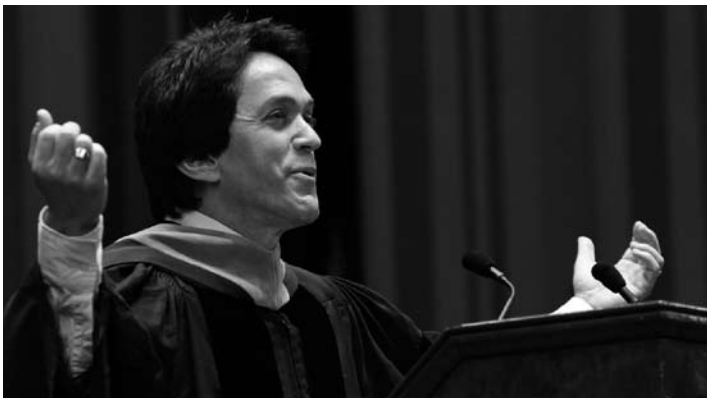
PENN BACCALAUREATE 2010

Penn Baccalaureate Address given Sunday, May 16, 2010 by Mitch Albom, internationally renowned and best-selling author, journalist, screenwriter, playwright, radio and television broadcaster and musician.

Have a Little Faith



Photograph by Stuart Watson

Mitch Albom

Thank you so much. I should point out that the thing about singing Elvis Presley songs on the Island of Crete is that they actually think they are originals, which is why I lasted as long as I did.

There was a country preacher who decided one Sunday that he was going to try to put the fear of God into his parish congregation, and so he came out and began his sermon by saying, "Remember, everyone in this parish is going to die." And he noticed this one guy up front was kind of smiling. And he looked at him and said, "What are you so happy about?" and the guy said, "I'm not from this parish, I'm just visiting my sister."

Well ten years ago, that would have been a pretty appropriate joke for me when it came to faith. I could have said, I'm not from this parish, I'm not from around here. I'm not too worried about the consequences. It wasn't that I hadn't been raised with faith. In fact just across the river I had been. As a kid, like many of you, I was involved with religious school, I grew up in the Jewish faith, I was involved with the synagogue, went to a religious academy through high school and studied it through college.

And right at the point where many of you are at, I graduated and walked away from all of it. It wasn't a tragic loss of belief, it wasn't a turn to atheism. It was, if I'm being honest, apathy. Lack of need. I was young, healthy, ambitious. I was doing okay. I was making money. Everyone I knew was alright. And so I just figured I would go my way, God would go his way and we'll be just fine. I went on like that for quite some time. And then, about ten years ago, I came back here to give a talk in the small town in New Jersey where I grew up, and after I finished, the rabbi of the synagogue that I had grown up in, now 82 years old, using a cane, pulled me outside in the hall and asked me a question that would change my life forever.

This was the question. "Will you do my eulogy?"

To which I answered, "huh?"

Will you do my eulogy? Who was I to accept that? I just said I wasn't very religious and besides, who does a eulogy for the guy who does eulogies? I figured rabbis, priests, pastors, they had this stuff all worked out with one another ahead of time, you know, like "if I go first, you do me, if you go first, I'll do you."

So how I got into this loop was beyond me. But not wanting to disappoint him I said, "Well if you want me to speak at your funeral, I need to get to know you as you lived. I mean, its true I've known you my whole life I guess, but always from the seats and the cheap seats at that. I need to get to know you if you want me to do your eulogy as a man."

To which he said, "I accept."

And that began a series of visits to this rabbi, Albert Lewis, Temple Beth Shalom. They were quite funny even from the very first because when I arrived, I drove to his house, I had never done that before; I parked in his driveway, I had never done that before; I walked up to his front door, I had never done that before and so the doorbell kind of threw me because I didn't know that priests or pastors or rabbis had doorbells. I just thought they sensed you coming.

But we walked in and he welcomed me down to his office. We went inside and sat down in his office, a room I had never been in before. I'd never been to his home before. I'd never seen him in anything other than a robe or a suit before, and now he was wearing Bermuda shorts with socks and sandals ...which is never a good look.

And we sat in his office and I looked around and I saw all these books and papers and I saw files on all these shelves. On the top shelf, was this huge big fat file right in the center and across the front it read, "God." He had a file on God.

I always wanted to ask him what was in that file, but I didn't have the nerve, so I decided I would begin my little process here with a very appropriate question. I took out a yellow pad, trying to do this eulogy thing very straight with a yellow pad and a pencil. I sat down and the first question I asked this 82 year old man of faith was, "Do you believe in God?"

And he said, "Yes I do."

"Do you talk to God?"

"I talk to God all the time," he said.

"And what do you say to God?" I asked.

And he had a habit of singing his answer and he chose this time to sing his answer and he said, "These days I say 'Dear Lord if you're going to take me, take me already! And if you're going to leave me here, leave me with enough strength that I can help my congregation.'"

"Do you ever get an answer?" I asked. He looked at me and smiled. "Still waiting," he said.

