

SPEECH TO MANCHESTER COLLEGE,
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It is a great pleasure to grow old and to be asked to dispense advice and to not have to follow it oneself. In that department, let me urge you to go to bed early, get up at dawn, keep well ahead of your studies, refrain from smoking and drinking and wild living. I give you that advice, not because I have ever followed it myself, but because life's pleasures are all the more delicious if an old lady has told you to do otherwise.

The fact is, life is a feast of great pleasures and we are rude to our Creator if we do not partake of the beauty and fun and pleasure of this life. So I do hope you will take care of yourselves and that you will do your homework to the extent that you will not always be behind and worried and stressed and missing out on the joy all around you. The captain of a well-run ship can afford the time to enjoy the breeze and the view. Be that to your own life, starting with college. It is a challenge, I know, but if you keep at it, you will get the hang of living well in this life.

You will see that some of the students around you are forever behind and worried, and stressed while others seem on top of it and have a smile. Your choice, indeed. The moment of truth is when you are tempted away from your resolve. Will you be a person of strong character? Here is the test of it: a person of character stays true to a task, long after the passing of the mood in which that resolution was made. Watch out for that: Your conscious overview of your daily life can guide you toward improvements that will strengthen your hold on life and its happiness. Let me warn you more specifically that problems like depression and chronic procrastination are always a good excuse for a visit to the health center where you can get very useful help. The brain is no less fixable an organ than the stomach, and we do get our aches and pains and should go for help sooner rather than later.

Now, that is all boilerplate advice. Let me tell you something more interesting. You come into college with the expectation of learning many new things—of becoming an expert in many areas. But there is one area where you are already the expert, and where the professors and the other old birds are not. Young people bring something special and, if you are not fully aware of this superior quality, you might waste it unknowingly.

I am not speaking of your athletic or more personal areas of strength and stamina, though I am sure you are very impressive to watch in action. I am speaking of your view of the world, which in many ways is superior to the view seen by older eyes.

Trust your sensibilities toward justice and fairness and toward the environment and peace. Understand that your value judgments in these areas are better because they have not been beaten down or crusted over. Information overload can make us insensitive. While your eyes are wide open—and so also your heart—trust what you see. Do not hang back from involvement in addressing the problems of the world, waiting to become

an expert. You are expert enough. You are our annual re-supply of new eyes and fresh hearts to give our sorry species its best hope for improvement and survival. Take your part in the great dramas and the great struggles now still in their opening acts in this world. It is the part where you storm on stage with a confused but mischievous look and the audience cheers you madly. Don't wait to know the part too well, or the moment will pass without you;.

What is your passion? There is a place for you in that passion. Or are you drifting, looking for your passion? Let your curiosity lead you to it. Trust the force of that curiosity—it is a lighted way for you, and just for you. Be brave when your curiosity takes you to places you would rather not go—it knows what it is doing and it has served you well for much longer than you can possibly imagine.

Look around every now and then and wonder what all this life is about. Whom is served by all this life? Whom does life serve? Life serves life, and we are happiest and at our best when we let our full life force—indeed our divine life force—rise within us as we engage our lives in service to the world, to the life around us. We are happiest when we are serving life and adding to its health and bounty. We are simply made that way—made for cooperation and joining of every kind.

This is an extraordinary time you have chosen to come into the world. What an amazing world! The young woman college student in Iran, wearing her Levis under her burka, is your sister and your friend. The farmer in Central America who is trying to get a fair price for his coffee beans so that he can build a better house for his children is your uncle and a man you deeply respect. The Navajo woman who is fighting for the right to stay on land that has been her family's for generations is your grandmother, and she needs your help.

It is not too much. It is all quite beautiful. Cast your heart into this world right now, for your eyes and your heart are open and your senses of justice and fairness and your sense of the right thing to do by the planet that sustains us are fully matured and at their perfect moment to give hope and progress to the world. Don't save yourselves for latter; spend yourselves today in love, and your investment will come back to you a hundredfold if you survive.

Most of the social progress of the past hundred years has come from college students demanding a better world.

