war was still raging, and Richard Nixon was our president. I also arrived on campus just after the worst crisis in the short history of Johnston College. The Chancellor of JC had been fired during the middle of the year by the then President of the University, a man who shall remain nameless, although we referred to him as "Captain Queeg." The next eight years consisted of endless crises, with often daily community meetings which made the place exciting, but exhausting. I know our priorities were centered on survival of the place rather than on education, and now thanks to many people, but especially to the superb subtle skills of Yash Owada, our present director, the Johnston Center is doing a much better job today in fulfilling its educational promises.

I have begun the somewhat painful process of going through my files to get rid of 40 years of accumulated junk. Last week I discovered a copy of a memo I wrote in 1977 to Ed Williams who was then Vice Chancellor of Johnston. I would like to read portions of it to you to give you an idea of how distracted we were from education in the "good old days."

To: Ed Williams
From: Frank Blume
Subject: The Porno caper

I have investigated the charge that Johnston students are

participating in the production of pornographic films. **(I have no idea why I was asked to investigate this).** My informant, an extremely **reliable** source, has told me the following: yes, two students did make a porno flick. While these two students were members of the film class taught by X, the film was not part of the course. They made the film "for a lark," although the initial motive was to make "an esthetically pleasing erotic film, 'you know, man, one with waves crashing against the beach.'" . . . Who the actors were was not disclosed to me, but in any case, they were careful not to show anyone's face, and thus the audience could not tell who they were, although there was a lively guessing game going on as to their favorite identities. . . . The film was shown at the Orton Center but my informant assures me that there was absolutely no one present under the age of 18. . . . Audience reaction was one of giggles, hoots, a big joke . . . it is also important to note that the cost of the film DID NOT come out of school funds . . . . My reaction to all of this is for you to forget the whole thing, and not even volunteer any more information on this, unless for some reason there is huge pressure on this—if pressed, you might say that we are giving our students real training for the real world of capitalism . . . .

It is easier for me to be funny than serious, but it is more important for me to be serious than funny. Rather than reminisce, permit me to **reflect** a little on my life and what seems important to me. In my lifetime, there have been many events that have had a deep effect on me, and more importantly, in the world at large. Half a dozen events really stand out. In chronological order they are: leaving Nazi Germany in 1936 with my parents and brother and coming to America; World War II; the Holocaust; the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945; landing a man on the moon in 1968; and the dismantling of the Berlin wall in 1989. All of these events are sharply etched in my memory. Only the tearing down of the Berlin wall, I believe, occurred in the lifetime of this graduating class.

This afternoon, let me focus on just one of these events, and attempt to relate it to our lives today. And this event—actually a series of events committed over a number of years—is the Holocaust. This systematic, brutal slaughtering of political dissidents, gypsies, homosexuals, and six million innocent Jews—young children, women, old folks, including my 74 year old grandfather, is in the words of Daniel Goldhagen, the author of the book entitled, *Hitler's Willing Executioners,* "the most shocking event of the twentieth century, and the most difficult event to understand in all of German history." For Goldhagen, explaining the Holocaust is

"the central intellectual problem of understanding Germany during the Nazi period." For me, explaining the Holocaust is one of **the** central intellectual problems of our times. Goldhagen tries to make a case that there is something inherent about Germans and German culture that permitted ordinary German citizens to gas Jews in the afternoon, and come home in the evening to an adoring wife and gorge on her wonderfully prepared duck dinner . . . . While there may be some truth to Goldhagen's theory, it is one that gets us all off the hook too easily. If the explanation of the Holocaust is that there is just something about Germans that allowed this to happen, I am afraid we really will not have learned enough to help us to prevent this tragedy from occurring again.

So how do social psychologists, and I am one, explain this phenomenon—the ability of ordinary people to kill other human beings without feelings of remorse? It certainly happens here all the time, all those LA gangs who shoot each other to bits, including innocent 4-year-olds who happen to be in the crossfire. You don't need me to give you more examples to illustrate man's inhumanity to man.