Now as that was going on, let me tell you a story about another person, who grew up the same age as I did. When I was growing up in the little synagogue across the river. Two hours north, in Brooklyn, New York, he too was growing up. He too was being dragged to religious school. He too would one day grapple with his faith. But that was about where the similarities ended. His name was Henry Covington. An African-American child, one of seven, born to a man who worked as a hustler and a woman who worked as a maid. When he was five years old, his mother was taken away to prison after trying to shoot his father. His family was so poor that they lived in a two-room apartment and at night they would put huge pots of rice on the counter in the kitchen, so that the rats would jump into the pots of rice and not come into their bedrooms.

The young Henry grew up fearful of falling asleep, lest he be bitten by a rodent. He was thrown out of school when he was 12 years old for fighting. When he was 13 his father died, leaving him directionless. He became a petty thief at 14, a bigger one at 15. By the time he was 19 years old he had so many enemies that one of them fingered him in the killing of a cop. And even though he was nowhere near the scene, he was advised to plead guilty to manslaughter, lest he be found guilty for murder. And he was sent away for seven years to a federal penitentiary for a crime he did not commit. He swore that the world would owe him when he got out.

He didn't think of all the crimes he hadn't been punished for. And when he got out, he made good on that promise and he got into the drug trade, and he did very well for a period of time. He sold drugs and at one point, he earned a half a million dollars a year, selling dope and crack and heroin. And then Henry Covington made a fatal error, he tried some of his own product. Pretty soon he was as desperate and strung out as all the junkies he'd been selling to. And a few years later, he had just passed his 30th birthday, alone, without any money, desperate, he robbed the only people he could think of that had any money or drugs. His own drug dealers, which is never a good idea.

And he banged on the door and waved the gun in their faces and said, "You know what this is." And they almost laughed at him. They gave him

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Penn Baccalaureate Address by Mitch Albom

(continued from previous page)

some drugs and he took off. He went home, he got high and in the middle of all that he realized, "uh oh, they know where I live." And he ran out front of his apartment and he lay on the ground and he held a shotgun and he put a bunch of trash cans in front of him, and there on the ground, holding a shotgun, after midnight, waiting for a car to come around the corner to murder him. Sure that the next set of headlights would contain his killer, would spray him with bullets and that would be the end, he did what many people do in moments like that. "Jesus? Get me out of this. If you save me tonight, you can have me in the morning. Help me, Lord. Spare me Lord. Save me, Lord."

Twenty years later, I'm living in Detroit. I have a charity that I work with that helps the homeless, and I heard of a homeless shelter that was being run out of church. A very unusual place, because the people slept on the floor of this church. The church had once been the largest Presbyterian Church in the entire Midwest, but that was in the 1880s when it was built. Today it has been left to rot in one of the worst sections of Detroit. Windows broken, bricks falling off of it and a massive hole in its roof and ceiling through which rain and snow literally poured in on top of the congregants when they tried to pray. And it got so cold inside this church that at one point they had to build a plastic tent, made of two-by-fours and plasticine, just to be able to huddle together on Sundays, to have a place that was semi-dry and warm, to pray. A plastic tent, in a church, in the 21st century in the United States of America.

When I saw this I said, "ok, this is worthwhile helping, you have homeless people sleeping on the floor here. Can I meet the pastor?"

And a couple minutes later, around the corner came a very large man. Big belly over his stomach, thick arms, a white T-shirt, he was patting his head with a handkerchief—I thought he worked there. And he held out his hand and he said something that would ultimately change my life forever.

He said, "Hello, my name is Henry Covington." And this was where Henry had ended up, 20 years after that night that he asked Jesus to save him. No cars came down the street. No bullets were fired. When he woke up the next morning, it was Easter morning and he got down on his knees and he prayed for forgiveness and then he drank a bottle of NyQuil and knocked himself out for a day. And when he woke up he did the same thing again. And when he woke up he did the same thing again, a self-imposed detox. And then he slowly, gradually, worked his way back to goodness. Went to church, got involved, became a deacon, became an elder, was sent to Detroit to try open a branch and eventually took up this crumbling church, where he now worked for no salary. This man who had once made a half a million dollars a year selling drugs, was now getting no salary, taking care of the homeless and the poor in a church with a hole in its roof.

Now I have to admit that when I first met Henry, I'm not sure I trusted him. For one thing, within 5 minutes he was telling me he'd been incarcerated, he'd been a drug dealer, he'd been a thief, he'd been a junkie. And while I thought it was very nice he was being honest, I kept asking myself, "Isn't there some point you get disqualified from the pulpit? Isn't there some minimum test score you have to achieve?"

Besides, he was different. He was different. I had grown up in a white synagogue in the suburbs. This was a black church in inner city Detroit. He was different, and let's be honest, if you haven't realized this yet, I'm sure you will. When it comes to faith, we don't trust different. We might say we do, we might pay it lip service, but in our minds there is always ours/theirs, familiar/weird, the right one/too bad for all of you. Different. And I probably wouldn't have trusted him the rest of the way except that I had been meeting with this rabbi, and seeing what a man was like away from the pulpit, the robes, not judging someone based on what I saw, and so I did the same with Henry.

And what I found was remarkable, because I discovered a man who drove around the poorest sections of Detroit with food on the hood of his car. Turkeys, cheeses, juices that he got from food banks, and he would honk his horn and in the poor sections and the people who were homeless who were squatting would come running out and just take the food.

