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Hebron Academy Speech

Charlotte Michaud

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presented in
academy chapel | speech at Hebron - Mother's Day Vespers
academy
May 8-1966

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It is a great temptation, in these surroundings, to attempt to preach a sermon, but I learn from the dictionary that, while a sermon is usually based on the Scriptures, a sermon is also the word used to describe a serious talk on behavior, responsibility, and other qualities--but, the dictionary adds--this refers also to "specially long, tedious, and annoying talks".

That is the last thing I want to do. First, I will be brief--furthermore--I have been ~~xxxxxx~~ assigned a topic. I am to talk to you about: ACHIEVEMENT. Again, I base myself on the dictionary.

I hope you have learned what a good friend that book can be, and what a reliable source of information it is.

In a newspaper office, where I spent 40 years--reporters practically live in the dictionary--so exact must we be--in everything we write. As an aside, let me tell you, that few persons bother to praise a good article, but let an error get printed--and the telephone switchboard lights up like a Christmas tree.

So, from the dictionary, I learn that ACCOMPLISHMENT and ACHIEVEMENT are sometimes synonymous--but--in usage--there is a SLIGHT difference.

Let me demonstrate. When you walked--from wherever you were--to come to this church, you can't be said to have "achieved" something. The word is too strong--but, you did engage in an ACTION.

If--to come here--you had to forsake something else you would have preferred to do--but you decided to come here instead--you can be said to have ACCOMPLISHED something. True--a rule of this academy--says you must be here at this time, and on this day, but--we all know that rules can be broken. Nevertheless, you came--probably expecting to be bored--if not convinced of the fact--but--you came. THAT--I would call an ACCOMPLISHMENT.

Now--let us suppose that these services were held every Sunday of the school year, and that you never missed attending. THAT, I would call an ACHIEVEMENT. All of us know--that to keep such a schedule would have taken some doing--that there would have been stormy nights and cold nights;--nights, when you didn't feel as good as usual--nights, when you could have thought of a dozen other things more interesting to do--but, here you came despite every temptation. THAT, I would say is an ACHIEVEMENT.

I grant you that it is NOT a WORLD-shaking achievement, but--one has to start somewhere.

Living the life you have lived here this past year--is an achievement in itself. I know something of such a life. I--too--was placed in a boarding school--~~xxx~~ at a much younger age than you-- and there I remained for five years.

I hated it most of the time, and I--especially--resented having those living at home tell me how lucky I was.

If there is something about the life here you don't like--I can tell you, of two for each ~~xx~~ one you can name--but, you'd be surprised how those outside envy you~~xx~~.

In ~~xxx~~ time, you'll learn to brag about your stay here. A school that has been able to retain a high reputation for over 150 years has also ACHIEVED something of a high order.

WHY are you here? You might be in a public school at a much lower cost to your parents. Being at home--you would have opportunities for extra pleasures that are denied to you, here. Years after I left the boarding school, someone asked me what I had learned there.

Truthfully, I could give but one answer--"I learned to obey"--I replied, and the comment I received was "Before you can lead, you must learn to obey". In other words: before you can discipline others--you must learn to discipline yourself. That is, undoubtedly One of your ACHIEVEMENTS during your stay here.

Do not forget--your stay here was difficult for your parents, too. They were deprived of the pleasure of your company, of watching you develop, of sharing your life from day to day--but YOU and THEY lived through it. THAT was an ACHIEVEMENT IN itself.

On this day when mothers are being honored throughout the nation, I hope some of you had a kind thought for the--stepmother, the foster mother, the aunt, the grandmother--or even the legal guardian--who performs as a mother for you.

Their task is doubly difficult! It's not easy for you, either--but--if you can both live harmoniously--THAT is an ACHIEVEMENT.

Do not forget--such foster parents have no day set aside for them. They should be honored daily--and, if perchance you are an adopted son, or one who has to rely on others to perform the duties of a mother to you--it is on bended knee that you should honor those who sought you out...They could so easily have avoided that burden....

The best way you can reward these mothers--whatever their true title may be--is to so live and ACHIEVE as to make them proud of you.

Have you profited through your stay here?

Have you made the most of the opportunities given you?

If you could start the year over again, would you perform differently?

Did you exert yourself in your studies?

