

Geroux Urges CS Men: Contemplate!

Head of the Drama Department Charles Geroux, who is retiring at the end of this year, gave the following speech at the Passage of Leadership Ceremony on April 22, 1999.

I've calculated that seventy percent of the students in the class of 2000 have been in my courses—some in acting, others in stagecraft, but the majority in speech class. Could it be, I asked myself when I accepted the invitation to share some thoughts here tonight, that they remembered the stress of delivering their first speeches, and, given the opportunity, jumped at the chance to see me on the hot seat too? Well if that's the case, you have succeeded!

Events like this ceremony are so memorable and unique, not just because they are rights of passage, but because they represent the rare moments when we choose to step back from the daily grind. When we decide to step off the fast track, switch off our cell phones, shut down our computers and come, receptive and ready, to live in the moment. So take a couple of deep breaths, relax, and let it happen. Here. Now.

As I look back over my life and nearly thirty years at Cranbrook, almost forty years teaching, I find that one of the things that has helped me grow, and allowed me to make the most of the opportunity, is a concept really quite akin to this ceremony. It is an aspect of the human condition very often neglected in this consumer-driven, network-or-die society. And it is the polar opposite of all that is work-oriented. It is instead intuitive, contemplative. It is the invaluable gift of leisure time. While I've no doubt that the idea of leisure time resonates with you, I'd like to suggest that you discover, or re-discover, its extraordinary importance.

Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854: "There were times when I could not afford

to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work, whether of the head or hands. I love a broad margin to my life. Sometimes on a summer morning I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night. And they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. They were not times subtracted from my life but so much over and above my usual allowance. I realize what the [philosophers] mean by *contemplation*."

Leisure allows you to attend to what is inside you—your soul, your spirit. Indeed I contend that without contemplative, solitary moments, you cannot bring perspective and harmony to your daily life. It is difficult to become sensitive to

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yourself in relationship to yourself. You cannot reach your full potential for insight and creativity.

The world of work and decision making is essential too, of course. But it is demanding, pervasive and, for many, draining. It isn't easy "aiming high," living up to the expectations you set for yourself, and being: alert, patient, consistent, adaptable, foresighted, strong, gentle, trustworthy, constructive, critical, scholarly, hardworking, passionate, imaginative, thoughtful, honest. And just generally able to keep your head in the game.

It's hard work no matter how you cut it: being a student; being the best person you can be; being likeable; being a friend; being unselfish; being cool. We need time off from the task. We need leisure. Without it, our humanness begins to erode and

disintegrate. We need time to recreate, to *re-create* ourselves.

Walter Kerr, a long-time drama critic for the *New York Times* in a book called *The Decline of Pleasure*, put it this way:

"Only a certainty of order, whether we are participating in it or simply standing humbly before it, can mend the rent (the tear, the rip) in our souls."

Contemplation is a mode that allows us to glimpse such an order, a glimpse that can radically change us. Contemplation in leisure is a receptive stillness that allows reality to apprehend us.

It is not a new idea—Plato, Aristotle, 2000 years ago said contemplation is the *highest human act!*

Buckminster Fuller knew the benefits

of contemplation. He had faced many disappointments. Fatigued and probably depressed, he retreated to solitude. He walked on the beach, thinking, listening, hearing, watching ... And, finally, *seeing* the bubbles, the linkage between the bubbles. And when he emerged a year later, he gave us the geodesic dome.

The spark came to him in leisure, in solitude, in contemplation. A glimpse of order apprehended. Change, growth. A new concept. A new idea. His soul was mended and the rational Bucky could get back to work.

We all have these little sparks of order. I too have felt the spark-while floating on Wisconsin lakes, fishing with my father, or while walking along the bluffs of the Mississippi River.

In Dubuque, Iowa, where I was

working before I came to Detroit, I remember coming out of the academic building one spring day. The college was set on a high bluff. The sun had just begun its perceivable descent. And it was spectacular. I froze to the spot, knowing it wouldn't last—wanting to see it all.

A colleague came out the door. I said, "Look!" He said, "What?" and kept walking to his car. He stopped and called back, "That's just the sun going down."

I learned then that not everyone will share your interest in leisure, or see the value of introspection. However, while preparing these remarks, I took Mark Twain's *Notebook* off the shelf. Page 163 held this note: Mississippi River, 1882. "The water above Dubuque is olive green and semi-transparent with the sun on it. Upper Mississippi, the home of superb sunsets."

Contemplation does not require endless hours. We're not talking your entire life here. More along the lines of five or ten minutes where you can be alone—be alone with nature, be alone with its beauty. As the arch reads, "A life without beauty is only half lived."

Our aim is to integrate the whole of our lives: the outside with the inside, the rational with the intuitive. Leisure, contemplation ... these are the keys to unlock that other half, the intuitive half, the creative self.

It is possible that these ideas might be misinterpreted, and that some of you could walk into the Dean's office for a slip to get into class after missing a day and say, "It's excused. Geroux said we were supposed to contemplate. I was taking my leisure time." Your impulse would be correct. Your timing would be off.

The point is, though, that *you* must see to the productive use of your time for leisure as well as work. No one else is

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going to see to it for you. Your wellness as an integrated, whole human being depends on it. Your growth, your intellectual growth, your intuitive growth, *depends* on it. Your ability to encounter change, to grow stronger, to move to the next challenge ... In other words, your life depends on you, *seeing to the well being of the inside of you*. Please think about it.

In little more than a month, I will take part in my own right of passage—the transition from decades here at Cranbrook to a new life in Wisconsin. I want to take one additional minute to share with you some of the things I am going to miss when I leave:

1. For certain, I will miss the excitement and anxiety of producing a play or concert.

2. I know I will miss being in the classroom, at rehearsal, designing, building, painting ... all of it.

3. I will miss my colleagues, your teachers, the administration and the staff. They are the greatest collection of men and women on a faculty you will find any-

where.

4. I will miss the house, Hedgegate, where we have lived for 29 years. I experienced major life changes there. I went from being a husband to becoming a father.

5. I am going to miss the maintenance and security people: the Gene Hunts, Tom Grants, Herb Lucres, Brunos, Sids, Harry Millers, the Jimmy Kecks Everything they do here, I will have to be doing for myself.

6. I will miss Mr. Hoffman, for all the same reasons you will miss him.

7. I will miss the estate: the lake, the valley, the gardens, the buildings, the walks, the change of seasons.

8. Back in the late '60s and early '70s, when my wife, Dr. Brigid Geroux, was teaching here, she met Bruce Coulter and we became friends. Mr. Coulter retired after 30 years plus here, but after being gone a few years, he returned to become Headmaster at Kingsbury School. What drew him back, he said, were the students. Students like these men here, the class of 2000. *I know* I will miss you, too.

Good luck next year. Break a leg. Go, Packers! God bless you all!