He didn't ask for anything in return. You didn't have to join his church, no *quid pro quo*, he just fed the hungry. What is more Christian than that? He took in homeless people, 50, 60, 80, 100 people sleeping on the floor of his church every night, and after he gave them a blanket and a mat, and a warm place to sleep, the lights went off and he sat there. Ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock, one a.m., watching over them.

And when I asked him, "Why don't you just get a night watchman?" He said, "This is my church. I need to make sure these people are safe."

And he befriended one particular homeless guy, a crack addict who was in an apartment named Cass, and he said to him, "You know, I can help you out if you need to, I can give you a job, you can help me unload the food trucks."

And Cass said, "Sure, I can do that."

Unfortunately, Cass had a unique distribution system. It was one for the church, two for Cass. And he would take these things and sell them off and buy drugs. Henry could have said, "Be gone with you." But he didn't trap a man in his past, because he had been there himself. And so he waited, and waited. And one night someone broke into Cass's apartment where he'd been squatting, stole the pipes for the copper, burst the water main and Cass woke up face down in water floating out of the apartment. He came to Henry the next morning and said, "Pastor, I can't work for you today, because these are the only clothes I own and they are all soaked."

Henry gave him new clothes. The first time in three years the man had clean underwear. Then he said, "Cass, where will you live?" Cass said, "I ain't got no place to live."

Henry thought for a moment and he said, "Why don't you live with me?" and that night he moved this virtual stranger into his home, his tiny home, and the one available couch that they had, while Henry, his wife and his three children lived upstairs. Not for a night, not for a week, but for a year. An entire year. Until Cass was able to straighten his life out. And today, many years later, Cass is not only clean and sober, but he is an elder of the church, he married a woman from the church and they have an eight-year-old daughter named Miracle, who runs around the church as if she owns it. All because of the kindness of one man, who refused to trap a man in his past. And showed he had faith in mankind.

So now, to the end—my visits with the rabbi. Normally, when someone asks you for a eulogy, you kind of figure, time is short. But after eight years of visiting, I was beginning to wonder if this whole thing wasn't a clever ruse to draw me back into an adult education class. What turned out to be the final Sunday that we had a chance to visit, we were talking about Heaven.

I must have been asking him so many questions ... what do you think is going to happen? But finally he looked up to the heavens in exasperation and he said, "Dear Lord, this one has so many questions, please give him many more years on Earth, and when we see each other again, we will have lots to talk about!"

And I said, "Do you really think we're going to see each other again?"

And he said, "Don't you?" and I said, "Well, lets face it … I don't think I'm going where you're going."

"What do you mean?" he said.

"Well, come on," I said, "They have to have a special wing for people like you, you're a man of God."

And he looked at me very sweetly and said, "But you're a man of God too, everyone is."

And you could have knocked me over with a feather, because for this 90-year-old pious, righteous man, to put himself on the same level as me, was not only an act of humility, but was, to me, what faith is supposed to be about. Not wagging a finger at the other guy and saying, "I'm more pious than you are" which he certainly could have done. Not wagging a finger at someone and saying, "My faith is better than your faith" which he certainly could have tried. It is about turning to the person next to you and saying, "You're a child of God too, everyone is." And if we really believe that, we would have to be nicer to one another, because we would all see ourselves as more the same than different, and you wouldn't hurt yourself or those you love.

Two days later, the rabbi was taken to the hospital for tests, and while he was in the hallway, in a wheelchair, an orderly realized he was some kind of clergyman and came up to him and said, "Excuse me, I don't mean to bother you, but I'm kind of having a rough patch in my life right now and I was wondering if you could give me a blessing."

And so, one last time in the hallway of that hospital, my old rabbi put

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Penn Baccalaureate Address by Mitch Albom

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his hands on the head of a stranger and asked God to bless him.

The next day at six a.m., the sun came up, the nurse came in to give him a bath and he was doing what he did best, making her laugh and singing, when his head slumped over and his music stopped forever.

Well, in case you're wondering, I did do the eulogy. I spoke about the eight years that we had together. I spoke about having my faith rekindled by witnessing a man who practiced it quietly and purely every day of his life.

And then I sat down. I never did find out, why the Rab, as I called him, asked me to do his eulogy. Especially because I always knew he could do it better than I could. When I sat down, his grandson walked up to the pulpit holding a cassette tape, and put it in the player and pressed the button.

And one last time a familiar voice rang out over the loudspeakers, and it said, "Hello my friends, this is the voice of your past rabbi speaking!" He made a tape and hadn't told anyone. It was very short, maybe a minute, but in it he answered the two questions he said he had been asked the most in his life as a man of faith. One was, "Do you believe in God?" He said he did. The other was, "What happens when we die?" To this he said, "My friends, the good news is by the time you hear this, I'll know. The bad news is, now that I know, I can't even tell you. You're going to have to figure it out for yourselves."

I think what he was saying and what I'm trying to say to you, was simple. You have to have a little faith. It is what will get you through the darkness, the sad times, the craziness, the maddening turn of events. Have a little faith and one day we may indeed figure it out for ourselves.

