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ECHOES from the Woods

JUNE
1952

WILLIAM WOODS COLLEGE
FULTON, MISSOURI

AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

Commencement Address By

RONALD REAGAN

Thank you President Swearingen. Members of the graduating class of 1952, your school mates, ladies and gentlemen. This is a role, which believe me, I approach with more fear than I have ever felt about any role I have played and certainly with a great humility and awareness of my unworthiness to participate in this ceremony. When you add to that the fact that less than a generation ago the people of my profession could not even be buried in the churchyard, you can understand why my knees tremble. However, do not get encouraged by this and feel that because of my fear you are apt to get off those somewhat uncomfortable chairs early. I once learned the hard way that whether you have anything to say or not, keep talking. I was, as has been pointed out, a sports announcer here in the mid-west, and once upon a time a very noted evangelist from Los Angeles came to our town to hold a series of meetings. An enterprising public relations man thought it would be a good idea if she were to be interviewed on our radio station. (Now why they chose a sports announcer to interview the late Amy Semple McPherson, I'll never know, but they did.) I asked her a few questions, she answered them graciously, then went into a fervent plea concerning the success of her meetings. I suddenly was horrified to hear her saying good night to our radio audience, and according to the radio clock there were four minutes to go. I stood up, I didn't know enough to fill four minutes, that is, that I could put on the air about Miss McPherson, so I signalled for a record and a very sleepy lad, as a matter of fact from Missouri, pulled one off the stack of records, threw it on the

turntable and nodded "go ahead." In my most dulcet tones, I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we conclude this broadcast by the noted Evangelist Amy Semple McPherson, with a brief interlude of transcribed music. I expected nothing less than the "Ave Maria." The Mills Brothers started singing "Minnie, the Moocher's Wedding Day." Of course, by way of encouragement I might tell you that age has somewhat tempered this philosophy of keeping talking. Added to this was an experience related to me by a friend of mine, Bill Alexander, the minister of a Christian Church in Oklahoma.

He told me of an experience in his first church when he had become ordained as a minister. It was in a little town in Oklahoma. It was an evening ceremony and he had worked for weeks on his sermon wanting to make a good first impression. As he stood up to speak there was only one member of the congregation who had dared the weather and the hour, one little lone man. So Bill went down and he said, "Look I'm just a young preacher trying to get started. You seem to be the only member of the congregation who showed up. Shall I go ahead?"

The man said, "Well, I wouldn't know about that sort of thing. I'm just a little old cowpoke out here in Oklahoma, but I do know this, if I loaded up a truck load of hay and took it out to the prairie and only one cow showed up, I'd feed her."

So Bill stepped back into the pulpit and an hour and a half later, having pronounced the benediction, he went down and said, "My friend you seem to have stuck with me. As I told you I'm just a young preacher trying to get started, what did you think?"

... and you're just a little ole cowpoke, don't know about that sort of thing, but I do know this, if I loaded up a truck load of hay, took it out on the prairie and only one cow showed up, I wouldn't give her the whole load."

No public speaker should open with an apology for himself or his remarks, but I would rather be known as honest than eloquent. And, so I feel duty bound to inform you that I am going to try to give you some remarks from my mind and heart, but they certainly will not be an address. If I had a text for anything I am going to say, you have heard it in the opening hymn, "America the Beautiful." I know that this is not particularly a fashionable subject. Too many tub-thumping politicians on too many fourths of Julys have paid word tribute in platitudes to the 4th of July speech and waved the flag. All of us as we grow older have a tendency to grow a little more cynical, to find fault, to see the things that should be done and as we're younger we're a little impatient with sentiment and emotion. We are a little reluctant to show it, we're impatient for change, and we want correction of those things that are wrong and should be done and so, perhaps, none of us pay enough attention to the very thought behind this land of ours. That is what I would like to do, if I may with your indulgence, for a few moments this morning. In the midst of all of the 4th of July speeches, I wish I had the eloquence and the talent to do it as simply as was done by a very great lady of the theater, Helen Hayes. As that little woman stood before 120,000 people in a patriotic ceremony at Soldiers' Field and so simply, with her God-given talent, recited the words that all of us have known since childhood and yet so few of us have ever really heard. Her address was—she simply said,

My country, tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing.

Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrim's pride,
From every mountain side,
Let freedom ring.