Psychologists know, and you know this too, that in order to kill another person, especially, sadistically, one has to do this **without feeling any emotion at all** for the victim. And for this to happen, the victim must be seen as less than human or as an object. And that's why, of course, when you are angry, you can pick up any object, like a TV set, and smash it to smithereens without having any remorse about what the TV set might be feeling, because TV sets have **no feelings whatsoever**. So this brings me to one of my main concerns. And that is (and I am sorry, I wish I could avoid the terms) the trend toward dehumanization and depersonalization of society. We are all familiar with it—real human contact is becoming scarcer and scarcer. You see it in our phone system on campus, where voice mail has replaced talking with real people, and with computers, where two people who have never met each other and communicate solely through the Internet, refer to themselves as being "in a relationship" or as "dating." Witness the title of a recent book, *Romancing the Net.* Mary Pipher in her newest book, *The Shelter of Each Other,* cites alarming statistics of how little time children spend with their parents, parents being replaced by the TV set, computer games, Cyberspace. Is it any wonder that more and more students are arriving on our campus with less and less experience dealing with the emotions and feelings of other people? Is it this fact that helps explain why some students here on this campus did not "get it"—how one of our Black students could **feel** outrage that a white fraternity member put on black face in order to do a parody of James Brown? Some students dismissed this man's feeling of upset and anger by labeling him as "oversensitive." **"Oversensitive?"** To say this is to trivialize his feelings, which is one step removed from denying him his feelings: in short, making him a little less than human,

an object. Perhaps it is a stretch, but I do not really think so, to say that what happened this spring on our campus regarding the black face incident is indeed related to the Holocaust.

I must confess that on some days here on this campus, including in my Johnston classes, I have felt like a television set—seen as having no feelings. Or worse, sometimes I feel invisible, like the protagonist in Ralph Ellison's extraordinary book, *Invisible Man*. The book begins:

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me . . . . When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imaginations—indeed, everything and anything except me.

Let me get back to my feeling like a TV set, because the other day someone asked me what changes I had witnessed over the years among our students. Well, it's nothing really dramatic—it's such a gradual change, that one may miss it, unless one goes back to the really good old days before the advent of TV, and all the contraptions we have now invented to entertain us and to make us feel comfortable. What I have noticed recently is that I often feel like a television set in my classes. Students are rarely vicious. It's just that a greater number walk into class late, talk with each other in class while I or other students are speaking, fall asleep, stretch out so they can feel REALLY comfortable, groan audibly, yawn, burp, suck on the straws of their plastic water containers that they faithfully carry around like baby bottles. They behave in the same manner that they do when they are watching TV at home or in their dorm rooms. (95% of students in my fall statistics class claimed to have a TV set in their dorm room.) What disturbs me is that it is happening so gradually that this type of behavior is becoming the norm, and when I have taken the risk of telling students that this behavior bothers me, on more than one occasion, I have been told, "Gee, Frank, don't take it personally." Yes, I take it personally. I have feelings. I am not invisible. To not see me, or to see me as a TV set, gives others the advantage of not having to deal with their own possible guilt feelings.

So I leave with a plea to practice more civility, more graciousness in your everyday life. It's not such a big deal. Err in the direction of being more sensitive to others, including strangers. I am sure you have seen the bumper sticker that says, ENGAGE IN RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS. That's pretty clever. An even better idea is to ENGAGE IN

PLANNED ACTS OF KINDNESS. Randomness, you see, implies ever so often, once in a while; why not simple kindness all the time?