Certainly--each of you succeeded according to his personal equipment--but--do you know--that a mind can be stretched? that you can improve your equipment--mental and physical--by exercising its functions.

I knew a newspaper man of high repute in that field, who would re-write his published articles four and five times until he was satisfied he could no longer improve them. This sounds silly--doesn't it? Once published--no matter how often he re-wrote his articles--there was absolutely no possibility of their ever being published again.

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YET, this wasn't as foolish a thing to, as you might think.

Reporters must get their facts under stress most of the time. They must put these facts in order rapidly--and get their story written hurriedly--frequently through interruptions--and surrounded by noise and confusion.

There is never time to think deeply--one must merely concentrate--closing one's mind to everything else but the task at hand.

I learned--as this man did--through my own experience--that, if you are patient enough--to go over your work, when you can be free of stress, and can labor over it--seeking to improve it, even if there's no immediate profit to be gained--you will have exercised your brain, and--the next time you must accomplish something under stress--your brain will work faster, and more efficiently.

Try this--next time you have a test returned to you. Go over the points you failed in; those you nearly missed; or just scraped by--Probe them more deeply. Extend your knowledge of them. This won't change the rank you obtained, but you will have made a personal gain--an ACHIEVEMENT.

Learn to do the HARDER things--first. The easier things will take care of themselves. I knew a boy in a family where all the children were required to study piano playing along with their school studies. This boy much preferred to play outdoor sports, but his mother insisted on the piano study--and he had to submit.

His sisters would practise an assigned music lesson, playing the entire musical selection from beginning to end--over and over--through the prescribed practise time.

The boy was wiser. He would first review his lesson--learning where the difficult part was located--then--he would work on that until he had mastered it. He didn't bother to study the easy parts. He didn't have to. Having mastered the more difficult parts, the easier portions just followed. He was the ONE of the family who made a career of piano-playing.

Do the things--NO ONE ELSE WANTS TO DO--the routine jobs, the non-stimulating tasks--There were many of these in my career. I learned something from each one--for--it is in doing a great variety of things that one's horizon stretches.

It is amazing what the mind can absorb--and how stimulating it can be. It becomes so much more interesting to live with yourself--if your mind is well furnished. There is so much more to hold your interest--to make life worth living. And--believe me--in choosing to do the tasks no one else wants to do--you will have NO competition.

Don't be AFRAID TO WORK. You'd be surprised how few are willing to give in labor what they are willing to accept in salary. Everyone who hires employes nowadays--says the same thing: Young people first want to know the benefits of a job, how high the salary is, and how soon vacations are paid. They rarely even think of presenting what they have to offer to the employe--and--if hired--they put most of their effort in devising ways of doing as little as possible.

In newspaper work, one has frequent opportunity to learn about folks. Reporters are always interviewing them. One thing we all learn. The world's work is frequently done by folks who had little schooling, little opportunity--but, who have a WILLINGNESS TO WORK. These people got to the top of their careers, while others--more capable than they frequently--were taking things easy.

Right now, press, radio and tv inform us of unrest throughout the world. Everywhere--there is trouble--and frequently students are causing it. We are shown students parading or destroying something. The banners they carry are always AGAINST something; never FOR anything. They destroy--they do not build. That is NO achievement. What can they accomplish by breaking windows? toppling cars? setting fires?

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Any crackpot can destroy--In fact--it is often the indication of a diseased mind--that its owner is moved to fight and to destroy. The saner mind studies--learns from the experience of preceding generations.

It is understandable that youth is in a hurry to get on with the business of living. Most students seem to forget that they have a JOB right now--and that that job is TO STUDY. Prepare yourself, train yourself to meet the problems when it will be your turn to solve them.

Believe me, there will be many ~~xxx~~ times when you will wish you had studied more deeply, and more extensively.

One never knows too much--and there is benefit to be derived from everything you can learn.

Make the most of your opportunities. Create them when none appear. Do the best you can, with the equipment you have. Seek to improve yourself constantly, and all through life.

Do the job assigned to you to the best of your ability--and don't be afraid to do a ~~xxx~~ little bit more--and a little better than what is required of you.

THAT will be ACHIEVEMENT;; that will comfort you, comfort your parents, comfort your teachers--and make the world glad that YOU came along.

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