A good friend of mine was flying across the U. S. recently and his seat-mates were a young man and woman from Iran. The man was a naturalized U. S. citizen. The young woman had come here more recently. She told my friend how she had grown up under the artillery barrages of the Iran-Iraq War. She described how the Iranians saw that war: that the Americans had built up the Shaw's army to be among the strongest in the region, but that, when he was toppled by the Ayatollah, the U. S. armed Saddam Hussein in Iraq and encouraged him to take down the Iranian army a few notches. It was in that game that she found herself as a child target of artillery. My friend asked her if she did not

resent Americans for that time in her young life. She said that she tried not to hold Americans responsible for the actions of their government, as she hoped she won't be held responsible for the actions of the Iranian government. She said that Americans seemed so kind and so unaware of what was being done in their names around the world, and she said she thought it must be like being the children in a family where the daddy is a mobster—their lives are comfortable, but they know there is something wrong. They do not ask too many questions because they love their way of life. She said that she did not like to tell Americans about all that she knew, because it was kind of a shame to wake them up to all this when their lives were so cluelessly blissful—her words.

Well, she was wrong on some counts. As citizens of a democratic republic, we are indeed responsible for what our nation does in our name. And it is no help for us not to be the awakened citizens we must be.

America is a great country and we love it. We love this planet, too. And you young people here today are the bright eyes that must be the open and awake eyes, though still full of joy and honor, love and mischief, duty and courage to serve life in a time when life is challenged by its old foes: fear and hate and ignorance.

Be a great brotherhood and sisterhood of love and action. Arrange your personal lives so that you have the time and resources to take your part on this great stage. And smile the smile of the peaceful warrior whose weapons are love and light, and ever more love and more light.

I particularly hope that you will help us get money out of politics by working for the Fair and Clean Elections law that needs to be passed in Indiana

Let me tell you about clean elections or public funding as practiced in the states of Arizona and Maine. Here is how it works. First, it is voluntary, so there are no constitutional problems about anyone's rights. The candidate who wants to participate has to personally collect a certain number of qualifying signatures and small contributions—usually in the five dollar range—from people who live in his or her district and are on the voting list. This demonstrates community support. Someone who has long been active in a parent-teacher group or scouting or some such thing will have an easy time of it. Someone who has not helped their community will find it hard sledding. When the candidate meets these requirements the campaign receives advertising money from the state fund. The candidate must agree to neither raise nor spend any other money, including his own. That neatly gets special interest contributors right out of the picture. The cost of such a system is about one-tenth the costs of our paying off special interest contributors with tax breaks and other favors, as we do today. Public elections should in every way be funded by public money or our elected representatives shall ever more be governing under the influence of their donors.

In the 1960's, my husband and I became involved, through our church, with an Eskimo village at Point Hope, Alaska. The village was about to be removed by our government,

so that they could test hydrogen bombs there, with the intention of making an artificial bay, as proof that they could use bombs to make a new canal across Central America. It was an ambitious idea, but, in terms of what we already knew about the human costs of atomic testing, and in terms of the loss of these people's traditional home, it was madness.

My husband and I took our little Volkswagen bus as far up Alaska as it would go, then flew in a little airplane the rest of the way. We fell in love with the people, and came to respect their way of life, which was hard yet beautiful. My husband worked for the New Hampshire electric utility, so the Eskimos thought he must be a man of considerable power, which was only true in terms of kilowatts. But they had no one else to turn to, so when they asked us to please help them save their village, we of course said we would do everything we could, which was what we did.

And in that effort, we met many Members of Congress, especially our own, who were outraged at the situation and who did everything they could to slow down the project until it could be killed, which did happen when president Kennedy and Nikita Krushchov signed the atmospheric test ban treaty. I felt that I had representatives in Congress who shared my values and represented me. That is democracy.

But several years ago I was reading about how a tobacco subsidy was put in a bill, headed to the president to be signed, in the dead of night, by two members of the House of Representatives. I came to understand that it was a payoff for the campaign contributions that big tobacco made to the reelection campaigns of our representatives. I realized things had changed—or was it that I had never seen that side of it? In any case, I got busy and collected thousands of signatures from my New Hampshire fellow citizens who helped me to spread petitions all over the United States to urge Mr. Gregg and other senators to get behind the McCain/Feingold bill to outlaw corporate contributions to federal campaigns.

Mr. Gregg did not respond to all that work, and when I called his office, I was told that they must have lost them, or never got them. Well, I had copies, of course, and sent them again. But he would never, and did never, vote for that reform. And in the process of pushing that bill toward passage, I did take a long walk of 3,200 miles to talk to communities and to newspapers and radio stations all across the country to get people to call their Members of Congress and support McCain/Feingold's bill. And all that did help in a small way to make the phones ring and convince these fellows that the people did care about it.