There is one more related matter. You can begin to see that as a teacher, I have been and am much more concerned with the education of the heart, or of the soul than with the education of the mind, which most people see as a professor's primary function. What I am about to say, including the sentence I just finished, will strike terror in the heart of all of you out there who have radar systems to detect cliches. Well, okay, so be it! Let me first rework an old saw and coin a new aphorism: "Don't throw out the idea behind the cliche with the bath water." The cliche is: Character Counts! I think all the concerns I have expressed in this talk relate to this admonition. The matter of your character (and that of my colleagues) has been much more important to me than your brilliance or intellect, although I certainly admire those traits. I cannot stress enough that once you lose, for example, your credibility, you lose a bit of your soul. Credibility means that I can count on what you tell me to be true, that the paper you promised to hand in on Monday will in fact be handed in on Monday, that if you tell me, "Let's do lunch sometime," that you mean it, and that we in fact will have lunch, or that if you say you will keep in touch with me, that in fact you will. For credibility is linked to trust, and once you lose the trust in the eyes of others, your own sense of integrity begins to crumble. And if that happens, what do you have left?

As I end this little talk, I hope you don't think I've been too much of an old codger, laying a heavy burden of moral musings on your collective shoulders. I suspect I have said nothing that you don't already know. Even if this is the case, I still hope it's been worth repeating, for if you can follow my advice—not to lose your credibility with others—to engage continually in planned acts of kindness and civility toward others, and above all, not to treat people as objects, I guarantee you that you will go to heaven in a basket, and thus live happily ever after. Now what nicer graduation present could you receive than that?

Ah, you thought I was finished. Let me tell you, old professors never die, they don't even fade away, they just go on and on and on. Thank you again for asking me to speak, and letting me leave here with a bang rather than a whimper, and I'll see all of you up there at our 100-year and our 1,000-year and our 5,000-year Johnston class reunions.

Pre-Posted: a Recitative and Aria
OR
A Post-Card and a Post-lude
Score marking: Post-haste

William E. McDonald
May 25, 1996

Finally, and in conclusion . . . as I come to the end of my talk, I won't repeat the many profound and insightful things I have already said to you seniors. Instead, I want to spend what little time remains to me on the curious, once-in-a-lifetime territory you occupy at this moment. It's a suspended, a liminal space in which you stand. Up until this moment at Johnston you've always known your place: a first year student; a person with a graduation contract; a computer whiz or a literati; a senior. But are you still seniors once the president has pronounced the magic words? Or not? If you're post-seniors, are you already gone? Suddenly you come after Johnston. For a moment you're standing in the threshold, then you've left. You're history here. You've been sent away. You're in the mail. You're post-dated. You're in the post-box, with no return.

So I want to send you, after the 50 or 60 stunning messages I've already given you, a simple post-card, because you indeed are now post-marked, and marked as "post."

Of course, all of us live in a whole bunch of post-boxes: post-partum, post-teen, post-colonial, post-industrial, post-L.A. Rams and Raiders, some think post-feminist (but they're wrong) and, of course, postmodern. Some of us are even post-50, the "age at which you realize that there's more to survival than just cheerfully being around year after year." So in some ways we're all posted. But you're posted in a particular way that the rest of us are not; everything that you do now is always already coming after Johnston.

At the same time you've always already been "pre:" you were pre-natal, pre-school, pre-pubescent, pre-cocious, pre-mature, pre-liminary, pre-ponderate, pre-college, pre-ternatural to your parents. You now have a pre-cis, scholarly pre-cision, you know the Pre-Socratics from the post-Kantians and the pre-Raphaelites from the Post-Impressionists, your childhood pre-conceptions have been shattered, and some of you, despite our best efforts, are still pre-scientific. Today you're pre-eminent, but tomorrow you will have been pre-empted, pre-figured, pre-determined. So, to repeat, you're post, you're posted, you're in the post box.

So here's my post card, a card that follows after you, a last message that I hope will find you home. There's not much room to write, and a lot to

say. That's the recitative; now for the aria. First, it's better to be "post" than "pre." Now "pre" sounds better—you're all potentiality, unfettered, everything lies before you, and so on. But "pre" also means that you aren't anything, anything at all, just a bundle of nerve endings waiting for something to happen. And if being "pre" still tempts you, it's only because you haven't yet taken the measure of your new post-box. Sure, "post" means that you come after something, that you're subsequent to it, but it also means "because of." So, for example, because of modernism, certain things happened which we now call postmodern. Just so, because of Johnston, you are now posted persons who know certain things. You know academic success and academic responsibility. You know another culture well enough to re-see your own. And most of all, with any luck, you know community.