By the way, I did open that file on God. I went back a few months after the Rab had passed, stood on a chair, took it down in my arms and held it. I admit I paused for a moment because I was flashing on that Indiana Jones movie where they open the arc and I didn't want my face to melt off. I really wished that the rabbi was there with me. But when I opened that file, he was. He was, because in it, were hundreds of pages of quotations and stories and articles, and questions written in the Rab's handwriting, all about God. And I realized that I was holding what he'd always been trying to teach me. That it is not about having the answer, as many of you want to have right now. It's about the search for the answer. You cannot fit God in a file. If you could, there would be no reason to believe in Him. You could take Him off the shelf any time you needed Him, like coffee.

It's the choosing to believe in that which you cannot fit in a file. It's the choosing to believe in that which you cannot see or touch. It's the choosing to believe that we are here for something other than just taking what we want and turning into worm food. It's the choosing to believe that there is a divine spark in every single person in this room, that can be touched and used to bring people together. It's the choosing to believe that makes the whole thing, the maddening, crazy, wonderful, but always ultimately satisfying journey of faith. Don't walk away from it, like I did. Embrace it.

In the beginning, there was a question for me. Will you do my eulogy? In the end, that question and all the others will get answered. I believe, like the Rabbi, God sings and we all hum along. And there are many, many melodies, and we are all witness to it, but its all one song. All one song, one same, wonderful, human song.

Thank you very much for listening to me. God bless you.

Penn Baccalaureate Address given on Sunday, May 16, 2010 by President Amy Gutmann.

Sustaining Your Passions

Parents, families, friends, and colleagues, welcome. And congratulations to the great Class of 2010.

Graduates, you have struck me as an unusually passionate class. So let's reflect on a short reading that speaks to the significance of that special quality—passion—that you have manifested at Penn.

In J. D. Salinger's novella, "Seymour: An Introduction," Seymour Glass offers this insight and advice on his younger brother Buddy's writing.

"When was writing ever your profession? [Seymour says to Buddy] It's never been anything but your religion... Since it *is* your religion, do you know what you will be asked when you die? You'll get asked only two questions. *Were most of your stars out? Were you busy writing your heart out?* If only you knew how easy it would be for you to say yes to both questions. … You simply … sit very still and ask yourself, as a reader, what piece of writing in all the world Buddy Glass would most want to read if he had his heart's choice. (Then) you just sit down shamelessly and write the thing yourself. … Oh, dare to do it."

Graduates: Think back to the project that gave you the greatest sense of achievement and fulfillment. Did you pour your heart and soul into it—with no guarantee of success? Were all of your stars out? Not your professor's stars, not your coach's stars, not Vincent Van Gogh's stars... but *your* stars?

This year's Senior Fine Arts Thesis Show gave me a window into the bold character of your graduating class. The stars of our senior artists were out in bunches. The exhibit was provocative; it also revealed the artists' avid pursuit of insights into the human condition. I was witnessing not the end of a thrilling chapter in these student-artists' lives, but rather, "the beginning of a life-long search for answers to questions and problems to investigate."

I have observed in all of you this inspiring capacity for the ecstatic pursuit of life-changing insights and experiences in all. I have seen all of your stars out on Franklin Field and at the Palestra; in my seminars with our Civic Scholars, Fox Leadership, Netter Center, and Bioethics Center students; at Weiss Tech House, Kelly Writers House, and Platt Performing Arts House; in our science and engineering labs; at our University-assisted schools in West Philadelphia; and in probing conversations at the President's House.

The question now is: Through the inevitable rough patches that lie ahead, can you sustain your passions and continue the voyages of ecstatic exploration and discovery you have begun at Penn?

You know my answer: Yes! Of course, you can. But *how*?

Two words of advice.

First word: *Remember*. Remember your most rewarding and rapturous experiences at Penn. Remember why you persisted in your passionate pursuit—despite setbacks and sometimes because of failure. Remember that if you could make it here, then you can make it *anywhere*.

Second word: *Connect*. You are not leaving Penn. You are graduating Penn and joining an extended Penn family of 300,000 alumni, parents, and friends. Among your immediate Penn family are classmates and faculty who kept you going when you were tempted to retreat, and who will always be there for you, with great affection, respect, and, yes, even a measure of awe.

I could give you innumerable reasons to stay connected to your Penn family—the endless intellectual excitement and enrichment, the awesome beauty of our campus, our edgy and engaging arts and culture scene, gratitude, and the Greek Lady. But two reasons resound above all: Remembering your most amazing moments at Penn; and connecting with your Penn friends and colleagues.

Remembering and connecting will continually elevate your spirits by reminding you of the trails *you* blazed for yourself and the fulfilling projects *you* pursued that also lent others a helping hand, all with the support of Penn friends.

"There is no passion to be found in playing small," Nelson Mandela observes, "[there is no passion to be found] in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living." So I say to you, the most passionate class I will soon have the privilege to graduate from Penn: Remember how you made the most out of your Penn experience. Stay connected, above all to your Penn friends and extended family. If you do, I know that you will fill our skies with your stars. And we shall be mighty proud. Let's hear it for the *passionately great class* of 2010! Godspeed.

Penn Commencement Address given by President Amy Gutmann, on Monday, May 17, 2010.

