

Daniel Robert Graham
Pomona College Commencement 2007
May 13, 2007

Thank you, President Oxtoby. It is a great honor to become part of the Pomona College family -- even if I have done so without the benefits of class attendance and examinations. Now, what I need is instruction in chirping like a Sagehen.

I know there was some controversy surrounding my selection to give the commencement address to the graduating class of 2007. Today, for the first time, I can reveal the secrets of how I was chosen to be here today.

It's pretty simple. The first and second choices, Abraham Lincoln and Albert Einstein, were unavailable. Bill Clinton was third, but he had reached his self imposed maximum of 37 graduation speeches. Moving down the list, No. 25, which happens to be her age, Britney Spears. Unfortunately, she was committed to her every other Sunday child care responsibilities. No. 46, Sanjaya, was reluctant as he was still in contention for American Idol.

I was No. 47. It might make you feel better to know that had I not accepted, No. 48 was Vice President Dick Cheney. Congratulations to each of the graduates for having completed your undergraduate experience at one of America's most distinguished colleges. Each of you has worked hard to be here this afternoon. You are not alone. Behind you were families, friends, supporters who assisted in your achievement.

I would ask the graduates of 2007 rise and show their love appreciation to your mothers on this mother's day, your father -- don't forget June 17 -- siblings, spouses, especially the grandparents, and friends who have walked this path with you.

On the gate not far from here is the statement of the fundamental values of Pomona. The fourth President of this college, James Blaisdell, inscribed in granite in 1914: "They only are loyal to this college who, departing, bear their added riches in trust for mankind."

Pomona has prepared you for many challenges. You are going to do very well. Warren Buffett -- No. 12 on the commencement selection list -- describes the most important event in life as the womb lottery. You were winners. You were born into nurturing families who provided and supported you in attaining a Pomona College education. You were born into an era when your aptitudes are in high demand.

Mr. Buffett correctly observed that had he been born five thousand years earlier -- with his slow foot speed and awkward manner -- he would have been eaten as some wild beast's lunch. Fortunately for him, he was born at a time when his talents for quantitative analysis and economics allowed him to eat other people's lunch.

You have arrived at a time when a command of cosmopolitan global interrelationships and a mastery of technology that continues to evolve at warp speed are the aptitudes for success. Your parents can relax. You will do well.



But will you fulfill the command of President Blaisdell to bear your aided riches in trust for mankind?

President Thomas Jefferson said a fundamental purpose of education was to inform the citizens of their rights and responsibilities and equip them with the competencies to fulfill those rights and responsibilities to their nation and their neighbors.

Our democracy is not a spectator sport - self government will only contribute to our national goals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness if we are participating on the field. Robert Maynard Hutchins, another great American and distinguished President of the University of Chicago, observed "The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference and undernourishment."

You have many riches of talent and values to give, and much to receive in personal joy and satisfaction from participating in the life of your times. Although denied a Pomona degree until today, I, too, have been blessed with a loving wife, four generous daughters, eleven boisterous grandchildren, and enough income to keep my car filled with gas.

But there are few things more gratifying than to walk in a park that you helped preserve, to meet college students whose education you helped to make possible, and to play with children who are healthy because of a children's health care plan you helped start. Those joys don't show in your bank account, but are a deposit to your soul that can never be withdrawn.

Many of you have shared your riches before you departed from Pomona.

Miriam Aguirre, an English Major, has been deeply involved in programs with low income students from schools near this campus; she plans a career as a school teacher.

Maggie Fick, an International Relations Major, has studied abroad in Cameroon, and through a Fulbright fellowship – one of 20 received by Pomona graduates of 2007 – will spend next year in Niger working on farming development projects for women.

Sarah Kuriakose, a Neuroscience Major, as student government president started an "alternative spring break" program of student volunteer activities. Sarah has volunteered extensively in programs for autistic children and adults and will do graduate work in clinical psychology.

Carey McDonald, an international relations major, as president of the Pomona Student Union, brought speakers to the campus to discuss and debate the great issues of our time.

You will also show your loyalty to Pomona College by applying the riches you have acquired here to continued personal growth and development. Let me share a few lessons I have learned:

Be nice to everyone. It is the right thing to do, will make you feel better and often will result in an unexpectedly good outcome. Let me reminisce about one of those good outcomes.

In the fall of my sophomore year at the University of Florida, I was walking down the stairs of the administration building. Walking up the stairs was a tall, beautiful brunette who I

remembered from a double date in high school. I greeted her and asked, “Adele, what are you doing here?” She replied that she was having trouble with her freshman physical science course and was anxious to get a tutor.

Now, what is a Southern gentleman supposed to do? I told her – with modesty – that I had made an A in the course and would be happy to be her tutor. I did and she has been a loving tutor and best friend for 47 years plus one.

You have finished a challenging and exciting period of your life. This period of exploration has been a chance to test the virtually endless possibilities of life. I see life as a pyramid. At birth you are at the wide bottom and have a lifetime of opportunities before you. As life progresses, you make choices among alternatives. The walls of your personal pyramid begin to close until reaching the apex and the end.

A goal in life should be to keep your pyramid as wide as possible, as long as possible. Test life: if you worked at a job you liked and thought you were good at it, resist the temptation to do the same thing again – challenge yourself with something new.

Travel and get to know the world and its diverse cultures.

