

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Graduates in the Real World....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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For the most part, handshakes, backslaps, hugs and teardrops--some joyously wept from grateful souls who achieved much, and some from others who barely sneaked by to graduate--now are part of history.

In bygone years, school superintendents and university presidents considered graduation events to be successful if everyone left venues in the same state of health and well-being as when they entered. (Nowadays, with some commencement exercises canceled or altered greatly because of safety concerns, most leaders would settle for the "mild stuff"--even squirrels running amok on stages in the berserk manner described in the novelty song about the First Self-Righteous Church of Pascagoula.)

It should be noted that there are far more places for exercises to go wrong now. Long ago, most schools had just one "warm-up" for graduation, it being from elementary to high school. Nowadays, youngsters graduate from kindergarten to first grade, then elementary to junior high or middle school, then to high school and the "biggie" at senior year's end. I wouldn't be surprised, up the way, if ceremonies mark progression from diapers to underwear, and/or nursery school to kindergarten....

One superintendent of my acquaintance says he hopes his commencement-induced "tummy knots" will loosen soon. I understand, but like most other folks, wonder what lies ahead. Civility seems threatened.

I asked him if anything at this year's graduation program caused him to smile on the way home.

"As a matter of fact, there was," he answered, seemingly eager to share remarks by one of his school's brightest graduates. (I am choosing not to reveal his name, nor his school's, nor the graduate's.)....

By way of background, much seemed to be predictable. Some 800 seniors "pumped and circumstanced" their way into the stadium, and several thousand relatives and friends showed up, hoping the graduates would take seriously both the "rights and responsibilities" printed on their diplomas.

It was a long ceremony, of course--what with all graduates receiving a dozen seconds each in the spotlight crossing the stage. There were many speeches, of course.

Were there ever speeches! Students who achieved greatly academically--as well as heads of student organizations--were granted a few minutes each to share their thoughts, most of which centered on gratitude to teachers, coaches, band directors, counselors, and, of course,

parents and other relatives. Most, my friend said, were well-chosen words. (I cautioned that I've been congratulated for a few "well-chosen words," both words in print and expressed verbally. Sadly, though, there were addendums, something about the few "well-chosen words" interspersed randomly with several hundred that weren't!)...

I hasten on, because my friend's face brightened as he described the young man whose remarks "took the cake," earning the evening's most thunderous applause.

"He had 'Paul Harvey kind' of timing, obviously spending hours deciding precisely what he wanted to convey," the superintendent said.

"The graduate was unhurried, quickly establishing eye-contact with the throng to create an appearance of serious intent and spirit of thanksgiving. I wish I could remember his exact words, but generally, here's what the lad said."....

"I would like to begin my remarks this evening by especially thanking my mother, even though she's no longer with us."

Swiveling to survey the crowd, the graduate seemed to "drink in" the audible sighs from the audience, all seeming to share the tender moment.

Several seconds passed before he loosed the bombshell retort that immediately turned a moment of sadness into laughter that bordered on side-splitting.

"Yeah, she left several minutes ago, probably out of sheer boredom."....

I congratulate him for his creativity. I'll throw in a bouquet to his mom, too, if she knew what he intended to do, and went along.

Okay, I'll extend the gift to all the graduates of our land, prayerful that they'll strive to make our world a better place.

My generation fell short of what we'd hoped. Maybe we all should re-read the words on our diplomas....

Dr. Newbury is a longtime public speaker and former university president who is Texas' longest-running syndicated columnist, writing weekly since 2003.