Making A Difference

Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller

Amy Gutmann

Chairman Cohen, Trustees, honored guests, families, friends, and alumni: Welcome to the 254th commencement of the University of Pennsylvania!

A special welcome to the members of the Classes of 1960 and 1985. It's great to have you—and all returning alumni—back on campus!

Everyone—let's hear it for the graduates of the great Class of 2010!

Graduates, you have met Penn's requirements; you have survived your final Spring Fling, and you have completed the epic trek from Center City to Smokes. Well done!

This day is a beautiful expression of all that your loved ones knew you could achieve. They believed in you. And, now, they share in your success. Find time to return their calls. Let's hear it for your family and friends.

Only these commencement exercises separate you from the so-called "real world." I'm sure you've heard much about this foreign locale—workdays begin before 11 a.m., weekends are short, and vacations are even shorter. I was reminded of the difference between Penn and the real world just last week when, in shockingly cold, 48-degree and rainy weather, I put on a beach party for the Senior Class at my house, complete with Penn-themed beach balls, pails, and flip flops. "I don't want to leave Penn," many a senior said to me, "but I know that it's about to get real." If, like Thoreau, you subscribe to the notion that one ought to "distrust any enterprise that requires new clothes,"—or anything more formal than flip-flops—then the demands of life post-Penn will seem very vexing.

And if, like Oscar Wilde, you believe that "quotation is a serviceable substitute for wit," then my send-off is certainly off to an auspicious start.

Take heart, graduates. Rumors about the real world have been greatly exaggerated. Life after Penn can be as fulfilling as life at Penn has been. Of course, *can* does not imply *will*. So: how will you approach your entry into the real world?

Far, far better if you let go of trying to be perfect. How many seniors remember your convocation precisely because it poured and you got drenched? You impressed me by your spunk and spirit far more than you otherwise could have, or would have, had the weather been perfect. Remember that people can be near perfect without being especially good. People who try to be perfect often avoid risks. They miss opportunities to grow and to cultivate lasting relationships.

Nothing truly important in life is perfect. Even the idea of striving for perfection is overrated. I learned this lesson early in my career. Fresh out of graduate school and in a tough job market, I was absolutely elated to be hired as an assistant professor. But I soon discovered that my teaching experience—a single 45-minute lecture that took me a month to prepare—did not exactly match my new teaching load—four lectures and six seminars per week.

Facing 150 hours of classroom time and the imperative to "publish or perish," I did what many a newly minted faculty member does: I quietly panicked. There was no time to make every lecture a perfect lecture, and even less time to write my magnum opus. So, I stuffed my book manuscript in a drawer. And I took a big risk. I threw myself into teaching. And instead of proving that I could drive home perfect truths in political philosophy by the end of every lecture, I decided to pepper my students with provocative questions to get them thinking along with me. I discovered how enjoyable it was to lead lively discussions that did not reach cut and dried conclusions.

Ultimately, my students and I learned more from my letting go than any of us would have from striving for perfection. And we all had more fun while learning together by thinking out loud, openly and imperfectly.

Is this a valediction promoting the pursuit of mediocrity?

Not at all! This is a call to be bold and courageous in facing the unknown. Let your reach exceed your grasp, enough to stretch your talents and make them, and you, expand. After I panicked, instead of playing it safe, I took a big chance. I let go of the certainty of what would come next in a perfectly scripted lecture; just as we all must let go of perfectly scripting our lives to succeed. I asked my students to confront with me some of the most complex and intriguing questions. I discovered that I could inspire students to join me on what would become a life-long journey in pursuit of our own best answers.

You will achieve greatness only by realizing that not every step is the beginning of an Olympic-quality 100-meter dash run as fast as Usain Bolt. Take the chance that you will sometimes stumble. Remember that you can achieve perfection at many small things without being especially good at anything truly important. Your Penn education has cultivated in you the courage to lead yourself and others—not in certain directions, not with perfect, pre-ordained answers—but in bold, creatively crafted, and life-transforming directions.

Embrace not perfection, but the ecstatic greatness of human life by being creative, courageous, and far ranging in your pursuits. Avidly pursue your passion for poetry, your love of invention, your ardor for athletics, or your fanaticism for film as you cultivate a great career and—of course—stay connected to your Penn friends and to Penn.

Your life, like your time at Penn, will have periods of deluge and drought—not to mention a few epic snow days here and there! And you will find, as I did, that some of those epic snow days, those panicked moments early in your anxiety laced and uncertain careers, are precisely what incite you to achieve new heights and enjoy the most fulfilling adventures of your life.

"The blessed work of helping the world forward," George Eliot wrote, "happily does not wait to be done by perfect men [or women]." The challenges facing our world, like those confronting me as a first-year assistant professor and those facing you as "it is about to get real," demand our boldest, most creative ideas and our greatest energy now, not a perfect solution later.

Over your years at Penn, you have put many great ideas into practice. (Not to mention some not-so-bright ideas fueled by too little sleep and other absolutely endearing imperfections). By triathloning through the semester and sprinting to the end of finals, you have passionately pursued excellence inside and outside the classroom.