What is the most common notice posted at Johnston? What post-card is mailed at Johnston nearly every day? It's a little chit with one of these sentences: "Where is the community?" "Do we even have a community? The Community is screwed!" These cries and queries occur at virtually every serious Community meeting. They're uttered in anger, in frustration, in hope, in fear. But they are cries and queries that you will rarely, if ever, hear from a graduate. Because they don't care any more? No-no: look at the ones who are here today, or at the amazing number that return for our five year reunions. I bet it's the highest percentage of alumni reunion participation in the entire country. They now understand what community is. An alum says "The Johnston Community" and has a clear image of what that means. That's the content of your rite of passage today; that's the knowledge on the other side of the threshold that you now add to your knowledge about academic success and other cultures; that's the deepest benefit of being "post."

The best things you've done here, as you now see in your retrospective imagination, have been in community: seminars, GYSTs, crisis meetings; graduation contract and graduation review rituals; right down to this week's late-night, glad-sorry conversations as you look on faces you may well not see again, and to this ceremony itself, with its traditions and alumni, long and sprawling as a Dickens novel, and as sentimental, and as unforgettable. All of these together form the Johnston Community, which as alumni know is always, first and foremost, an image and an intention. Community isn't simply the sacrifice of individual rights and prerogatives to a group task. That's a pre-description, nothing more. Community means the persistent intention to make a community, and community means having the image, i.e. the imagination, retro and future, pre- and post-, to envision that community's values and goals even when they appear to be absent. Just so, dispersed peoples have always referred to themselves as part of a community that may seem fanciful to skeptics, yet which forges unities across time and space that

have empowered everything from baseball fans to nation-states and our oldest religious traditions. Our little community has certainly changed my life, completely; thanks to the Johnston Community I, and my colleagues here, are not your typical ambitious academics trying to bump equally determined competitors off their perch on some disciplinary pyramid; my academic life is utterly interwoven with the lives and history of this place and these people. It wouldn't exist without this community. So "Because of . . .": because communities are imagined and intentional, they're real.

And because you understand this now, you discover a further truth in your post-box: "post" means not just "coming after" or "because of," but also "inclusive of": to be "post-Johnston" means to have included all of this community's past in your own living. The details and local struggles of community life may disperse in your mind even as you disperse from this place, but the intention and image remain. You now disband, you scatter abroad, you follow after people you knew here who transferred or dropped out (but who still come to reunions in great numbers). As you become a graduate of this place, you in turn follow after an evanescent community of 1500 or so other people who were dispersed from this homesite before you, and whom you may never meet, yet with whom you persistently imagine a resemblance and a bond. You share a common, contested culture, language and outlook, one made with your labor and intention and so kept vital. You are, in short, fractals.

So because you're post-Johnston, you now know that the very idea of coming after always includes what came before. You're post but not post-humous; you can, and will, return here. Johnston has been your post, your camp, your retreat site; it is now, in dispersal, a word that resonates and a quality of spirit that animates, revivifies. Given our world today, it is likely to be the best community you will belong to. What you do when you graduate is post a bond that you too belong, and I promise you that post-cards from Johnstonians will never stop arriving in your box.

And as a post-lude to my aria, I have transposed a famous coda from Michael Ondaajte's *In the Skin of a Lion* into a communal key:

> "Her own life was no longer a single story but part of a mural, which was a falling together of accomplices. She saw a wondrous night web—all of these fragments of a human order, something ungoverned by the family she was born into or the headlines of the day. The detritus and the chaos of the age was realigned . . . .Official histories, news stories, surround us daily, but the events of community travel languorously, like messages in a bottle."

