

## **Graduation Address to Gateway Tech High School**

### **Titled “Shoot Your Arrows”**

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It’s always an honor to speak to young people when asked. I still feel like a kid in many ways. I have a few more wrinkles, grey hair and some sagging skin, but I still think I’ve got more in common with young people than many adults. When I graduated from HS one of the top selling songs that year was titled “My Ding a Ling”, by Chuck Berry. So what year was that? Go ahead and google it and tell us. Go ahead, I’ll wait..... Now if you read the lyrics out loud to “My Ding a Ling” (Don’t! We want to keep this a G rated graduation) you will discover that my generation was just as crude, irreverent and suspicious of authority as your generation. Most of us turned out just fine. The only difference between my generation, and yours, is that we used different euphemisms. I’ve listened to some of your popular artist such as Lizzo and Drake. Yikes! Graphic stuff. You guys could use some of our euphemisms. There is much we can learn from each other.

As you can see I’ve brought a Native American long bag or container, what they called a quiver, some arrows and a target. I study and love Native America History. There were some things native tribes taught their children that are, I believe, eternal truths. They were true back then, and are still true today.

Some of the Great Plains Indian Tribes held ceremonies and rituals for their children to signify that they were ready and prepared to go off and be independent, to hunt for sustenance and create their own families. One of the those was to receive a quiver like this. The receiver would then go and make arrows out of wood. Attached on one end were hawk feathers to guide the arrow, and on the other end they attached the obsidian stone head (a type of volcanic glass or flint that was made into a sharp point).

I’m going to ask you to imagine that when you receive your diploma here in a few moments, that you are given a quiver to carry ----- to go out and make it on your own. Imagine you get to decorate your quiver the way you want. And you get to determine what your target is going to be, and to gather and make your own arrows to hit your targets. For you see, I think life is like carrying a quiver with several arrows inside, a bow and a target.

Now, I’m not here to tell you what your lifetime goals, targets and aspirations should be. That’s up to you. They will certainly change over time. These were my goals in my mid-twenties: Professional - Become CEO of a hospital and be a small healthcare business owner. Personal – Get married by 30 and have 2.3 children by age 40. To be a good father, raising children who are in love with their Dad, are good people, independent, successful, and still want to hang with their

Dad in my senior years. Physical – Keep weight at 180 with 44-inch chest and 32-inch waist. Leisure – own a yacht.

Goals and targets change over time. Big bodacious list when young. Small list when old. I'm nearing my retirement years now and I can put my goals on a small post it note that says "stay alive".

### **1. CARRY YOUR OWN ARROW QUIVER**

Do not rely on the government, or anybody else, to put arrows in your quiver. In fact, one of the big fallacies you are taught early on in school, is to put your trust in the collective will of a nation, state or some other. No, you will always be disappointed. Become the master of your own fate. Own and accept personal responsibility for who you are, what you do, and what you want to accomplish.

Remember that deep freeze we had a couple of years ago when we were without power for a week during that rare deep freeze? Remember how it felt to be cold, without running water, or light? Did you not learn that you can't rely on our government, or anybody else, to provide for you? Become as resilient and anti-fragile as possible!

### **2. ADD AS MANY ARROWS AS YOU CAN. ARROWS = OPPORTUNITIES.**

You can't hit a target if you don't have any arrows. Some people have more arrows than others. They may have more luck, be in the right place at the right time, or have more "privilege". Yes, life is unfair, and no matter what the "Equity Police" do, it won't do much to improve your lot in life. Don't fall into the "victim mentality". Realize life is not fair, but don't make excuses.

#### **Story of High School Classmate Tommy.**

Tommy's dad was a Ford Auto Executive. When he turned 16 his Dad gave him his very own Ford Mustang, a "muscle car". Us "peasants" hated Tommy. We were jealous. My family of 6 (my parents, three younger siblings and me) owned a Volkswagen Beetle that seated only five of us. We weren't poor, but we didn't have much. I never owned my own car until my junior year of College, and I had to quit school for 1 ½ years to make enough money to afford my Chevy Vega GT with a back seat that went down flat in the back. Oh the stories I have in that Chevy Vega. You see, some of us must create our own opportunities from nothing.