You strengthened our campus community and West Philadelphia through your community service. You traveled to Katrina-ravaged New Orleans to help rebuild a city with your own hands.

And when a catastrophic earthquake struck Haiti a day before this semester began, you sprang into action, hosting vigils and benefit events, and collecting necessities to support your fellow human beings in need.

Great lives and great deeds are not perfect. They reflect the boldest efforts of women and men with the talent and the fortitude to make a meaningful difference. You are those women and men—and I love you for your Penn spirit. That spirit—our spirit—that does not let perfection obscure the path to creative, courageous, bold and transformative action.

Graduates, how will you confront the daunting challenges of what lies ahead? By making courageous choices, by cultivating far-ranging interests, and by passionately devoting yourself to meaningful action, you *will* live a life that is every bit as fulfilling—and fun—as your life at Penn has been. You *will* tackle the greatest challenges of your time by leading others, not perfectly, but creatively and constructively. You *will* be the generation that both imagines a truly bright future and avidly works to bring it into being.

You have made me tremendously proud to be Penn's president. Yes, it's about to get real. So, now, go out bravely into that real world, boldly stake your claim, and—not perfectly—but passionately make a difference. I wish you all the greatest success and the utmost happiness. Go Quakers!

Remarks given Monday, May 17, 2010 by Dr. Robert C. Hornik, Wilbur Schramm Professor of Communication and Health Policy, Annenberg School for Communication and Incoming Chair of the Faculty Senate.

Preparing for Life

Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller

Robert Hornik

On behalf of the 3,800 faculty at this extraordinary university I wish you congratulations. This is a day representing great accomplishment for you and a day of great pride for us.

Tradition requires that I ground my remarks in Benjamin Franklin's words, and I do so gladly. As many know, our University is founded on Franklin's Academy of Philadelphia, first described in his pamphlet "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania" published in 1749. It was in that document that Franklin called for study of subjects both "useful and ornamental;" this was to be a place where people would prepare for a life of the mind and a life of application, and a commitment to service. There is much else in that document, but among the striking elements is what is not there: amidst all the detail of what is to be learned, there is little in it about the role of the faculty.

Franklin's proposal describes a rector who is to hire some masters or tutors. The tutors are given but two specific roles in a few words: to revise student letters and to supervise rehearsals of speeches. Do we really need 3,800 faculty to do that?

Partly this minimal role for faculty can be attributed to Franklin's era and his experience: a school-leaver at 10 years of age, self-taught and peer taught, nonetheless Franklin was among the accomplished intellectuals and scientists of his age. There are no teachers in his autobiography either. There is only voracious reading and constant engagement with the minds of those around him. But is there more to take away here than an idea rooted in an historical moment?

I think so. The fundamental implications are twofold: What any student, what *you* will take away from Penn is what you have engaged with, what you have produced while you were here. We may have been assigning grades but you were in charge of your education. At one level that means you are likely to remember the final papers you wrote, the experiments and analyses you conducted and wrote up, and the discussions you had with your peers. You will likely better recall this work that you did than you will the specifics of our lectures or the details of readings we assigned.

But more than that, if we were successful as teachers, we have given you the skills to teach yourselves. We would have made sure you understood, in each of our fields, how it is we frame questions and what methods we use to approach finding answers.

The implication is clear: what mattered to Franklin and matters to us is not what we have taught you; what matters is what you have taught yourselves with our guidance. So when the ideas we taught become outdated, and even the facts slippery, you will have the methods and the way of thinking on which to build.

We are proud of you. Congratulations to you and best wishes to you and to your families.

Photograph by Stuart Watson

President Amy Gutmann sat with Ben on the Bench before the procession to Franklin Field. She was joined by the honorary degree recipients (left to right) Greg Mortenson, Peter C. Nowell, Paul Farmer, Risa J. Lavizzo-Mourey, Sandra M. Faber, James S. Riepe, Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., along with Trustee Chairman David L. Cohen. Abdullah Ibrahim was unable to attend this year's Commencement and will receive his honorary degree next year.

Penn Commencement Address by Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., US Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, given on Monday, May 17, 2010

Putting Life in Perspective

It was worth that trip from all the way from China just to hear that introduction. And you don't get one today, you get two. That's pretty awesome.

To members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished faculty—we're very, very proud of you too, proud parents in the audience—and you, class of 2010. What do you think? The question now becomes what do you do without your bursars in hand.

Graduation is one of life's great milestones. I guess the others would be your birth, your death—and anytime Penn wins the league championships. Way to go, team!

So, let's deal with the elephant in the room. No, I'm not the guy after whom the great building on campus is named. But he would be the first to admit that the Huntsman line isn't very good at following conventional wisdom. You see, he's upset with my career choices—just as his dad was upset with his own.

My grandfather was an educator in a small town in Idaho and he expected all in his family to be educators as well—nothing was more honorable, respectable, or important. And as he always told his three sons, "If you can't cut it as an educator, you will always need a fall-back position … you can always go into business."

So, I got the same lecture growing up from my own dad—maybe some of you can relate—that was before he had any spare change in his pocket. "Son," he would say, "if you really want to make a difference in this world, create jobs, contribute meaningfully, control your own destiny—you need to go into business. Nothing else is more important. And if you can't cut it in business, you will always need a fall-back position—you can always go into politics."

