

REMARKS OF FIRST LADY ANITA PERRY
TAMU, COLLEGE OF VET MEDICINE AND BIO SCIENCES
DVM - COMMENCMENT ADDRESS
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Thank you so much Dean Adams, Chairman White (*Regent*), Dr. Davis (*TAMU president*), esteemed faculty, families and of course Class of 2007.

I am honored to join you today. Rick and I add to the many cheers of congratulations as you receive your diploma and begin the next phase of not only your careers, but also lives.

(pause)

You know, I don't want to make you feel badly, but I had to endure quite a bit in order to be with you today.

If you can imagine telling your husband – as tried and as true an Aggie as they come, that you are giving a commencement speech at Texas A&M.

Funny how he never wants to provide input when I'm giving speeches on tourism or heart disease but with this one.....well lets just say I received a little unsolicited advice....over and over and over again!

Then our son Griffin, who received his degree last year started critiquing various commencement speeches and giving me his pointers. Before long, Sydney a sophomore on this campus started giving me her insight on the Aggie spirit. I politely told her that she probably needed to turn her Aggie spirit toward her exams if she wants to attend her own commencement in a timely manner!

And then, if it wasn't enough with Rick and the children imparting their wisdom - my brother-in-law Tom Hairgrove - Texas A&M Doctorate of Veterinary medicine Class of 1974 – got a hold of me.

Now Tom, of course, is a proud Aggie graduate and highly respected bovine practitioner and highly sought after speaker on new field trials in regards to leptospirosis... After much discussion, I finally convinced him that I was not the appropriate vehicle and this was not the appropriate venue to speak to you about reproductive herd health.

I could try, but I think a less technical and more personal subject works best for commencement!

Needless to say, I'm not nervous about speaking in front of you. I'm nervous about going home to face my family who will expect the play-by-play!

So, knowing I had a lot of pressure to do well, I thought about some things that might help you on your way, not just as doctors of veterinary medicine, but also as individuals.

It brought me back to a book that was popular several years ago, *All I Needed to Know in Life I Learned in Kindergarten*. Robert Fulghum wrote this book and provided logic for our complex, over-analyzed world in the simplest lessons. They still apply and can be found in the most unexpected places.

I was thinking about that book and about this speech while sitting in our own vet's office a few months back with our precious, but high-maintenance, miniature short-haired red Daschund **Lucy**.

Some of you may have met Lucy as a puppy when she was a patient of Dr. Williard and spent 5 days here. And, it is important that you picture her in your mind. *(pause)*

As I looked around the waiting room, it dawned on me. Forget kindergarten. Everything you need to know in life you can learn in your vet's office!

So bear with me as I share five tidbits I observed in that waiting room which I believe qualify as traditional, sophisticated commencement advice.

First, don't always be afraid of the big dogs. As I mentioned I was in the office with Lucy our Daschund, and bless her heart Lucy's never met a Bullmastiff (*Pron: Bull-mast-if*) she didn't try and intimidate!

Due to sturdy leashes and kind owners on the other end, Lucy hasn't encountered too much trouble from her "confident" behavior, but you have to give her credit for trying to assert herself.

Several of you graduating today may join existing practices or go into areas of established research. You, my friends, will be the Daschunds entering the world of Bullmastiffs. It will be intimidating at times, educational at others and probably uncomfortable more than once.

But during those times, remember little Lucy, and be confident in your knowledge and instincts. That said, let me also add that there is a line between confidence and arrogance.

And while the confident Daschund may earn respect, those who approach a situation with a greater mix of arrogance may end up pinned to the ground by their neck.

Which brings me to my next point- Ladies and gentleman - hairballs happen!

One day you're walking across the floor just fine and the next you are coughing, wheezing and have no idea what hit you. When you take that situation out of the feline world, it's called a "What just happened?" moment.

It's a missed diagnosis.

It's a speeding ticket when you are already late.

It's a broken heart.

It's a human failure that comes out of nowhere... and it's part of life even for those of you who are so bright. And yes, I won't tell those Longhorns back in Austin, but even Aggies have failures from time to time.

And you know what? Failure is OK. Perfection is not a realistic goal, but persistence certainly is.

I have a favorite saying: "You don't drown by falling in the water. You drown by staying there."

If you learn to master that, life's little hiccups – or in our example - hairballs – will become a lot less tragic and a lot more educational.

Now let's see – number three of the life lessons you can learn in the vet's office:

Always look both ways before you cross the street!

(pause)

I think that one's pretty self-explanatory so I'll move on.

Number four: don't fight someone putting a cone around your neck.

Learn to accept help, even if it might make you feel foolish at the time. There may be some people who don't have your best interest at heart, but there are a heck of a lot more who will.

Learn to be gracious and say thank you even if you might not feel like it at the time.

I'd like to add that this is especially applicable to parents and older relatives. As we have two children now finally out of their teens, Rick and I are gaining back a bit more credibility and their eyes are rolling a little less often.

However, I've learned as my own parent's age, that their wisdom is indispensable and irreplaceable. Treasure those moments, even if they don't make sense at the time. Their insight may just sneak up on you when you least expect it.

And the thought about my parents brings me to the last piece of advice:

Keep several people around who are always happy to see you.

People often joke that a dog is always happy and wagging its tail to see his owner, no matter what your dog loves you unconditionally. I don't think that's such a bad criticism, and we'd be a lot happier if we took a few clues from our furry euphoric pals.

We are constantly striving for more and failing to define "What and how much is enough?"

The ability to make someone's eyes light up when you walk in the room - that is a supreme achievement in our lives.

Whether it's a spouse or a child, a family member, friend or colleague, make it your goal each day to make someone smile for a moment, and soon you'll realize you don't have to try anymore....it just happens with your presence.

Their lives will be richer for it and your heart certainly will be.

(pause)

Well Class of 2007, I may not have unlocked new secrets to animal epidemiology. I have no ideas on how to improve beef production. And true, my greatest achievement in veterinary science has been sneaking Lucy's medication into her vitamins that I squeeze out of a tube!

But I hope you can take some of this with you on your journey to be a good doctor, Aggie, Texan and most importantly a kind and wise human being.

And if you need a little reminder....just take a look at those four-legged patients in front of you or think about Lucy.

Class of 2007 – I extend my very best wishes to you and warmest congratulations.

Thank you. Good luck and God bless you all.

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