

Note: Due to the size of the graduating class, undergraduate commencement is held at twin ceremonies. The following transcript was made from audio tape recordings of both ceremonies.

Thank you, Roger (*Roger Gelfenbein, Chair of the UConn Board of Trustees*) and thank all of you for that warm welcome. I wish Barbara had been here to hear that nice applause from this marvelous class. You see I am going through a bit of an identity crisis now. Look, I used to be President of the United States of America, now I am known everywhere I go as Barbara's husband or the father of the Governor of Texas. So thank you. Thanks for that welcome.

May I join all of you in congratulating Beverly and Raymond Sackler for the honors that they have certainly earned in the good that they do for our society, and, of course, salute the Class of 1998 and your eloquent spokesman, Kristen here, (*Kristen Sandstrom, as class representative, presented the graduating class*) who set a record for being short and brief in her remarks. Something that you know. I hope you know, that you hope I'll follow.

Of course over my 35 years in and out of public service, I have been fortunate to be invited to a number of graduation ceremonies and you can never tell who's happier that this educational and enriching experience has come to a close, the students or the parents up there. And of course as proud parents in our own right, we have been blessed to see our five kids graduate from college and so to the broke, but happy parents here let me say that Barbara and I feel your pain.

I was reminded of this parental role again last week as I watched our oldest grandson graduate from Rice in Houston. There were plenty of smiles, maybe a few tears. And it struck me that perhaps more than any other day there is a certain something special about graduation day. It struck me that days like today are days when the past intersects with the future.

And this is also a wonderful day for family when the generations come together. And I was thinking about all of these different things, as I sat there at Rice listening to a marvelous graduation speech by Kurt Vonnegut. And then another thought occurred to me. It occurred to me that as the graduation speakers this afternoon, I should remember to do unto others as I would have them do unto me.

And I thought of a graduation at Yale. They got a pastor to come graduate. I am not against pastors, but he went on. He says, "Y is for youth", 40 minutes on that. "A is for altruism," About 20 minutes. "L is for loyalty", 15 minutes. "E is for excellence", about 20 minutes. The minister finished, everybody had left except one guy praying. And he said, "Son, I am very pleased to see a man of your faith praying here. May I ask what you are giving thanks for?" He said, "I am giving thanks that I didn't go to the University of Connecticut."

I'll tell you what I really think about long graduation speeches . But as my friend, Dana Carvey would say, "Not gonna do it! Wouldn't be prudent!" You know I talked to Kristen

about it. Her speech was so short that I now have additional time to develop a couple of themes that I know you will be interested in. The Federal Reserve Board, the Gold Standard and then I will give you 15 minutes on why Dennis Rodman should never be Secretary of State.

No, I will be brief, cause I am reminded of my favorite story told by Billy Graham, who has been just a wonderful inspiration in my life and in Barbara's life, a friend of ours. He told about this speaker standing where I am and he went on and on and on and finally the head table over here, guy picked off his shoe, heaved it at the speaker, missed him, hit a lady in the front row and she said, "Hit me again, I can still hear him". So I will.

This year marks my fiftieth, half a century since I graduated from college. And it is funny, I can't remember where I had lunch yesterday, but I do remember something from way back then, remember it distinctly: the last baseball game of my college career back in June of '48.

We played at Yale Field, reunion weekend. And for some reason I will never forget the site of the 50 year reunion class that came parading into the ballpark. There they were. A bunch of helplessly old guys, rejoicing in seeing old friends, glad, most of them, just to still be alive and surely the class here, you don't reunion at commencement time, but the Class of '98, 1898 is the same here at this school. I am not sure. A lot of good will that day as the members of the Class of 1898 marched in. Some still had a spring in their step. But let's face it, I've got to recognize it. They all looked old and with good reason.

Their generation had been through a lot.

The Class of 1898 graduated from UConn or from my school (Yale) down the road. They watched in awe as the Wright Brothers first flight sputtered into the sky and then a little later, Henry Ford gave us the automobile. And 20 years following graduation, they agonized over the "War to End all Wars". They saw World War I grind up their classmates. I think seven from the University of Connecticut gave the ultimate price in helping to defeat Germany's aggression. And 30 years removed from their graduation they were seized and many destroyed by the Great Depression that rocked and socked our nation.

