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Alumni Dinner Speech, delivered on November 1, 2011

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When President Haas talked to me about tonight’s program he said he would speak first, I second, followed by Mark Murray; a virtual presidents Troika. He said something to the effect, “You are the ham between two pieces of big cheese.” I am happily the ham but to me they’re toast. Tom, I know this is not intended to be a roast. No incumbent presidents have treated a former one with such cordiality as you and Mark have treated me.

A few mornings ago I was listening on public radio to a reporter interviewing two Hispanics about the Hispanic vote in the forthcoming presidential election. One was a Democrat, the other a Republican. Both complained about the current job situation. The Democrat said that despite the problems most Hispanics would vote to re-elect Obama. The Republican
wasn’t so sure. He said most Hispanic values favor those attributed to the Republican side. Then he invoked Ronald Reagan in 1980 when asked about the Hispanic vote, who said, “Hispanics are Republican, they just don’t know it yet.” That leads me to say the alumni are the most important factor in determining the future of Grand Valley, but they don’t know it yet. How you live and what you give are the most important factors in the university’s future.

Being a young university has advantages. There are many older successful universities to emulate. As we sought to build academic excellence, the Provost, our spouses, and I visited Miami University of Ohio, a special place amongst Ohio’s universities. We wanted to find out how they did it. A course was charted that has consistently been enhanced through three administrations and Grand Valley is beginning to occupy that
special place in Michigan; even to the extent that we may claim to be, as Miami does, a cradle for football coaches.

When looking for an alumni relations model we need go no further than Ann Arbor. The University of Michigan has been the best of the state universities, followed by UCLA. Substantial numbers of their graduates succeed in ways that draw students to their campuses. Substantial numbers of their graduates give to enhance and even direct them to greater levels of quality in academics, arts, and athletics. That is what is going to happen at Grand Valley, and is well underway. Alumni are going to know and understand the importance of their living and giving. Those of you here tonight do, the goal is to have a majority of your ranks join you.

Recently, I listened to a sermon in which the minister pointed out that each of us is more than one person. There is a toddler, child, adolescent, and for us, a college student, a young
be silent or angry. Grand Valley like all of us is experiencing a stage of life. It is healthy and moving forward. Unlike us it will continue after our health gets the better of us. We can, however, contribute to our university’s good health now, later, and even after we are gone by how we have lived and how we have given.

I want generations in the future to say to us and our university as Shakespeare wrote in *Hamlet*, “Come, give us a taste of your quality.”
adult, and so on. They are joined together in the sanctuary of memories that resides in us. All of those persons make a whole, but they do not lose their identity. They are all important and using memory they can be relived, and ought to be from time to time. When they are they bring us understanding for those in every stage of life whom come after. When alumni of a university relive their college days they experience again the fears, hopes, and needs of that time; and the life they have lived since then gives them the means to help the students at their alma mater alleviate their fears, fulfill their hopes, and meet their needs. They do that through scholarships, program development, and the enclosure of new spaces. The students move forward, the university is more respected, and the alumni take greater pride.

I share with you, our graduates, an uplifting experience. Grand Valley has improved since we left. If it had not we would