So to put this in perspective, I stand before you as the loser of a loser of an educator. We started with noble intentions. Something went wrong along the way.

So no, you didn't get Lady Gaga. You didn't get Oprah. Snoop Dogg came to the Fling. You didn't get Dick Cheney; he'll be at Yale.

This university has flourished over the years, but never more so than under the leadership of my good friend, Amy Gutmann—we love you, Amy. And she's beautiful!

An amazing thing took place in my studies here after taking time to work and live overseas, whether in the lectures of Professor Alvin Z. Rubinstein or Allyn Rickett, I found my passion. Now I ask that you do the same because your direction in life will remain uncertain until you do.

You know, I wasn't quite sure how best to spend my few moments of wisdom-dispensing, until a recent visit to see an American citizen detained in a Chinese prison. While there, I was reminded that some folks, when all of their freedom is deprived, are able to put life in proper perspective. Perhaps being held for two and a half years without a trial or proper explanation will do it. But I couldn't help but be impressed by the words this inmate was giving me to pass on to his two kids—because he wasn't sure he'd ever see them again. But more on that in a moment.

Today, I stand before you not just as a fellow alumnus, but as a United States diplomat. My main points of reference and world view are not from College Hall, Smoke's or the original Lee Anh food cart, not even this beloved field, but rather managing the diplomatic, military, intelligence and economic infrastructure of the United States in China—the hard and soft power that bridges the sometimes considerable gaps between the American people and the world's most populous and culturally complicated nation of China.

But make no mistake about it, the years ahead for both countries will hold a mix of promise and peril, euphoria and depression, where the most important stabilizing element will be holding true to our values of liberty, human rights, equality, and rule of law and, more effectively, identify our shared interests. *Spoken in Chinese:* Help each other. Learn from each other. Progress together *(as translated into English).*

Like you, I'm a product of our place in history. So, first, some perspective, then some advice which I offer in great humility … knowing that my own failures and shortcomings in life are probably no different than yours. I'm just a little older and as a public servant they're a bit more on public display!

My earliest memories were Vietnam, civil rights, the Beatles on the *Ed Sullivan Show.* It was a time of tumult, uncertainty and great change. So much so, that many wondered with the assassination of beloved leaders, the overhang of imminent nuclear war, a failing economy, troops deployed in a foreign quagmire, and the resignation of a President … if our nation would ever survive. It has survived … like every generation since independence.

Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller

Jon M. Huntsman, Jr.

You see, each wave of graduates has a set of circumstances that make it seem like the wheels are coming off a bus … wars, depression, social revolutions. In each case, we recover, we learn our lessons, and we become ever more resilient.

But just as important, our system requires the infusion of new thinking, driven by a fresh generation of innovators, leaders, risk takers, entrepreneurs, scientists, community activists, and plain old citizens—that's you! The generations before you have risen to their challenges … I trust the same will be said of yours.

So the world you now step into, regardless of your point of origin on the globe, should be cause for excitement, not fear; anticipation, not anxiety. The prospect of driving knowledge deeper into deprived communities, breakthroughs in conquering human disease, lifting the poor from desperation, and bringing about greater world peace.

You now will begin to take ownership and responsibility for our future. And what you discover may surprise you … life at all levels still requires the human touch, the displays of goodness, selflessness, tolerance and compassion that make this world beautiful if you're fortunate enough to find it. And I hope you do.

And, make no mistake about it, while technology will drive us to mind-bending destinations during your lifetimes, the world is still managed at all levels by human beings and human emotion; happiness, sadness, mercy, thankfulness, and forgiveness: all attributes of living human beings—but the traits of the most successful among us for the foreseeable future will require the most precious of all attributes – good judgment.

So finally, I will display the truly *bad* judgment of dispensing some advice.

You remember my mention of the great building that carries my family's name. Now let me tell you something else that carried my family's name—my sister Kathleen, who died last month succumbing to life's challenges. I dedicate these comments to her because she inspired them.

So now that you've graduated, where you were constantly reminded never to get an F in any of your classes, I am telling you that to have a life fulfilled, you will need F's of a different kind. So far as I can tell, these five F's may help to get you a passing grade in life.

1) *Find Yourself.* So, just who will you be? And how will you change the world? Whether you realize this or not, you have a gift … a genius that no one else has. Find it and nurture it. By this I mean, you need direction; not just a profession, but a pathway in life that is uniquely yours.

You see, life isn't a straight and narrow path that is the shortest line between two points. In fact, life is full of turns, hills, alleyways, sometimes cliffs, lots of speed bumps and potholes. But your passion will never be complete unless you learn to follow your heart. So quit asking others what they think you should be … ask yourself—and follow your heart—it will never let you down.

2) *Find A Cause*. Find something to be passionate about, something to save, something to free. And when you have found that cause, don't hide behind your MySpace page—speak out—because you'll soon find that the world is "Our Space." Take action and never let it be said that you were an anonymous blogger—too timid to be counted, too weak to stand by your cause.