And as the Class of 1898 celebrated their 40 reunion, they saw Hitler unchecked, race through the lowlands and free nation after free nation fell beneath the Nazi boot while the US and others stayed on the sidelines. "No Americans to fight abroad", was the cry.

And 45 years after they left college, they saw their sons and daughters fight in World War II, fight to end German Fascism and Japanese Imperialism. But as they came together for their 50th reunion, hopes had been lifted with the end of World War II and the founding of the United Nations.

And still as the Class of '98, 1898, began to fade from the scene, the dark shadows of the Cold War began to stretch across Europe. Before long it would envelope Africa, Asia and Latin America too.

My class was 1948 and most of us here in my school, those who might have been in that vintage year served in World War II. The country came together essentially for one purpose. We saw many classmates die. UConn lost 114 graduates during that War. So together we saw the horrors of war. We felt the joys of victory. And we watched as our nation in victory embrace our former enemies and help them nurture their new democracies. We lifted up Japan and we lifted up Germany and helped them grow and remain democratic.

We saw TV begin. Didn't have TV when I was a kid. I know that is hard for you. We had Buck Rogers and Wilma Derring. We had the Lone Ranger and Tonto, but we didn't have tv. We saw it begin with Ed Sullivan and Milton Berle and Lucy and in time there was *60 Minutes* and *All in the Family*, but then later we got Rosanne Barr and Jerry Springer. What a waste, what a trivialization of a media.

We saw the Cold War intensify as Soviet tanks crushed the Freedom Fighters in Eastern Europe and that monstrous obscenity, the Berlin Wall divide a great country right down the middle. My class saw the threat of nuclear war as two super powers faced each other down. The Communists said, "We will bury you." And our response was "Freedom will prevail."

The Ultimate Sacrifice

In preparation for his remarks, former President Bush requested information about UConn alumni, students, and faculty who lost their lives during war time. Approximately 133 alumni of the University of Connecticut have died in service to the nation since 1898.

- One graduate died just after the Spanish American War. Willis Nicholas Hawley, Class of 1898, died Nov. 19, 1898 of typhoid fever at a Red Cross Hospital in Philadelphia. In 1915, an armory/gymnasium was named for Hawley. Still standing and recently renovated into a fitness center, Hawley Armory is a well-known campus landmark.
- Seven (7) alumni died in World War I, all in 1918 between June and December.
- One hundred-fourteen (114) UConn alumni died during World War II, including Harold R. Frecklton, Class of 1936 who was editor of the student newspaper in 1934 and a reporter for the *Hartford Courant*; and two brothers, Roger Brundage, Class of 1939, and Pierce Brundage, Class of 1943, members of a family with close ties to the University.
- Ten (10) alumni died during the Korean war.
- Two (2) UConn alumni were listed as missing in action during the Vietnam conflict. In 1974, a tree was planted on the Student Union Mall in their memory.

- One student, Cindy Beaudoin was killed during the Gulf War (Desert Storm). Two months after enrolling as a freshman, 19 year-old Beaudoin went to the Persian Gulf as a medical technician with the 142nd Medical Company of the Connecticut National Guard. On February 28, 1991, the day after the cease-fire, she was traveling with a doctor in an Army vehicle in Kuwait when both were killed by explosions. In 1992, a plaque in her memory was placed on a boulder outside the Student Union. There is also a student scholarship given in her name.

For more on UConn alumni who made the Ultimate Sacrifice, please to to the [Alumni Association Roll of Honor website](#).

And we witnessed two ghastly wars with unhappy endings, Korea and Vietnam. And again UConn alumni answered the call to duty and paid the price losing 10 in Korea, a couple of more I believe the record shows in Southeast Asia. And the latter conflict divided our country like nothing since the Civil War and we lived blanketed with fear over nuclear fallout and super power conflict.

