

Ranney E. Draper '60
Pomona College Commencement 2013
May 19, 2013

Thank you, Professor Summers Sandoval, for your generous introduction and for all you do for the College.

President Oxtoby, my fellow Trustees and fellow Graduates, Faculty, Staff, Families, and Friends, I would first like to offer a brief family history....hey, I'm sorry...I guess I am still a history major!

As Tomás mentioned, my unlikely journey to this stage today actually began right here. And Pomona College's legendary fourth president, James A. Blaisdell, was indeed partially responsible. My father, Ranney C. Draper and his brother Ed, enrolled here in 1921, no doubt drawn by the friendship the Draper and Blaisdell families had forged in Michigan, well before Dr. Blaisdell left to become Pomona's president in 1910. And then, of course, my Dad met my Mom here and Dr. Blaisdell officiated at their wedding in 1930. And finally, President Blaisdell's lofty words inscribed on the College Gates in 1914 about giving back, proved to be an important north star throughout my life's journey.

Growing up in nearby Monrovia, my siblings and I heard of little else but Pomona. We listened to the lovely college songs, played on the piano by our mother. We went to Alumni events and football games. Although I never imagined that one day I might play college football on that very field, my path was, in fact, aimed straight at Pomona College. Our parents and a beloved aunt, who had worked for President Blaisdell, lie at rest in the nearby Oak Park cemetery. And today, three generations of Drapers who are still on this side of the grass are gathered in Claremont yet again on this happy occasion, which also happens to be our grandson Matt's birthday.

As a student at Pomona, I must admit that football, fraternity and fun seemed to trump academic focus for me. I only hope you graduates had as much fun as I had! After graduation, however, I made a couple of "smart" moves. First, I married Priscilla Blake, and as my wonderful life partner, she has kept me grounded for 52 years and raised three great kids of whom we are so proud! Second, after a lot of uncertainty, I decided to take a job in commercial real estate in Orange County in a position paying no salary to start, so Priscilla supported us with her teaching job, but we were not far from the beach, we thought life was pretty good!

Luckily, the California economy was taking off then, and to my great surprise, I found I really enjoyed the work and that I was far more prepared to be an entrepreneur and risk-taker than I ever imagined. Life lessons learned on the athletic field certainly helped, but I also credit my liberal arts education, for some ability to communicate clearly and to engage my mind and imagination to problem-solve and adapt to inevitable changes and challenges. So be assured, graduates, if my experience is any example, your degree gives you a solid foundation for the future. So here is my unsolicited offer of advice... have the confidence to take some risks, aim high and have FUN!



So how do Blaisdell's words on the College Gates speak to us here today—I quote “They only are loyal to this college who departing bear their added riches in trust for mankind.” Isn't that our collective mission, to prepare future citizens to leave college inspired to create, build and work collectively at something greater than personal gain? Philanthropists have given generously to found and sustain Pomona. In fact, that spirit of volunteerism, generosity, and philanthropy sets our country apart from most other nations.

Your generation will also be called upon to lead, to offer your “added riches” to society, and I am sure you will respond. I have been blessed with good fortune, and I feel compelled—inspired by those words on the gates—to do what I can to address pressing social problems that I see.

A high point in my philanthropic work has been to help establish the Center for Community Partnerships here at Pomona. The Center directs the rich human capital of our faculty and students to civic engagement and service and to be good neighbors and partners to those not so well off just beyond our gates. It is so exciting to see our students become engaged in lives of service, and from these experiences, I hope, new leaders and ideas will emerge to solve our most vexing problems. Goodness knows we are leaving you plenty of work to do! I have great faith that the Pomona College family will continue to embrace The Center's mission and will accomplish the task of sustaining it in perpetuity.

So, graduates, I conclude with a question for you: What will the high point of your life look like? How will your “added riches” benefit our world?

Standing here today, I sense the spirit of both my parents and President Blaisdell. To them and to Pomona College, I offer my profound thanks for all that has been given to me, gifts that I can never fully repay!

And so on behalf of the entire Draper family, I accept this great honor with a full and happy heart. Have fun everybody!!

About Ranney E. Draper '60

Ranney E. Draper '60 founded Diversified Shopping Centers, which developed over 75 commercial shopping centers in California and the West, in 1966. After selling the business in 1998 he became involved in philanthropy with a focus on issues related to the educational achievement gap. He and his wife, Priscilla, established the Draper Family Foundation at the Orange County Community Foundation and then launched and funded dozens of programs with the OCCF and United Way to help at-risk students succeed in school and to improve access to college. He is a significant supporter of AVID (Achievement Via Individual Determination) and helped establish a program to assist low-income, high-achieving students access private universities and colleges with high levels of financial aid. A member of the Pomona College Board of Trustees for more than 25 years, Draper's generosity has benefited Pomona, its students and surrounding communities in profound ways. In 2009, the Draper Center for Community Partnerships was named in honor of Ranney and Priscilla Draper in recognition of their key role in establishing a number of educational outreach programs at Pomona, including the Pomona Academy for Youth Success (PAYS), a comprehensive college-access and academic skills building program, and Pomona Partners. The Drapers' generosity has also supported a number of other important programs and projects on campus.

As a student at Pomona College, Draper majored in history and served as captain of the football team and secretary of the Ghosts Honor Society.