For only the best communities can order the chaotic tumble of events. Only the best can realign chaos to suggest both the chaos and the order it will become . . . . The first sentence of every community meeting should be: Trust each other, this will take time but there is order here, very faint, very human. Meander when you get to town. I end where I was supposed to begin: by greeting the president, our much-esteemed Director, my colleagues, our enthusiastic guests, and especially each of you in the pre-sent; by humbly thanking you for inviting me to speak to you; and by declaring you, from first to last, from Alpha to Omega, post-Johnston.

J.A.T.T. Cusp

May 31, 1997

Thank you for that gracious introduction. I was pleased to be informed by officials of this commencement ceremony that my address should be brief. In point of fact, they insisted it last no more than five minutes. Accordingly, you should take comfort that I have come prepared . . . um . . . for the occasion and shall not transgress the precise mandate given me.

Set Timer, and hold up large pocket watch.

After all, the idea of a brief commencement address is a good one, I think. Who wants to sit in the hot sun and listen to someone rehearse an endless canticle-to-irrelevance while pressing matters of unabridged scholarship beckon us all to other places and more comfortable settings? Not We! Indeed, we all can recall, I'm quite certain, times we have been forced to listen to buffoons who due to lack of preparation, or good sense or who carry about with them an enormous sense of their own importance . . . and who therefore insist that all must endure listening to them as they meticulously beat around every bush there is before finding their path of dubious direction . . . upon which they then stumble thoughtlessly on to some unlikely conclusion. Terrible, wouldn't you say? A barbaric intrusion upon everyone's valuable time. Alas, not so here.

Hold up watch.

No! I say, arduous preparation makes for precision of speech. Precision of speech coupled to brevity makes for lucidity. Lucidity, of course, fosters comprehension. Comprehension renders the communication memorable . . . indeed. There you have it! That is what we press for here . . . . In point of fact, should someone rise in a cultured gathering such as this and begin by saying, "I haven't any idea what to say, but . . . ." Such a one should be shot on the spot . . . I say. After all, what are we, Barbarians! No, brevity born of arduous preparation is the touchstone of true culture.

Of course, that does not mean that good communication must lack altogether a certain languor of pace, or that one should never linger on a relevant notion so as to savour the obvious pith and moment that presents itself. No. Not at all. But with that singular qualification being made we may then agree that . . . .

Five minutes it is, and not a word more from this commencement address, which, of course, is for the class of 1997. O Good Heavens!

Do forgive my lack of protocol . . . so detained was I with your wise notion of brevity: Protocol, um . . . .

President Appleton, Dean Glotzbach, Director Owada, Faculty and Staff of the University of Redlands, who because of either inclination or good breeding render especial service to Johnston Center, Members of the class of 1997, Parents, Friends, Guests of the class of 1997 . . . um . . . in point of fact, Alumnae of this august institution, who have taken it upon themselves to come and to participate in this auspicious occasion . . . um . . . and, in addition, all who may have found themselves here, for whatever reason, as uninvited onlookers and may have determined to remain for sake of their own edification from this address which, as we all know, will not last a moment longer than five minutes . . . due of course to my very painstaking preparation so as to render the edification cryptic and to the point. . . . um.

Greetings to you all . . . . Oh, do forgive me, greetings also to those guests of the onlookers who have wandered onto this green this day, and have neither inclination nor interest in what is going on here. Greetings to you as well. There we have it . . . protocol first and foremost . . . I always say . . . um.

Now then . . . um . . . to the question I would put before you this day, while requiring of you your most critical acumen. What sense. I ask you, are we to make of the new scroll recently unearthed from the Rock Strew at Urick? Can we rest content with Professor Hidgley's preliminary findings and tentative conclusions as to its meaning and origins?

Timer rings; watch consulted. Cusp sits down forthwith.

Don't Miss the Fireworks

Patricia L. Wasielewski
May 30, 1998

First, I would like to thank the Johnson senior class for asking me to be one of the graduation speakers. According to the Riverside Press-Enterprise, I am the "witty and entertaining, light and lively" speaker on the program. I intend to do my very best to provide you with something both entertaining and provocative.

