Rich Galen Speech

Acceptance of Marietta College Alumni Hall of Honor Award

Saturday, October 12, 2013

Marietta, Ohio

As a member of the Class of 1968, I got here in the fall of 1964.

The highlight of my freshman year was being the coxswain on the freshman crew. Gary Pyne was our stroke and we were the best small-college freshman crew in the nation. His now wife, Joanie Oxenham, arrived a year later. [I have remained friends with Gary since our freshman year. They were sitting in the audience.)

After three semesters I was invited to hop on a bus and return to New Jersey having “failed to make satisfactory progress toward a degree.”

I had flunked out.

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After two years of having joined the New Jersey then Ohio National Guards, spending six months on active duty for training, working on the obligatory construction crew, and taking night courses at local universities I applied for re-admission.

I got a letter from the Dean of the College: Dr. Merrill Patterson.

The letter began: “All is forgiven; you may return.”

Anyone who is fortunate to remember Dean Pat will recognize the brilliance in his brevity.

I realized I needed to go to class and study. I took speech from Dean Ruth Wilcox [Dean of Women and Professor of Speech]; writing from College Editor Bill Shepherd; humanity and kindness from Bill Thompson [Director of Development]; and Radio and Television from Dr. Bernie Russi [Head of the then-fictional Department of Radio-TV].

There was no Mass Communications major so I had to major in speech.

In addition to knowing how to talk into a camera I also know how to draw a “schwa” and identify the body part known as the “uvula.”

Before you shift uneasily from leg-to-leg, the uvula is that benign little hangy thingy at the back of your throat.

But it *is* an attention getter.

Perhaps the most important classes I took were Constitutional Law from Dr. Robert Hill [Poly Sci Professor]. Beyond Marbury v. Madison and McCulloch v. Maryland, Dr. Hill taught us that the Constitution is the rule book – something occasionally forgotten by the First and Second Article branches of our government in Washington.

Just the other night someone was talking about how we needed to reduce the salary of every member of the U.S. House and Senate until they stopped the shut-down. I said that would be a good idea were it not for that pesky 27th Amendment.

Thank you, Dr. Hill, for providing debating points for me while on CNN. [Dr. Hill, who recently passed away at age 93, was in the audience. I pointed him out and he got a warm round of applause]

Speaking of debating points, I met Ross Lenhart [Director of Admissions, and we became good friends] – who over the past decades has remained my favorite debate opponent. We learned here that we could have different points of view but we could express them in a civil manner without shouting, nor with tightly shut eyes, and equally closed minds.

I met Bill and Diane White who taught me that friendship trumps time and distance.[Bill and Diane were our closest friends when we lived in Marietta and have remained so.]

It was after I returned that I met and married Susan Curran – now, 41 years later this coming Monday – Susan Galen. As an example of the Euclidian humor in our household, last weekend I asked Susan what she wanted for her anniversary. She said that as 41 is a prime number; that would be present enough. Our son, Reed, now 37 was born here, he has two little girls of his own; and thus does the Long Blue Line continue. [Marietta College’s colors are blue and white. We refer to its history as the “Long Blue Line.”]

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I know I’ve run over, but I need to make this point, standing here on the Christy Mall [named for a young Air Force pilot killed in action in Viet Nam] in front of the Administration building.

I’ve been blessed to go to many places, see wondrous things, meet fascinating people and engage in projects great and small; in peace and war. The universe that has become my life is as complex and vast as the physical universe that surrounds us.

That all began in that building. To torture the metaphor, the spark of the big bang emerged from a singularity at a desk, within an office, inside that building.

With six words.

“All is forgiven; you may return.”

Thank you.