

**Mary Patterson McPherson**  
**Pomona College Commencement 2007**  
**May 13, 2007**

It is an honor and a great pleasure to be with you on this special day, celebrating the Class of 2007, their families and friends, some of whom might even have entertained an occasional doubt that this glorious day would ever come.

Cheers too for the faculty of Pomona who are in good part responsible for getting us all to this moment ripe for new beginnings.

Now commencements, like weddings—another new beginning—are occasions in which vast amounts of good advice should probably go unheeded. Two wise philosophers of commencements believed deeply in the value of the short speech, and had a minimalist's approach to advice.

Art Buchwald, speaking at a commencement at Holy Cross, said simply—"we have given you a perfect world, now don't go out there and louse it up", And Yogi Berra opined at a similar occasion—"when in life you come to a fork in the road—take it."

But as I have been asked to sing a bit for my lunch—let me say simply to the class of '07 that you are needed in the wider world you are about to enter. The last 6 years have been especially painful periods of self-reflection for many Americans as we have had to come to terms with, or at least acknowledge that, we are seen by a number of the world's citizens —not as the somewhat innocent, generous-spirited people we like to think we are, but rather as being generous-yes-but too often on our terms -- arrogant, and bullying in our stance to the world, and self-centered consumers of far more than our share of the world's resources.

That woefully dated innocence—the marker for earlier generations of less affluent, less well-educated, less well traveled Americans—that we still imagined in ourselves has turned out to be now a dangerous kind of ignorance about how much we are both envied and hated by those less fortunate than ourselves and an ignorance about whole parts of the world we have not found it important enough to try to understand.

So, our country needs you—a generation better prepared for the task of thoughtful citizenship in a post-cold war world. You have been taught here about respecting and learning to understand people different from yourselves. Learning to appreciate other religions, languages, traditions and values has been a central part of your education here. Many of you have participated in programs that have had you living and working in other countries, and you have been taught that with the privileges of education come certain obligations to and responsibilities for the world beyond yourselves. After today life gets real for you—but you have been readied here for Prime Time.

As you start your own journey from this good place, remember the sage advice given by the modern Greek poet—Constantine Cavafy:

As you set out for Ithaka  
hope your road is a long one,  
full of adventure, full of discovery.  
Hope the road is a long one.  
May there be many summer mornings when,  
What pleasure, what joy,  
You enter harbors you're seeing for the first time;  
May you stop at Phoenecian trading stations  
To buy fine things,  
Mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,  
Sensual perfume of every kind-  
As many sensual perfumes as you can;  
And may you visit many Egyptian cities  
To learn and go on learning from their scholars.  
Keep Ithaka always in your mind.  
Arriving there is what you're destined for.  
But don't hurry the journey at all.  
Better if it lasts for years,  
So you're old by the time you reach the island,  
Wealthy with all you've gained on the way,  
Not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.  
Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.  
Without her you wouldn't have set out.  
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you,  
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,  
You'll have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

### **About Mary Patterson McPherson**

McPherson is president emeritus of Bryn Mawr College – she was made acting president of Bryn Mawr College in 1976 and president from 1978-97. Effective July 1, 2007, she will be executive officer of the American Philosophical Society. She currently serves on the board of directors of Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, JSTOR, The Philadelphia Contributionship and Goldman Sachs Asset Management. She is on the board of trustees of Smith College, The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Emeriti Retirement Health Solutions, and The Teagle Foundation. She is also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She was vice president of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation from 1997 until April 2007. Prior to joining Bryn Mawr College as an assistant and fellow in the department of philosophy in 1961, McPherson was an instructor in philosophy at the University of Delaware (1959-61).