I am, in fact, very glad to be the "less serious" speaker here, because usually serious graduation speeches are full of platitudes. Platitudes, for those of you unfamiliar with the word, are defined as "dull, stale, insipid truisms." Fortunately for us all, I have no platitudes to offer you today. Rather, I thought I would use this opportunity to encourage and guide you in the development of an "Attitude." Yes I do mean this in the sense of "Are you givin' me some attitude." I thought my qualifications might be particularly relevant to suggesting how you might further your attitude of defiance.

Yes, now I know that many of you believe that you arrived here with a fully developed understanding of what it means to be defiant. Perhaps you even had someone officially apply this label to you for one reason or another. Some of you specifically came here so that you could spend the last four or five years in the bosom of defiance we call the Johnston Center. However, it is my belief that defiance, like a fine wine, can only get better with maturity. Defiance is a skill, like many others, that must be practiced daily in order for one to develop the true breadth and depth of its use.

The instructions I have to share with you today about defiance, if followed closely, will inevitably make your life more interesting. They are specifically directed at three areas which I assume will take on primary importance to you as you start your life after Redlands. These areas include love, investing and altered states of consciousness.

First, love. To develop an attitude of defiance in the realm of love means to live by the words of one of the great spokeswomen of popular culture, Janis Joplin, when she wrote (25 years ago) "Get it while you can." No, I do not mean that you all should pursue random, unprotected acts of sex and ego driven meaningless "hooking up" with whomever is available. A true act of defiance in the realm of love is to look for, nurture and revel in truly meaningful connections with other human beings. Defiance is always a scary proposition. Defying the sexist, racist, homophobic images of one another that encourage us to see in each other only as objects to satisfy our desires is demanding work. But, most of all,

developing meaningful relationships with others requires that we defy the negative messages we have been taught about ourselves. In order to love another, we must first begin by loving ourselves in that significant way that allows us to be human, to make mistakes, to see our strengths and weaknesses, and proudly, yes proudly, display them to those we desire. If you can accomplish this part of defiance, you will be privileged to many sensuous, supportive, and satisfying interactions with whomever, however, you choose.

Now to investing. I can tell when I look at the list of emphases, that you will all be assured of fine lucrative careers in our capitalistic society. How can you miss with things like "Religious and Cultural Studies" or "Society and the Human Condition." So as the money rolls in, you will have some need to think about an investment policy. Conventional investment advice is pretty clear. After you set aside that portion you are going to donate back to the dear old U of R (you realize hitting up soon to be alums is always a part of commencement speeches), you will be told to make some safe, stable, long term slow growing investments with the majority of your assets, and to put a little bit into something risky. Frankly folks, I don't care what you do with your money, and this may very well be good advice for capital accumulation. However, I strongly suggest that in order to adopt an attitude of true defiance in your life, you turn this investment policy on its head and apply it to everything, except maybe your money. That is, put the majority of your life assets into things that are risky. Do not be satisfied with a job you don't love. Do not leave things undone or unsaid that you really want to do or say. Do not fear reprisal for standing up for what you believe in. Do not compromise your integrity even if someone else says it is the best thing to do. The biggest risks do not come climbing Everest, rafting the Amazon, or snowshoeing the Antarctic. The biggest risks come everyday, in the small life choices we make. Defiantly take these risks, and look to your family and/or your friends, and/or your sense of self, as the continuing support system that allows you to pursue these goals.

This brings me, finally, to the area of altered states of consciousness. I suggest you get some sparkle. By sparkle, I am not referring to the street name of some synthetic designer drug, but rather to a description of how the world looks when you develop a defiant curiosity about it. I am tired and bored with people who view the world from a tired and bored, detached, ironic, sardonic viewpoint. I hope the world, in all its beauty and ugliness, holds more mystery, excitement and pleasure for you than is implied in this darker attitude of despair and myopia. The most mind altering experiences come from your own ability to view the world as an ever-changing, kaleidoscope of truly curious events and people. If you refine your capacity to take the role of the other, to gain some perspective, to pretend, to see what happens just for the hell of it, I am sure you

