

Commencement---Otsego High School

THANK YOU

First of all congratulations Class of 2008!!! And second, congratulations to the entire community. This is a beautiful school – one to be very proud of. It is a testament to your dedication and commitment to the education of our young people, like the young men and women graduating here tonight.

Over this last year I have read and spoken to classes in schools across the county. I really love coming to the schools, especially the younger grades because they really speak their mind. I nearly always get three immediate questions from them, so just in case you are wondering, (1) No, I do not know Judge Judy; (2) No, I do not know Judge Roy Brown; and (3) Yes, we judges DO wear our suits under the robes in court.

Few of the schools I visit however, can match this school, it is fantastic! But now, graduates, it has come time for you to move to the next stage in your life. You have succeeded in this place. It has, much to my dismay, been 30 years since I graduated, but I think I will be joined by your parents and grandparents in telling you that while your movement to the next challenge in life may be a little scary, a little nervous, it will be a great adventure and you will meet some AMAZING PEOPLE along the way.

One such person that I met a few years ago was a wonderful woman named Barb Conner. When she passed away a few weeks ago she was 82, she had raised a family and was at the same time very involved with her community. She saw a need for a hospital and organized a committee to fund and build one. Let me tell you, she could tell stories that would make you roll with laughter or sit and cry. I will miss her a great deal but I will continue to cherish her stories and to be inspired by the strength with which she led her life. If you know anyone; parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt that lived that amazing and terrifying span of years that we called the twentieth century, sit with them, listen to their stories. They have incredible tales and lessons to share.

Recently, I was at a judicial conference in Washington, D.C. One evening after the meeting I walked to the National Mall. I honored my two brothers that served in Vietnam by visiting that solemn memorial. Many sacrifices are remembered there—*they are not forgotten.*

Another memorial that I visited was breathtaking and spectacular; Terrible in the scale of human tragedy and yet glorious in the crowning victory it commemorates. That was the National WWII memorial. It is located at the end of the reflecting pool between the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. At night it is lighted with flood lights, and is one of the most magnificent features of the national mall. The TITANIC struggle that the memorial commemorates defined **good and evil; repression and freedom**; and that era defined for us what has come to be known as the *Greatest Generation.*

This was not the Greatest Generation because it emerged victorious from WWII, *though that would have been enough.* It was not greatest because they wrestled an economy from the depths of the depression to create the world's arsenal of democracy (especially here in Michigan), *though that by itself would have been enough.* They were not the greatest because of the countless civil, community and faith organizations they volunteered for and served within, *though that too would have been enough.*

They were, they ARE, the greatest generation because in addition to all of these things they WORKED AND GAVE and SACRIFICED to allow and ensure that the following generations had the opportunity to be even greater than they. They fulfilled the essence of the American Dream; to give their children the chance to do better than themselves.

Let me quickly quote you a line from an epic WWII movie; "Saving Private Ryan". A whole platoon of men has given their lives to save this one soldier Private Ryan. Ryan is told by the last dying hero, "Deserve This." I would like to take this opportunity tonight to tell you that you CAN "Deserve This." That you *do* DESERVE this.

I know you have worked hard to get here tonight. You have spent hours in classes and doing homework and in extra curricular sports and in clubs. You have shown that you do "Deserve This."

Let me tell you that graduating from High School is an accomplishment that many do not achieve and it is a very important mile stone. 24% of adults within our county over the age of 18 have NOT completed High School. I can also tell you that there is **no one factor** more prevalent than failure to finish school, closing the door to so many opportunities, which brings so many people to my courtroom. Closing the door on education closes many doors of opportunity. By finishing your High School education you demonstrate that you continue to deserve the blessings of the Greatest Generation because you keep the hope of greater opportunity open to you.

Many of you will go forward to continue your education in colleges or technical schools. Others of you will go directly to work but you are all fulfilling the dreams of that Greatest Generation who gave of themselves to make this possible for you.

But ladies and gentlemen of the graduating class of 2008, when I say “Deserve this” I do not wish you to hear those words as heavy and laden with the need to succeed only in finding a good job, or in getting a degree that will help you make a lot of money. I mean to “Deserve This” by recognizing the value of an education and to encourage education at ALL levels. Help your brothers and sisters, your sons and daughters achieve their educational goals as well.

I mean to “Deserve This” by doing what that Greatest Generation did when *they* provided support, not only with money, but with their *actual time* and *sweat* and *effort* to volunteer in civic, community and faith organizations, to *work* to make your community a better place, to *enable* the generations to follow you to do even better than you and by doing so to achieve greatness yourselves.

Mother Theresa wrote a poem which is  
**engraved on the wall of her home for children in Calcutta.**

People are often *unreasonable, illogical and self-centered*;  
**Forgive** them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you  
of selfish, ulterior motives;  
**Be kind** anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some  
false friends and some true enemies;  
**Succeed** anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;  
**Be honest and frank** anyway.

What you spend years building,  
someone could destroy overnight;  
**Build** anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness,  
they may be jealous;  
**Be happy** anyway.

The good you do today, people will  
forget tomorrow,  
**Do good** anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and  
it may never be enough;  
**Give the world the best you've got ... anyway.**

You see, in the final analysis, it is  
**between you and God,**  
It never was between you and them anyway..

In Conclusion Graduates:

May God Bless You and also the United States of America.

And, in turn, **as you are strengthened and empowered** by the blessings you receive. Extend YOUR Blessing to your *nation*, your *state*, your *community* and your *family*. Bless them with your work, your commitment to making the world a better place. You **can**, you **do**, deserve the blessings bestowed by the Greatest Generation. You **can** and I know you **will** rise to the challenge to be the next Great Generation.

Congratulations to each of you.