

Class of 1964 Fiftieth Reunion Memorial Service

Rollins Chapel
Dartmouth College
Saturday, June 7, 2014

The Rev. Robert S. MacArthur, III '64

Keep Going

In a few minutes Roger will lead us in remembering and honoring our departed classmates and their loved ones. We have done this for the past two reunions, and it has become a special time -- for some of us, a sacred ritual of reconnecting.

As I thought about framing this moment, three themes came to mind: the *lessons of our youth*, the *legacy of our leadership* and the way we answer the question, *what next?*

The Lessons of Our Youth

Classmate Jay Regan introduces his Life Report with Dr. Seuss.

“How did it get so late so soon?
Its night before its afternoon.
December is here before its June.
My goodness how the time has flown.
How did it get so late so soon?”

Jim Wright begins his foreword to the *Vietnam Perspectives* book on a more somber note: “*Where have all the young men gone?*”

The verse from Pete Seeger’s iconic song reminds us not only of the passage of time and the circle of life but the as yet-to-be- answered question about all our striving, “*When will they ever learn?*”

The young men that we were and we knew as companions, where have they gone? Today we look in the mirror, wondering who belongs to that elderly face with its creases and white hair (for those with any left). The irony is that despite the image looking back at us most of us still see and feel the youth within looking out on the world with all its prospects. It was only yesterday.

Thinking about the '14s whom we will accompany tomorrow, I ask, what was it about our youth that we still see?

One set of answers comes from Joseph Conrad, whom we read in Freshman English. In his short story titled, *Youth*, an aging salt named Marlow sits at a table with his peers and recounts his first voyage as second mate on an old bark that hauled coal from England to the mysterious East.

The journey is filled with one disaster after another, culminating in the cargo of coal catching fire and the ship sinking. Marlow assumes his first command at age 20 as captain of his life boat with a crew of two.

What is Conrad's message in this tale? I think it is this: challenge forges character, adversity tests it and youth is the first time of life for both.

Marlow describes his defining adventure:

"I remember nights and days of calm when we pulled, we pulled and the boat seemed to stand still... I remember the heat, the deluge of rain-squalls that kept us baling for dear life ... and I remember sixteen hours on end with a mouth dry as cinder and a steering oar over the stern to keep my first command head on to a breaking sea.

I did not know how good a man I was till then... and I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back anymore – the feeling that I could last forever, outlast the sea, the earth and all men; the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to perils, to love, to vain effort, to death; the triumphant conviction of strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small, and expires ... too soon... before life itself."

Marlow concludes his tale:

"By all that's wonderful it is the sea, I believe, the sea itself – or is it youth alone? Who can tell? But you here ... tell me, wasn't that the best time, that time when we were young at sea; young and had nothing, on the sea that gives nothing, except hard knocks – and sometimes a chance to feel your strength – **that only** – that you all regret?

And we all nodded at him: the man of finance, the man of accounts, the man of law; we all nodded at him over the polished table that like a still sheet of brown water reflected our faces, lined, wrinkled; our faces marked by toil, by deceptions, by success, by love; our weary eyes looking still, looking always, looking anxiously for something out of life, that while it is expected is already gone – has passed unseen in

a sigh, in a flash – together with the youth, with the strength, with the romance of illusions.”

50 years have passed and we sit in Rollins Chapel. What were those illusions of youth that fueled us for decades? The sense:

- That our strength and energy would never fail?
- That we could change the world in a way that would last?
- That there was always sufficient time to worry about other things later?

Whatever their source, the illusions drove us -- until they yielded to the perspectives and pacing of our experience. Our weary eyes still look for something more but that something is tempered by wisdom.

In classmate Dave Shieler's words:

“Looking ahead is a habit, and a good one, and I doubt that any of us are ready to take our eyes off the road just yet. We hope we have miles to go before we sleep.”

The Legacy of our Leadership

That there is more yet to do brings me to the topic of our leadership. We embraced President Dickey's challenge to us at convocation in September of 1960. With rhetoric for which he was known and an image that recalls young Marlow with his steering oar, President Dickey said to us:

“What is true is that you are now preparing yourself for the certain day when imperceptibly, or perchance suddenly, you will discover that the stick in your hand is not a club but instead the tiller of a human enterprise entrusted to your head and heart. And if that enterprise should prove to be simply yourself and a fine mind, you will still know the challenge and the rewards of the leadership for which you now prepare.”

Reflected in *The Road Less Traveled* and our other three books, we certainly took his message to heart as a class.

Whether shaped “by choice or by chance,” “intention or serendipity,” “muddling through,” or “making it up as we go along” – all phrases that appear in our essays – our lives have created our own Orozco fresco, a colorful montage of influence and service that is in a class by itself.

And our leadership on behalf of the college is exemplary, if not unparalleled, in the variety of roles our classmates have served, the projects undertaken, the dollars raised and our legacy gift endowing experiential programs in leadership development.

What Next?

So what is next for us, the old men listening to Marlow's story? Was it youth itself, or was it the sea -- the metaphor of life with its mysterious and beautiful horizons, its swells and the powerful storms that test our mettle? No doubt it is both.

The question remains for each of us, do we still look for something out of life? Does the "the glow in the heart" still burn? In many of our Life Reports it still does. Does our leadership end with this reunion? Collectively we answer, NO.

Certainly, our capacities are diminishing, and we know their trajectory. However, life beckons us to tap into a new reservoir of courage and grace. With our hand still on the tiller our task is to discern the meaning of the time remaining and rise to its tests.

Whether our well spring is a religious faith or a secular cultivation of mindfulness, we share the charge of living each moment to the fullest. Some have done this all along; others are coming to it now.

One of those remaining duties may be to learn how to say our goodbyes to those we love and admire before it is too late.

In my work I have come across four stem sentences that provide a simple way to begin the conversations. I was able to share these with Mike and Lonna Bloom when I visited them in April.

I regret that...
I am sorry that...
I am grateful for...
I will carry with me always...

They are simple keys that may unlock a single response or unleash a litany of thoughts and feelings that have waited years to be shared.

As we honor our classmates and their families today, may the memories of their friendship sustain us moving forward, and may we support those dear to us, knowing that it is never too late for the healing gestures of loving kindness.

Mike Bloom shared a piece in his Life Report that has been his mantra facing his cancer. It captures his spirit and encourages all of us to keep ourselves, in Marlow's words, "head on to a breaking sea." It is titled, **Keep Going**.

"A young man asked his grandfather why life had to be so difficult sometimes. This was the old man's reply...

Grandfather does not say this to make you despair, but to teach you reality, that life is a journey sometimes walked in light, sometimes in shadow...

You did not ask to be born, but you are here. You have weaknesses as well as strengths because in life there are two of everything. Within you is the will to win as well as the willingness to lose, the heart to feel compassion as well as the smallness to be arrogant. Within you is the way to face life as well as the fear to turn away from it.

Grandfather says this: Facing the storms of life, knowing loss, feeling sadness and heartache, and falling into the depths of grief can give you strength... When a storm blows it is not trying to knock you down, it is really trying to teach you to be strong.

Grandfather says this: Being strong means taking one more step toward the top of the hill, no matter how weary you may be. It means letting the tears flow through the grief; it means to keep looking for the answer though the darkness of despair is all around. It means to cling to hope for one more heartbeat, one more sunrise.

Each step takes you closer to the top of the hill, closer to the light of the next sunrise, and the promise of a new day.

Grandfather says this: The weakest step toward the top of the hill, toward sunrise, toward hope, is stronger than the fiercest storm.

Grandfather says this: **Keep going.**"

J.M. Marshall III