will never be bored with life. Defy the temptation to disengage from the world because parts of it are ugly and unjust and perhaps irredeemable. If you make curiosity your preferred altered state of consciousness, it will never allow you to disintegrate into nothingness. It will also make it difficult for you not to take some action and get involved with whatever it is that piques that curiosity in you. Now, for the big finish. At Johnston we place a high value on experiential learning. Years from now, when you think back to your graduation and commencement addresses, I don't want you to forget this information I have shared with you. A principle of experiential pedagogy would suggest that some "out of the ordinary" experience, attached to this information, will help to solidify it in your minds. As I thought about this speech I taxed my brain for something to do that would make sure you never forget these solemn words. It came to me as I was sitting at the graduation of my nephew from Wichita State about two weeks ago. His graduation was about five hours long and just happened to be the 100th graduating class from that fine institution. As my family sat well into the evening in order to see him receive his diploma, we consoled ourselves with the thought that, because it was the 100th graduation, a display of fireworks would finish the evening. The fireworks were truly spectacular, and as we were getting ready to leave, my mother turned to me, with, I think, a newfound appreciation of some of the requirements of my job, she came up with one of the best pieces of practical philosophy I have heard in years. She said to me: "I think commencements should have fewer speeches and more fireworks." So, with the help of some assistants, who are all practitioners of defiance in their own right, I present you the best out-of-the-ordinary finish I can come up with—Remember, go forth defiantly. Don't miss life's fireworks. Good Luck Graduates of Johnston, 1998 and in your honor we light the traditional five sparkler salute.

Kevin D. O'Neill

May 30, 1998

"Graduation" and "commencement" are celebratory words. They are also imperialist and they exclude. To graduate means to elevate; more precisely, to raise up or expand, in a graded way. To commence means to begin, with the suggestion that the beginning is a new one. Thus this ritual in which we are mutually engaged means one in which those honored are said or thought to be enlarging themselves and to be beginning something new. And these connotations of the terms are roughly true. They tell an important part of the story.

But if as Emily Dickinson writes, "Pain is lost in praise," then the celebration of graduating and commencing also perhaps means a forgetting, an unrecognized erasure of memory. Because going forward and beginning are never sui generis; never de novo. There is always that from which one graduates, that in terms of which one begins. As we look ahead in the necessary triumphalism of the occasion, mightn't we also, if only for a few minutes, also look back to the pain, exile and confusion that also helped bring us here?

A week or two ago at a Johnston grad review the precis I had written for one of my advisees was challenged by another student. He claimed that the precis was unacceptable because he charged that it made the graduating student look, in his words, like a flake. But pain is lost in praise: to graduate means not only to move ahead and to begin; it also means to have overcome and, even more, not to have overcome—it means, on some level, to have failed.

Today in this speech I want to celebrate failure, the obverse and necessary face of graduating and commencing. I want to argue two things that are different. First, I want to argue that failing, suffering, confusion, though not honored at graduations, contribute at least as much as success to these proceedings, and to where you all are today. Second, I want to argue that the same, or like, failures, confusions and sufferings do not contribute anything at all to your current success, and that these non-contributing failures, which never get recognized at graduations, might even be a most important aspect of your lives that deserves reminding and privileging for a little time.

First, the contributing failures. Learning means failing. We learn when we cannot do something that we want to do or that we recognize it important to do. Even those who have special talent at certain skills and activities fail. And there are times—and this is a truism that is a deep component of the Johnston myths—when such failure, and the risks it entails, are the necessary condition for all further success. The Johnston

class contract and the Johnston graduation contract implicitly recognize this fact. We propose a plan; we revise it, sometimes over and over, at times because we are exceeding our expectations, more often because we discover that our optimism about the rate and level of our projected success was somewhat ill-founded. And this discovery is a good thing, in our shared story, because it can lead to regrouping, rethinking, and new more successful efforts. We see our lives as a series of experiments, or trials, so that a certain amount of failure is built into our expectations. Thus my precis, which I believe accurately captured the complex and not always triumphal progress of a certain individual toward eventual but provisional success, seemed right to me. At Johnston and at this graduation we honor not blank progress, effortless achievement, but the hard-won accomplishment that comes from mingling failure with successes.