#### **Story of My Role Models**

So in my family all the adult models I had were either a preacher or a teacher. I started down those two paths kind of going back and forth. I enrolled at a Seminary and quickly realized I had made a big mistake. I was stuck in Kansas City on a cold winter day when I made this decision and needed to find some work to pay my heating bills and feed my stomach. During the day I sold cameras at Kmart (like a Target here in Texas). I knew nothing about cameras. And I worked the night shift as a nurse assistant at a local hospital. I was terrible at selling camera's. One day a young boy came in to buy a new camera (long before you had smart phones) asking me about

shutter speed and all these other camera features I knew little about. He called my bluff. Gradually I found a fascination in healthcare, and especially the business side of healthcare. I obtained a graduate degree in Healthcare Administration and worked my way up to eventually becoming a Hospital CEO, and later I owned a small healthcare business. I had no connections, and no special privileges. I created that career opportunity on my own. And so can you.

### **3. SHARPEN YOUR CHARACTER. THE FEATHERS ON ONE END AND THE SHARP POINT ON THE OTHER END OF THE ARROW = YOUR CHARACTER.**

You can have a quiver full of arrows, but if you don't have good character you still won't hit your target. For you see, arrows need special care so they fly straight to the target and stick. Native children would go looking for the straightest piece of wood to make a good arrow. If an arrow is crooked, without guiding feathers and a sharp tip, it's unlikely to hit its target, or it won't stick. Are you honest, trustworthy, brave, caring, responsible, ambitious, generous, and patient when it's called for? What is the content of your character?

#### **Story of me needing to work on my character to be a better parent.**

So I have two children. First born a girl, and six years later a son. My daughter was a piece of cake to a raise, but my son was, shall we say, a challenge? He was stubborn, hard-headed, and ornery. He hated to be placed in car seat and didn't like socks on his feet. A very picky eater, he was very hard to please. As he got older, the more contentious became our relationship. He would often just frustrate the heck out of me. In our home was a rocking horse that his Grandpa had made for my son. He called his horse "Trigger". One day I was so frustrated and mad at my son that I kicked his horse as hard as I could and it broke into several pieces. "You just killed Trigger", he yelled! Our relationship was strained.

You see, my arrows were bending, becoming warped. I was not going to hit my target of being a good parent in a great relationship with my son unless I changed the tip, and the feathers. I needed to work on my patience and perseverance to handle this better. I needed to sharpen my character.

Character formation always sounds a bit soft to me, almost like holding hands in a circle and talking about my feelings, and singing a song that makes me feel good. But I've learned that it's actually more of an assault on my character defects, and a tearing away of all that doesn't align with the goals I'd set for myself. It's a constant search for the straightest piece of wood for my arrows, a sharpening of the arrow head stone, and finding just the right feathers to place on the other end. Character formation is the grit and grind of life change. Over time I got better at parenting my son because I wanted to. I read up on raising a boy. I used prayer, study and reflection to improve my parenting skills. I worked at it. Our relationship and our bond grew during the ensuing years.

A couple of year later, on a Christmas morning, we were opening presents from Santa. A bigger box than usual was for me, from my kids Grandpa. When I unwrapped it, it was the rocking horse

Trigger newly restored. I carefully took it out, laid on the floor, and on the back of the horse Grandpa had placed a sign that read; “Kick Here”. We all had a good laugh at my expense. And every time since, when I would see that horse, it reminded me that I still had some work to do on me.

### **Conclusion - - - - What really matters**

Remember at the beginning when I said that one of my goals in my 20s was to own a yacht? Well, I’m not going to hit that target. In fact, I scratched that one off my list many years ago. I came to realize that the time, effort and luck it was going to take to become a multimillionaire to buy a yacht was probably going to be in conflict with my goal to be present with my kids as much as possible, to have an authentic, meaningful relationship with each of them. So over the years I scaled back on some of my goals.

But just a few years ago, while reevaluating my goals, I did see a red Adirondack row boat crafted in Vermont. I went ahead and purchased that red row boat for about \$5,000 and had it shipped to a summer cottage I had built along an ocean bay in Nova Scotia Canada. I spend several weeks in the summer there and my kids come to visit for a couple. And on those beautiful summer evenings as the sun is setting I take us out for a row. We go out on my little red row boat with three seats; one for me in the middle and a seat on each end for my two children. I row, we talk. As we glide along we are followed by a trail of seals who occasionally pop their head up above the water. We go past the light house that safely brings the boats in to the mouth of the harbor, to where we meet the open sea. I stop rowing and we let the wind just move us around as it wills. And then I think to myself, “Richard, on that goal of having a great relationship with both of my kids..... I hit the bulls eye”. I didn’t need a yacht.

So.... **Carry your own arrow quiver** (don’t rely on the government or other collective group),

**Create your own opportunities** (add as many arrows as you can, but realize somebody will have more arrows than you), and finally.....

Constantly **Sharpen your character**, (attach the hawk feathers and sharpen the tip)

And then you will hit your targets. I’m sure of it.

Congratulations and Godspeed.