Rest assured that I am not going to give any romantic advice. Two years after meeting on the stairs, Adele and I were married when we were 20 and 22, so our adventure together started early. But I will tell you that our experience is that a life-long partnership with another human being offers the greatest opportunities for growth and happiness. I sincerely hope that each of you find a partner who can help you realize your greatest potential.

As you keep the walls of the pyramid wide, look for chances to expand your tool box of personal experiences. There are lots of ways to learn: lectures, books, television, the Internet. But in my opinion, none of these has the intellectual and emotional impact of learning by doing.

When I was in the Florida State Senate, I observed huge inadequacies in the teaching of civics in Florida high schools. After conveying those concerns to a group of high school civic teachers, one of them challenged me to walk in their shoes – to take my complaints to the classroom. As she put it, “you politicians are always telling other people how to do their jobs better when you don’t know what you are talking about. The only way to find out is to get into the classroom.” I thought she was talking about a couple of hours on a Tuesday afternoon, so I said yes.

She called a week later to tell me she had worked it out. I would teach 12th grade civics for 18 weeks at an almost inner city high school in Miami. Those 18 weeks turned out to be a truly transformational experience. I did learn more about students, teachers, administrators and parents than I had through hearings of the Senate education committee.

But the most important thing I learned was the difference between learning by lecture and learning by doing. It became an obsession. During my final 30 years in public service, I took over 400 jobs held by everyday Floridians. Those work days have been among the most rewarding, joyful and learning times of my life. Let me give you a few examples:

As a nursing home orderly working in an environment that reeked of urine, I asked my supervisor how he was able to get up and come back to this job every day. He said "I figure that if God let these folks live so long, He must really love them. I can love them too."

At a landfill north of St. Petersburg, I squatted for lunch next to the bulldozers that four women and I had been driving to pack down the garbage. One of the young women told me of the pain she had felt that morning with the choice of taking a sick child to the health clinic or earning the \$75 she needed to pay the rent. That is a practical course in ethics.

Or a pre-dawn garbage pickup in Tampa. Every job can be done with pride...every job deserves respect.

When faced with a difficult problem, put aside the microscope and view it through a telescope. The full intricacies of the challenge and the options to respond are almost always better seen from afar than up close.

Your liberal arts education at Pomona has prepared you to reach for the telescope.

What a difference it could have made if the President and his advisors during the preparation for the war in Iraq had focused less on the irrelevant aluminum tubes and the non-existent yellow cake from Africa and more on understanding the culture and history of Iraq and the neighborhood in which it resides.

Finally, let passion be your guide. Don't let dollars get in the way of what your heart tells you is your true calling.

Bill Gates – No. 17 on the commencement speakers list - is one of the richest men in the world. He is a breakthrough scientist in computer software and the founder of a company which provided the operating systems and software for many of your laptops and PCs. He has been richly rewarded and recognized. I suspect, however, that a hundred years from now, Mr. Gates will be better known and appreciated for what he has done with his philanthropy to make the world a healthier and safer place. Bill Gates is following his passion.

Pomona College is committed to "need blind admission" and "need based financial aid." Because of those commitments, you are graduating today with substantially less student debt than your peers at other colleges and universities. This financial freedom gives to you the personal choice to follow your passion in the cause of service to mankind.

There is a great cause to which all of us as citizens can direct our efforts: shaping the position of the United States in the world based on our values and aspirations.

In 2007, the United States is the second most powerful nation in the history of the world. We extend our cultural, political, economic and military strength over most of the globe.

The only country more powerful, was the United States of America in 1946. We had all of our current power plus being the sole possessor of the atomic bomb. Much of the rest of the world was in the shambles of World War II. We could have been the ultimate Roman Empire.



But we decided to take a different path. Through the Marshall Plan, the United States voluntarily provided the assistance and support which helped the rest of the world – our allies and our enemies – rise from the ashes of war. Our nation shared its power through international institutions like the United Nations. We led an effort to use strong diplomacy backed by military resolve to contain and ultimately topple the wall of communism. In those days, our nation was demonstrating the best of its values.

Today, I fear, we have forgotten the lessons of 60 years ago. We are approaching the world with a blustering arrogance, ripping apart many of the institutions, treaties and policies that served us and the world so well. We are bogged down in a war of distraction and manipulation in Iraq and seem incapable of exiting.

As we prepare to select new national leadership in 2008, we the people must demand that we have choices which are true to our principles - leaders who stand with us and for us and our values.

Pomona College is a secular institution, but has its roots in the Congregational Church. I am a Congregationalist and would offer from a prayer spoken in my church what I believe should be America's creed as we discharge our trust to mankind: "We hope in God's promises, and we wait for a world where justice reigns and all God's people live in peace and prosperity."

It is an honor to join you as together, we extend our added riches in fulfillment of our trust to mankind.

About Daniel Robert Graham

Graham was elected to the United States Senate in 1986 and served until his retirement in early 2005. During that time he was chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee for the 103rd Congress, and was part of the Select Committee on Intelligence for the 107th Congress. He also made a bid for the Democratic Party presidential nomination in 2004. His book, *Intelligence Matters: The CIA, The FBI, Saudi Arabia and the Failure of America's War on Terror*, was released in 2004. Graham was first elected to public office in 1966 to the Florida State House of Representatives, and was a member of the Florida State Senate from 1970-1978. He was state governor of Florida from 1979-1986. Graham attended the public schools of Dade County, Florida, and graduated from the University of Florida, Gainesville in 1959. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 1962 and was admitted to the Florida bar in 1962.