To say such things does what graduation speeches are intended to do: it belabours an obvious in a way that turns the obvious into a mild warning and certainly into a cautionary tale for those who are leaving us. There is however another kind and level of failure that interests me more and that is a little more difficult to evoke because it does not fit into a larger narrative filled with the hope of progress. And, as the anthropologist Nigel Barley writes in his book on death, *Grave Matters*, we Americans are enamoured of what he calls those "forged memories" that either eliminate failure altogether or transform, as I just did, into part of a success story. We leave shots of the funeral out of the family photo album.

To call forth that deeper sense of failure I must go back to the Old Testament—or for the Jewish people here, to the part of the Tanakh called the Psalms. The psalter is filled with reflections on human failure but the psalm I want especially is Psalm 139, which was made into a reggae tune by Jimmy Clift: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, and yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion." The particulars of this song to failure interest me. The people Israel have been taken away from their promised homeland as slaves. They are exiles and oppressed in a strange land, and in that land they are compelled to sing their songs, in a mockery of their joyous singing in their own land. They are oppressed outcasts and losers, and they are living a life that is not their own. Their failure seems complete and there is no facile, nor even an arduous overcoming. The point is, there is no overcoming at all. The people Israel sit by the rivers of Babylon, and from their hopelessness the psalmist forges a song, a poem. He or she privileges failure, and leaves us in it and with it.

Is this a self-destructive quietism? A foregoing of justice? A failure to stand up for one's rights? No. I think it is a song that celebrates the

unbridgeable limits of human life. Sometimes we sit, by the rivers of Babylon, and we weep, because there is no comfort, because we have come up against a personal limit or an ontological limit or a political limit and for that moment we can do nothing—but weep, and sing our sorrow.

Such sorrow does not, I argue, contribute to later success. It does not feed into a larger river of accomplishment; it is not a tributary whose bitterness will be smoothed by inclusion in the larger stream of life. It is what it is. A sitting with limits. An embrace of one's smallness. A crucial admission that the deathless ground for our momentary successes, the night into which our stars burst forth and into which they vanish, is so much vaster than we can ever plumb, so much deeper than we can ever hope to see.

And what does this teach? I believe it can teach a softening of confidence and a texturing of hope. Not their abandonment, of course. Confidence and hope are appropriate and powerful forces in all our lives. But how much more graceful and true they are when we understand the weeping by the rivers of Babylon that will always be our lives, when we see ourselves thus weeping, when we even learn to poetize that weeping, when we sing what we must accept and in singing it, wring a slight change in its inevitability. That we weep is inevitable; that we sing the weeping is not, and it is singing, on occasion, our failures, that we become more human creatures.

So I end in a circle, singing the singing of failure, praising the poetizing of suffering, reminding both you and me that we must not lose pain in praise and that, on even our most triumphal days, we cannot afford to forget the tears that mark our lives.

This touches my final thought—the fundamental of triumphal progress, its look forward and its inevitable glance backward. To capture this I must now inject a little Latin into the proceedings because graduations really need a little Latin. The Roman poet Catullus wrote a piece on the death of his brother. In it he visits the brother's grave, which he has traveled a long way to see. Standing on that grave Catullus speaks, capturing his complex feelings: "Frater," he calls, "ave atque vale." "Brother, hail and farewell." In more modern English: "My brother, I honor you and say goodbye." In that short sentence Catullus captures graduations as well as leavetakings for the beloved dead: honor for progress made, sorrow at the parting the progress makes inevitable.

I take the liberty of adapting that farewell gesture to you graduates, addressing you as what you genuinely are, now my brothers and sisters

in this community: "Fratres et sorores, ave atque vale." "My sisters, my brothers, I honor you. And I say, 'Goodbye.'"

Long live Johnston College!