Summer 2013

Remarks for the Visit to Cambridge and Oxford, delivered in Summer 2013

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I. Visit to Cambridge & Oxford

a. Colleges go back to late 14\textsuperscript{th} and 15\textsuperscript{th} centuries

1. They had a pioneer faculty – the first faculty

2. Doubt if they used the term pioneer – the American Frontier was still more than a century off

3. Portraits – mostly royals – but faculty ones began to appear and Newton, Macaulay

b. Fifty years isn’t much to big history, but it is a significant amount of time to us and to our university.

1. To have so many who came at the beginning still standing and participating contributes to the heritage of the university

2. I don’t think we should designate these receptions more than receptions on most of the occasions we meet, but today I want to make an exception, and call it Heritage Day.

3. Today we focus on the founding faculty, the first ones, who can see now what a strong structure has been built on their foundation

4. All of us here who had a role in the early days can take more pride in what we did because those who followed were successful. I am so pleased they didn’t screw it up.

c. As we reflect on what has happened we all remember colleagues and members of the GVSU community who are no longer living, who made important contributions.

1. This then is our own memorial day, too. I wish we could read names but that would be impractical

2. Each of us will recall the colleagues and spouses with whom we were most closely associated, and with those recollections will come feelings of respect, gratitude, friendship, and love. They are good to have. They make me feel good.
II. What is Our Heritage?

a. In a recent encounter and discussion about Grand Valley the person said, “At Grand Valley everyone is expected to be nice.” I was startled by the word “nice” being used in the description of a university.

1. I thought I knew its meaning, but upon looking it up I found nice is not so simple.

2. Here are some definitions of which I was unaware: “Able to make or detect effects of great subtlety or precision”; “So slight as to be different to notice or appreciate”; and the one I believe my conversant intended – “Having pleasant, desirable qualities.”

3. That’s a nice thought, but my reaction is some of the people can be nice some of the time. All of the people cannot be nice all of the time.

4. As I continued to think about the concept, I think the person who said it implied that at Grand Valley we conducted discourse and argument in a civil manner. A civil manner of discourse further implies that we respect one another.

5. Without the passions of disrespect, the objectives of an institution can be pursued with one major obstacle removed, and personal life is more easily and happily lived. There is even a happier place for the discontented.

6. Nice as intended by my partner in discussion may be an important part of GVSU’s ethos, and a part of our heritage.

III. Heritage is a past.

a. Most of us here are part of the past. Only the President, Marcia, and the attending staff are not old or borderline old.

1. We who are here a part of a noticeably diminishing group, one fortunately that will be replenished

b. A friend recently told me about a friend of his who went to South Africa to assist her mother in a move to a care facility. In going through her accumulations she came across a “17th Century Nun’s Prayer.” She shared it with him and he with me.
1. A I thought immediately of Al Ten Eyck, a devout and venerable Catholic; who worked in non-sectarian venues most his professional life, and I am sure needed and had many nuns praying for him.

2. ALet me share a few lines of that prayer with you. Good advice as we drift into our roles as part of GVSU’s heritage.

3. ARead prayer

c. A Browning Poem – the first verse of Rabbi Ben Ezra caught my attention when I first read it nearly 65 years ago. I am not sure why. Perhaps in the throes of adolescent intensity it provided hope for a complete and fulfilling life. I have read it many times, and I share it with you.

1. Read verse

2. AThat promised second half most of us have spent at Grand Valley. For me it was a promise fulfilled. I am grateful. I hope your experience has been the same.
LORD  Thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older and will some day be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful but not moody; helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord that I want a few friends at the end.

Keep my mind free from the recital of endless details; give me wings to get to the point, seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing, and love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others' pains, but help me to endure them with patience.

I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken.

Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint—some of them are so hard to live with—but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and talents in unexpected people. And, give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so.

AMEN