My predecessor, Ronald Reagan, came into office and rightly concluded that only a strong America, strong NATO could guarantee freedom and I became president in 1989 and in four short years, your class, this Class of 1998, saw perhaps the most monumental global changes in the history of this country. The Berlin Wall fell. Germany, against all predictions was unified and remaining in the Alliance in NATO. The Baltic States, three of them gained, all three of them gained their independence. The Warsaw Pact, the enemy, the Warsaw Pact totally collapsed and the Soviet Empire Imploded and Eastern Europe liberated and with Gorbachev's cooperation, and incidentally, I know him well and I believe Gorbachev will be treated very kindly by history.

With Gorbachev at my side, we convened the Madrid Peace Conference where Arabs and Jews talked peace in one room, an unthinkable scenario for years. And that never would have happened without Desert Storm, without the 31 nations that came together to form a disparate but historic coalition in defeating a brutal aggressor on the sands of Kuwait. And thankfully the outcome of the Gulf War was different from the Asian forays that preceded it.

But the victory was won at great cost and our casualties were light compared to other wars, but that didn't make it any easier to make a decision to send someone else's son or daughter into battle. I have never forgotten people like UConn's Cindy Beaudoin, a medical specialist who had her abdomen ripped apart by shrapnel and gave the last full measure of devotion. People like her give the phrase "Duty, Honor, Country" true meaning and certainly inspired me and I believe inspired an entire nation.

And gradually your class began to see, you got through high school, going through high school and into this magnificent university, that things were different now. Very different now in this world of ours. The Soviet Union will never go back together again. Eastern Europeans, in my view, are going to remain free and in spite of India's unfortunate

action just this week, the world no longer has to worry about a super power war, a nuclear Armageddon.

And sure dangers remain. Today everyone says to me, "Well why do we need to be strong? Who is the enemy?" Well the enemies are international terror, fundamentalism, people killing people in the name of God. They are the spread of weapons of mass destruction and all these and more explain why the US must stay involved in the world and why we must lead.

And today there is a strange coalition at work in Washington and across the country consisting of people on the political right and the political left coming together to keep us from staying involved. Big Labor and Liberal Democrats joining some Republicans on the right in calling for America to come home, that we have done our part and it is time for others to do the heavy lifting on international leadership. And we must not listen to that siren's call of protection and isolation and we must not neglect Asia.

We must tend to the most important bilateral relationship in the world, incidentally, and that is the United States/China relationship. Not by bashing China, but by heeding the advice given just this last week of the Dalai Lama, who has huge differences with Beijing and dissident Wan, the man who stood in front of the tanks in Tiananmen Square, both say that we ought to work closely with China, not cut off relations with China, work closely with China and try to effect change in that manner. The point is, we must treat great nations with respect, while never yielding one inch on our fundamental beliefs on rights or whatever else the subject.

As we move into the next millennium, this great class has a shot at a world that is far more peaceful and much more prosperous, and much freer and much more democratic than the Class of 1898 or the Class of 1948. And to be sure our society will have ills to battle, such as these great domestic problems that plague us, teenage pregnancy, drugs, broken homes, gang violence, illiteracy, filthy entertainment, racial prejudice, all of these things will continue to plague us, but the world you enter is far from perfect, but I believe you're blessed because it will be more democratic and I think there will be far less risk of the kind of confrontations that previous generations faced.

Great professors have given you a great education and you ought to be counting your blessings. I know you don't like them all, but nevertheless, you ought to be counting your blessings for how lucky you are. You have been blessed to forge friendships that will last a lifetime and until your 50th reunion when you come back here and beyond that too. Most of all you have been blessed by the abiding love of parents, which has guided you. You are blessed by the values that they've taught you which will sustain you through success and defeat alike. You have been given all this and more.

So my question is what are you going to do with your life? Will you constantly gripe and complain when things go wrong? Will you be selfish and say why me, or if it feels good do it. Will you roll up sleeves and get involved and put something back? Will you strive to lift someone up and help others, all the while giving credit to someone else? Will you

say politics is lousy as you sit whining on the sidelines, or will you serve society, serve your country?

I have a wonderful feeling that you will appreciate what you have been given at this great university and that you will charge out of here setting big goals, achieving great ends in your own way. I also hope that you will find a way to be one of a thousand points of light, because your country needs you and your country is counting on you. My God bless each and every one of you as you leave this wonderful university.

Thank you very, very much.