When I finished the last of those 3,200 miles to Washington, I sent a note to Mr. Gregg asking for a meeting, but it was not answered. So, even then, I had no senator in Washington, and neither did so many thousands of my fellow New Hampshire friends and neighbors who expected more of him in voting for an obviously needed reform—the first of many, still-needed reforms.

So you see, I have been at this project for a few years, and have a few more to go.

The McCain-Feingold bill, of course, did not stop the flow of money to power, but it made it a game of individuals again, and not corporations.; Mr. Tom Delay of Texas has become very aware that the bill does have teeth. We are all watching and waiting and wondering what will happen to him, having been caught with his hand in the cookie jar. But elections are too expensive and too rigged against our interests. The only reform that can really work is if people run without taking any of that special interest money—no PAC or other special interest money from the right, left, or middle, and then win anyway. That was my pledge and my plan when I ran against Mr. Gregg in the last election. If I had succeeded it would have caused an earthquake in Washington. My campaign was one of the first (Russ Feingold is another) to take no special interest money, and in trying we have helped to break trail for others who may come after us in other elections and who may get all the way there. It was a serious thing we did, and I do not exaggerate when I say that our democracy is quite in jeopardy;.

Why do we not get the health care we need and why do they spend instead of invest our Social Security fund, and why do they send our grandchildren on foreign misadventures? Well, we may disagree here and there, but powerful special interests, now international in their operation and with no allegiance to any nation, now control Congress more than we do. And that is taxation without representation, and you know how we Americans respond to that situation. We have no tea to dump into the harbor, but we can jolly well dump our paid-off politicians into the Potomac and refuse to vote for any of them who take that money and use it to bludgeon any of us who dare run against them as fellow citizens.

So here it is. Those of us who have lived in the grace of a democracy given us by our fore-fathers have a duty to leave it as our legacy.. Too many people whose memories we still cherish died, and too many young men and women are dying in a senseless war in Iraq for us to allow this system of human freedom ' to vanish from the earth' . .

In the end it is about our power to have lives of meaning. A democracy is our machinery for expressing our civic values here and abroad. We have the right to a meaningful life, and when we feel the power to create a meaningful life slipping away from us, we tend to do all sorts of crazy things. We have family violence, and cultural violence, as our frustration grows. We latch onto crazy leaders who express our madness—leaders who represent hardened attitudes and inflexible stances, instead of the more human aspect of growth and change and experimentation. This is a descending spiral, and we are now deep into it.

So what can we do? We can reassert our power. We can throw a monkey wrench into their little corrupt game by not voting for any of them who take special interest money, which is the poison that gets between us and real representation—representation which is our power to shape the world in ways that gives our own lives meaning. We need to believe that we made a difference, because we were here, because we were alive, because

we participated in a great democracy that led the world in bright new directions. That power we do have right now: it is in the tip of our fingers on our next election day, and we can all move grandly back toward our real power and toward lives of civic meaning that we have a right to, if we will but lift that finger and vote for change. That can be our legacy to our families and to American and to the World. We are awake. We will put this house in order. We will stand up for freedom so that others behind us can be free, as our forefathers stood up for us.

And in taking that action, we can change the world, if only by the fact that some people here did what they could. That is our victory, and that alone gives meaning to a life. So even in acting, in standing up, in making our voices heard, we shine brightly in a victory, for life is a spiritual stage and either we take our part or we do not, and it is not the end of the play that matters, for it never does—it is how we play our part.

This is a time when your individual involvement will have an heroic importance to the world. This may sound overblown. It may make no sense to you for an old woman to stand here and tell you that you, personally, are the hero or heroine whose actions will decide things for a troubled world. But I think that may indeed be the case. Our lives are more beautifully linked that you can imagine, and the genius of one life can affect all the others in unimaginable ways.

When you are my age of 95, you will understand that the voice you must listen to is that small one within you, telling you to save our planet, to get involved. Stay involved. Understand what it means to be an American. It means to take responsibility for mature self-governance. In a world where the polar ice is melting and atmosphere ozone levels are thinning daily; in a world where the divided between the very wealthy and the literally starving is growing rapidly, where one child in five goes to bed hungry and two out of five if they are Afro-American, we must assume responsibility;. We must take our place at the table of power.

What a wonderful challenging time in which we live. A time when so much is at stake and when we all have so much important work to do in taking back our freedom from the Corporate world that has been created. And that you, personally, have an important role to play in this greatest drama of our time.

Don't let anybody tell you that is impossible. You are winning if you are just out there trying, because you are the Center of the World.

Thankyou