

Penn State Harrisburg  
Spring 2003 Commencement Speech  
Col. Jeffrey B. Miller, May 17, 2003

Dr. Hanes, trustees, faculty and staff, parents, families, and, of course, the Graduates of the class of 2003. I am extremely honored and privileged to be with all of you here today as we celebrate your achievements as you prepare to embark upon your life's journey. Finally, winter is but a distant memory and with the dawning of spring comes new growth and optimism for your future.

It is particularly gratifying for me to be here this morning, because I can relate to what you have gone through to get to this point and what you are feeling

today. Two years ago I sat where you are sitting after completing my Master's degree in Public Administration at Penn State, Harrisburg. Like you, I felt a tremendous sense of accomplishment in having worked very hard to achieve a personal goal that I had set for myself. Each of you have set goals for yourselves, as well, and you have made many sacrifices along the way. Some of you are full-time students, while others have pursued the completion of their degrees while simultaneously balancing a career and taking care of a family. While you each have slightly different personal circumstances that you are faced with, there is a common thread uniting all of you throughout this process. That common

thread is the support that you have received from your families and loved ones. At this time, I would ask the parents, husbands, wives, and children of the Class of 2003, to please rise and be recognized for all of the sacrifices that you have made to ensure that these graduates could make it to this point in their lives. There is, no doubt, that your love, support, and guidance played a major role in helping them to achieve their best.

Life is full of choices, and each of you made an important choice that led to you being here today. That choice was to pursue your college education at Penn State, Harrisburg. While you could have gone

to other colleges, you made the decision to come here. In many cases, you could have selected a less rigorous degree program elsewhere, but you chose instead, to pursue a Penn State education. You may have had to work harder, take more classes, or complete more degree requirements than you would have at another institution, but having made your choice, I'm sure you can look back now with the satisfaction of knowing that the effort you put forth was worth it, and you can take pride in the value of your degree from Penn State. You can be confident in your ability to be successful in your future endeavors, because you have received a first-class education brought to you by competent and caring

faculty and staff. The fact that so many of Penn State, Harrisburg's faculty and staff participate in commencement ceremonies like this is a true testament to their commitment to each of you and their unwavering belief in the value of higher education. It is now up to you to take the gift you have been given and remain committed to the premise of being a lifelong learner as you pursue your own particular path of excellence.

As you leave this institution today and begin to define your own destiny, I challenge each of you to never be satisfied with mediocrity in anything you pursue. You must be innovative and unafraid to take

the risks necessary to achieve personal growth and in identifying solutions to the problems you will face in your chosen fields of endeavor. You must aim high and believe in yourselves above all else. Don't let anybody lessen your expectations of what you can achieve. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Your future is constrained only by the bounds of your imagination, your vision, and your ability to dream. Embrace unwavering confidence in your abilities and always treat others, no matter their station in life, with respect. Remember that only you can be the guardian of your own personal integrity and

reputation, which is really all you'll ever truly own in life.

When Governor Rendell nominated me to be Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police, I knew that I would face many challenges along the way. The events of September 11, 2001, have forever changed the way in which law enforcement views their job responsibilities in this new world of turbulent change. The additional duties in the realm of homeland security when combined with the Commonwealth's current fiscal situation, has presented many challenges indeed. But it was the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said, "The

ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in times of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy." We live in challenging times, but I believe that these challenges provide opportunities for us all to come together and accomplish great things. I believe it is important for us to remain optimistic and to steadfastly refuse to give in to those who would seek to change our way of life. In law enforcement, I believe there is tremendous value in dedicating ourselves to protecting the freedoms we cherish and in seeking justice for those who are unable to seek it on their own behalf.



If I were to provide any advice to you this morning, the advice I would give is simple. First of all, enjoy each day. Live each day as if it were your last. There are no guarantees for any of us, and we should enjoy what we do for a living and the camaraderie we have with others. Second, we need to celebrate the accomplishments and achievements we realize along the way. Take time out to recognize the results of your hard work and effort, and the efforts of those around you. If you keep your head down and you're always driving forward, you will never see and really appreciate the results of your work. Third, cherish your family, friends, and loved ones. Those relationships are the ones that

mean the most in your life and they are far more important than anything you could ever achieve in your work. Finally, take control of your own destiny.

Be responsible for your success and your future.

When I contemplate personal responsibility, I think back to the actions of the passengers and crew of United Flight 93 on September 11, 2001, over Somerset County, Pennsylvania, and I am truly amazed. Upon learning that numerous commercial airliners had been hijacked by terrorists and intentionally flown into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, with the aim of inflicting large numbers of civilian casualties, these men and women got together in the rear of the aircraft, and

do you know what they did? They took a vote. They instinctively relied upon the most sacred underlying principle of our free society in applying democracy to determine their actions as a group. They chose to take control of their destiny by confronting their attackers and ultimately saving countless lives thru their courageous actions. If these brave heroes can make those types of decisions under extreme duress, certainly each of us should be able to muster the intestinal fortitude necessary to take responsibility for our individual destinies as we chart our life's course.

When you ask someone what they expect to accomplish in life, you generally hear people say that they want to somehow make a positive difference in the lives of others. When I think about the difficulties encountered in almost any walk of life when we try to make a difference, I am reminded of a story I once heard about a young boy on the beach. One morning after a violent storm, an elderly man was walking down the beach. On that morning, the beach was littered with starfish that washed onto the sand during the night. Off in the distance the man saw a young boy throwing something into the sea. As the old man got closer he noticed that the young boy was throwing starfish back into the

ocean. He asked the young lad what he was doing and the boy responded, "Saving the starfish." The man said, "Son there are literally thousands and thousands of starfish on the beach, you can't possibly make a difference." The boy thought for a second then reached down, picked up a starfish and threw it into the sea saying, "Made a difference to that one, didn't I." Just because we won't be able to reach everyone doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to help anyone. Take the time to be thankful for your blessings in life and commit yourself to helping those less fortunate along the way. Don't let anybody dull your enthusiasm, your optimistic exuberance, or your

dreams. Go forth and achieve great things. Our future is in your hands.

Congratulations and may God bless you all.

Thank you.