

Commencement Address
Friday, May 1, 2018
UMSL College of Optometry

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Thank you Dean Davis. Chancellor George, Provost Sobolik, Dean Davis, families, friends and especially members of the Class of 2018, it is a privilege for me to be your commencement speaker today at the University of Missouri St. Louis College of Optometry. I understand the Class of 2018 is the first class to complete all of your on-campus clinical rotations within the new Patient Care Center. Thus, you are the first class to fully appreciate what it offers the community and optometric education. I was pleased to be present for the ground-breaking ceremony for the Patient Care Center to support Dean Davis and the faculty, staff and alumni in your ambitions to build a much needed patient care facility. As the only college of optometry in Missouri, I am proud of your accomplishments. It is also exciting to learn that last fall, SSM Health Medical group established a practice as partner within the new facility. That partnership serves as tangible example of the commitment of this campus to not only this community but also the Colleges vision to prepare graduates for the evolving role of optometrists within the health care system.

During the 38 years of the history of the college, I have worked with many of your college's leaders. I have had the privilege to work with Dean Larry Davis for quite a number of years within the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry where we both served as President. When he was appointed Dean, he was the youngest Dean in the country. Now he is among the most experienced and valued. We have both served long terms, including terms as President, on the National Board of Examiners in Optometry, NBEO, the official testing agency for certifying optometry college graduates to be eligible for licensure after their graduation. We have both served as President of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO).

But I had other links to your previous Deans. Like Founding Dean Dr. Jerry Christiansen who was a faculty member when I was going to optometry college in the 60's at The Ohio State University College of Optometry.

And I knew his successor, Dr. David Loshin who is now the Dean of NOVA's College of Optometry in Ft. Lauderdale after serving a short term at UMSL. He was one of my optometry students at Ohio State in the 70's.

Another short stint as Dean was served by Dr. Jack Bennett after he retired as Dean at the Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State. Jack tried diligently to recruit me to the Michigan College of Optometry in the 80's but I turned him down.

And that brings us back to Dean Davis who has been serving proudly for eighteen years. Under his leadership, the faculty governance structure was revised, the college strategic plan updated several times, curriculum and measures for program outcomes were effectively defined. And I've already mentioned his leadership in building the Patient Care Center.

One of the features of this special event today is that you, Class of 2018 graduates, are supported by family and friends. Nobody gets through a rigorous program like UMSL's without a little help from these people. So today, I thought I would share with you some of my family support sayings which not only got me through my graduation in 1971, but have encouraged my career these last 50 years.

Let me start with my mother. I'm sure you all have remembrances of phrases of wisdom your mothers offered, and I expect there may be some similarities in what they said, and what my mother used to say: "You can either get up grumpy and disagreeable, or you can get up and start the day happy and positive." Mothers know the power of positive thinking and the importance that attitude brings to success. She was right, and even today her advice continues to serve me well. And it will you, too, as you start what will be remarkable careers in optometry and in life success!

Another of Mother's admonitions was, "Remember who you are." This wasn't meant to believe you were better than others, but to respect the family who nurtured and supported you. A family who wants to continue to be proud of you whatever you do. But, also a family who fervently wants you to succeed by being a person who respects traditions and values taught to you throughout your growing up years.

I expect that most of you have had a version of the mother's caution which goes something like my mother's. "Eat your vegetables if you want dessert." While that might be good healthy eating advice, I believe she also meant it in a more global sense. In your striving to achieve worthwhile goals, like your graduation this weekend, there will inevitably be important, but sometimes not pleasant, steps to getting where you're going. It was true at the dinner table, but it is equally true for life achievement. When I was five years old, my mother took me to a live radio show. Apparently, I looked cute enough, or goofy enough, for the radio talk show host to interview me on the air. She asked about chores I did around the house, and I said my brother and I helped with the house-keeping. When she asked about any special tips I innocently replied that if there was dirt on the floor I could not clean up, my brother and I swept it under the rug. Needless to say my mother was mortified. When we got home she reminded my brother and me, "Don't ever sweep dirt under the rug again." It applies to life as it does to house-keeping. Do your job the right way. There are no short-cuts!

I was always a very competitive kid. My brothers and I often had usually friendly, but sometimes intense differences of opinions which sometimes resulted in shouting matches or worse. Mother's approach was not to take sides, but to counsel, "Take a deep breath and speak a little kindly to your brothers." Often the clarity of the situation is greatly improved by taking a deep breath, and certainly situations were diffused by speaking a little more kindly to my brothers. It helped me then with my brothers, but it has helped me much more during the years I have been involved in challenging situations.

In my younger days, I was in love with sports: football, basketball, baseball, volley ball, you name it. I hated to lose and would get emotionally drained when I, infrequently, wasn't on the winning team. I never got it until my grandmother Augsburg used to posit, "Someone has to lose." By that she didn't mean I should plan to lose, but each game is not the end of the world. There will be another game tomorrow or the next day, and there will be an opportunity to win that one. But never let a single loss get you down.

Well, there you have it. Six phrases of wisdom from my mother and grandmother which have served me well during the last fifty years of my professional career, and they will serve you well also.

Remember:

1. Keep a happy and positive attitude
2. Remember who you are
3. Eat your vegetables if you want dessert
4. Don't ever sweep dirt under the rug
5. Take a deep breath, and speak a little more kindly to your brother
6. Someone has to lose, (but not every time)

Best wishes to each of you new doctors. You've received a superb education and clinical training here at UMSL. Now, go out and make this next part of your life successful and meaningful. Remember to give back to your profession and your college in these future successful years. And, most importantly remember to listen to the advice of your mother!