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Penn Commencement Address by Jon M. Huntsman, Jr.
(continued from previous page)

One of our distinguished honorees here today found a cause, a cause that showed how one individual can truly make a difference in this world. Greg Mortenson, the author of *Three Cups of Tea*, showed us that through determination and passion, we can overcome fear and extremism. I'm honored to be on this stage here today with people like him, and the other honorees, all of whom have done their part to make the world a better place. They have found their passion.

3) *Face Failure*. I'm aware that some of you haven't yet landed the job you wanted. I'm aware that many of you have faced hardships, some deeply personal—I know I have. Failure only hurts if you were unable to turn it into a learning experience that makes you stronger and wiser. As much as you'd like to hope it, life will not provide immunity from failure for any of you.

All you can do is prepare to face adversity head on. The band Incubus puts it nicely in their song called "Dig:" "We all have a weakness; some of ours are easy to identify. We all have something that digs at us." Always remember that your weaknesses in life can be turned into your greatest strengths. Just as Ben Franklin said "There are no gains without the pains."

4) *Find Someone To Love*. Love is life's most powerful emotion. And there are people all around us who need an emotional lift that only another human being can provide. Mary Kaye and I have two adopted daughters, one from India, the other from China. We never thought we could love something or someone as much as we do them. This past year, we had the opportunity to visit the humble vegetable market where our daughter Gracie was abandoned in Yangzhou, China. For the first time, she was able to see where she had come from. Many of the women who nurtured and provided for her in her orphanage were still there and they remembered her. Gracie came to realize that love can transcend race, geography, religion and class. As we were there, I couldn't help but reflect on Gracie's biological mother, who wasn't there, but, some 10 years ago, left her in plain sight, so as to make sure that she would be found and have a chance at life. I'm sure her love for this little girl was no less than our own.

There are people who need friends and others who need hope—reach out your hand and give them your heart. You will be better for it.

5) And finally. *Find Meaning*. You'd be surprised at how many people go through life without ever discovering its true meaning, or at least attempt to put it in proper perspective. I mentioned a moment ago that I learned a valuable lesson from a recent visit to an American citizen who has languished in a Chinese prison for more than two years without being charged with a crime or given a trial.

During my last visit, sitting in the sobering and sterile surrounding that has become this man's existence, guarded by the ever watchful eye of public security officers, I brought him photos and letters from his family, and as he read the cards he was clearly moved and visibly shaken. As he wiped the tears from his eyes he stated that he hoped his children would learn three simple lessons so that their lives would have meaning.

First, they should always have goals.

Second, create an intellectual framework or personal philosophy to value the world and the people around them. This, in turn, will lead to wisdom.

And third, they must remember that experience is the most valuable of all training grounds. Everyone will make mistakes, they are the dues owed to life, but learning from them, in order not to make them again, is the key to a happy and successful journey… Pretty profound statements from a man who has had everything taken from him, but only wishes the best for his children.

So, finally, let me conclude with what is probably the best wisdom you will hear today. It comes from one of Ben Franklin's closest associates, who helped give birth to this republic just a few short blocks from here. "The most valuable of all talents," said Thomas Jefferson, "is never having to use two words when one will do." I think I've probably used my quota for the day. Congratulations, and good luck, graduates! Go Quakers.

Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller

President Amy Gutmann at the podium during the University's 254th Commencement on May 17.

Photographs by Marguerite F. Miller

Secretary of the University Leslie Kruhly with the University mace.

Penn Band (at left).

Caryl Kristen Dizon, EAS'10, sang The National Anthem before Chaplain Charles Howard's invocation and she led the singing of The Red and Blue after the Chaplain gave the Dismissal.

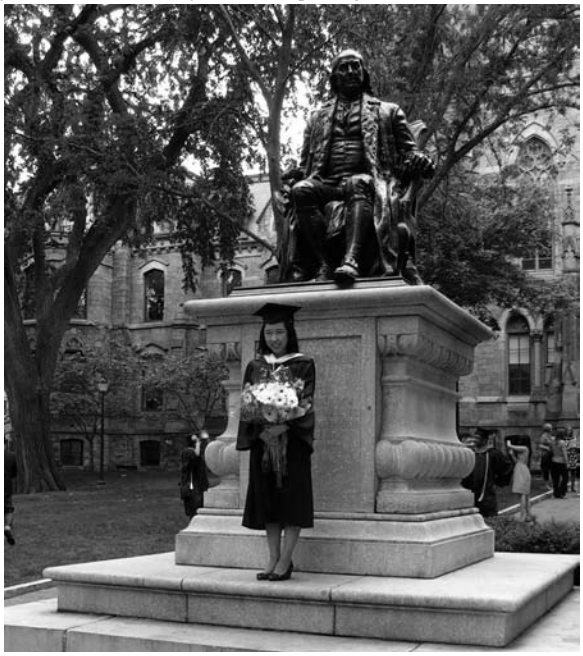
Rev. Charles Howard

Students from the School of Dental Medicine along Locust Walk.

Provost Vincent Price

Commencement Marshall Fran Walker, and graduates applauding the Academic Procession as it enters Franklin Field.

See Almanac's website for Almanac's Commencement slideshow, and Penn's webcast of the 2010 Commencement.



A graduate of the Class of 2010 with the University's founder, Benjamin Franklin, on College Green, after Commencement.