

**Grayling Tobias’  
UMSL Summer Commencement Address  
August 9, 2014**

To the chancellor of this great university, prestigious scholars and dignitaries with whom I share this platform, esteemed faculty, parents and families of the graduates, and to you, the graduates of the class of 2014, I am honored to have been asked to speak to you today.

Even though it is a high honor to be invited to such an occasion, it is tremendously challenging since I’m not a public speaker.

The challenge of doing this address is twofold. First, I was told by those who invited me to limit my remarks to 8 minutes, **and** I was told by everybody else that no one listens to graduation speeches anyway.

As an educator and father of two sons I have to believe that young people listen to adults, even though I've seen no evidence that my sons have heard much of anything I've said in their entire lives.

Then I had to deal with the challenge of saying something meaningful in 8 minutes. The 8 minutes would've been great had they left out the meaningful part. I wondered how one could do a meaningful speech in just 8 minutes. Then it occurred to me that the Gettysburg address, one of the great speeches in all of literature was just over two minutes long. So, I thought, if Lincoln could do it, why can't I? And since I have 4 times as long as he took, I should be able to have 4 times the impact..... I soon banished that thought and went back to just being meaningful.

As I searched for something meaningful to say in 8 minutes my thoughts went back just a few months ago to a setting very much like this one. My wife and I, along with other family members attended the graduation of our oldest son. As we sat there with families from all over America, and several foreign countries, we had many of the thoughts that your parents have, and my son probably had many of the thoughts that you graduates have..... the relish and the relief, the anticipation and the anxiety, the freedom and the fear, the aloofness and the aloneness, the toughness and the tenderness, the confidence and caution, and all of the contradictory emotions of the human experience captured in this defining moment in a way that they will never come together again.

It was great to see our son walk across the stage and to envision tuition money staying at home....It was costly, but I've never heard the parents of a child who could play a musical instrument complain about the price of music lessons. We sat there, along with the other families, to see our older son receive his degree, just as your family is here today sharing this experience with you. For us, as with many of you, it was a family affair. And this is a day that your whole family can celebrate. I hope you enjoy and cherish this day.

I don't know much of what the speaker said to my son's class, but on my way back home I couldn't help but reflect on the experience and what I hope my son and the other graduates had gotten from the

speech and the experience.

It is those thoughts I would like to share with you.

As an educator, I have always wanted for the children I worked with the same things I wanted for my own. So the thoughts I had about my son that day are the same as the ones I have for you today.

Compared to the average length of speeches in Abraham Lincoln's day, the Gettysburg address would've been a tweet. So I decided to put my "Thoughts in tweets" - followed by a brief explanation for the parents who, after paying tuition for four years might be reluctant to embrace any word that starts the letter T.

These are the “Tweets of Thoughts” I had for my son and have for you.

My first tweet is:

**Savored it and make it last.**

I hoped that day--that my son had enjoyed his college experience and had made life-long friends. I hope that is true for **you**.

My second tweet is:

**Get fruition from my tuition.**

I hoped that my son had become responsible enough that he could take care of himself and a family. And I hoped he would ever need to ask me for money again. I hope that for all of you, and I hope it for your parents. And your parents hope it also.

My third tweet is:

**Left a good name at the college.**

I hope he was remembered by his professors with fondness.

I hope he appreciated the role they played in his life. And I

hope they have pleasant memories of him..... I hope that is

true for all of you. I hope that no professor has retired

because of any of you, or questioned their decision to teach

at the university.

My fourth tweet is:

**In Loco parentis is alive and well.**

In years past, teachers were seen as parents away from home. The term means literally “in place of parents.” I hope that somehow the professors got through to my son things I had been trying to tell him all of his life..... I hope that your professors got through to you and confirmed some life lessons that will serve you well for the rest of your life.

My next tweet is:

**Make something of yourself.**

Do something worthwhile with your life. Make us proud of you and feel good about you being a member of the family.

Give your parents and grandparents something to brag



about.

The next tweet is:

**She was there.**

This tweet is very personal and I hope you are not offended by my sharing it. My son lost one of his grandmothers (my wife's mother) while he was in college. She lived with us for much of his school life and would have been the proudest person in the audience had she lived to see that day. I would want him to know that granny was there and will forever be a part of him. And to all of you who have lost dear ones on this journey; **they --- are--- here!**

This day is their day also; remember them with appreciation and gladness.

My final tweet:

**Be good, do good, and good will follow you.**

Be a good person, do a good job, and have a great life.

In a way, all of our efforts point toward a single end; that you will be a good person, do a good job, and have good to follow you.

My 8 minutes should be about up now so I return again to the Gettysburg address. I want you to remember this presentation every time you think of Abraham Lincoln and the Gettysburg address. The Gettysburg address has lasted because it finds a new audience with each new generation of Americans. You are now a part of that audience. Lincoln knew that only as long as we had universities like this one, parents like your parents, and students like you can be assured that: "a government of the people, by the people,

for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Thank you and good luck.