She had said it all, because it has been said that America is less of a place than an idea, and if it is an idea, and I believe that to be true, it is an idea that has been deep in the souls of man ever since man started his long trail from the swamps. It is nothing but the inherent love of freedom in each one of us, and the great ideological struggle that we find ourselves engaged in today is not a new struggle. It's the same old battle. We met it under the name of Hitlerism; we met it under the name of Kaiserism; and we have met it back through the ages in the name of every conqueror that has ever set upon a course of establishing his rule over mankind. It is simply the idea, the basis of this country and of our religion, the idea of the dignity of man, the idea that deep within the heart of each one of us is something so God-like and precious that no individual or group has a right to impose his or its will upon the people, that no group can decide for the people what is good for the people so well as they can decide for themselves.

I, in my own mind, have thought of America as a place in the divine scheme of things that was set aside as a promised land. It was set here and the price of admission was very simple; the means of selection was very simple as to how this land should be populated. Any place in the world and any person from those places; any person with the courage, with the desire to tear up the roots, to strive for freedom, to attempt and dare to live in a strange and foreign place, to travel half across the world was welcome here. And they have brought with them to the bloodstream that has become America that precious courage, the courage that they, and they alone in their community, in their nation, in their family, had in the first place, to this land, the

unknown, to strive for something better for themselves and for their children and their children's children. I believe that God in shedding his grace on this country has always in this divine scheme of things kept an eye on our land and guided it as a promised land for these people.

There is a legend about the group of the fathers of this country meeting in a long debate in Independence Hall regarding the signing of a Declaration of Independence. As the hours wore on and the talk was filled with the sound of treason, traitors, heads rolling, we shall hang, at the very peak of this, there stood up a man and spoke out and with his voice all was stilled. He said, "Sign that document, sign it if tomorrow your heads roll from the headsman's axe. Sign that document because tomorrow and the days to come, your children and all the children of all the days to come will judge you for what you do this day." As he went on speaking his oratory was so great, his words so sincere and so moving that there was a sudden movement to the front of the room, and the Declaration of Independence was signed. When the ceremony was completed and they turned to find the man that had swayed the issue, they could not find him. The doors were guarded, and they asked the guards and no one had seen anyone leave; and no one knows to this day although his words are recorded, who the man was nor could they find anyone who had spoken the words and caused the Declaration to be signed.

Since that day and down through the years, we have seen grow an American personality. We who have within our nation and within ourselves all the bloodstreams of all the national origins in the world know that today there is an American personality, something that stamps us indefinitely as what we are.

I remember a few years ago on a Sunday afternoon taking a hired automobile out into the countryside of Eng-

land. I wanted to see the countryside and I had never been abroad before. As dusk was falling on a very cold winter day, we came upon a little English tavern several hundred years old, a pub if you will, and this I wanted to see. So the driver and I entered and there was a very motherly looking woman standing back of the counter and very few customers as yet. Some-way she divined that I was an Ameri-can, and she started talking, "Oh," she said, "we had a great many of your lads just across the roadway there during the war," and she started talking about those lads. She said, "They used to come in every night and have a songfest." Then, as she looked into the distance and her face softened, she said, "I remember one Christmas Eve, me and Pop was here all alone. Suddenly the door burst open—and in they came, they had presents for me and Pop—they called me Mom." She said, "Big strapping lads they was from a place called Iowa."

"Well, she had a tear in her eyes and I'm sure I did. Because you and I know those big strapping lads from a place called Iowa. They could have been from a place called Missouri, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Maine, or California. They were just American boys stamped with the indefinable trademark that is America. I think, in talk-ing about this personality that is Amer-ica, someone once during the war mar-veled that we seem to be the only people that could laugh and fight at the same time. I don't think this stems from any love of fighting, it just stems from the rich warm humor that comes from confidence in the belief in all that is good, that is inherited in all of us.

I think it was best illustrated out in a lonely Pacific Island one day. A B-24 came in, buzzed the field, circled, and asked for landing instructions. Sud-denly the control tower, as they buzzed the runway, saw a one-star flag painted on the side of this plane, and there was a hasty call for the Officer of the Day and the Commanding Officer with the

announcement that a general was com-ing in, a Brigadier General. So they hastily mustered the guard and the Of-ficer of the Day stood there as the plane landed and pulled to a stop. The crew came forth and the top ranking man was a youngster about 22 years old, a Major. They looked beyond him and asked, "Where's the General?" and he said, "General, there's no Gen-eral, this is all of us." "But the one-star flag?" He said, "Oh that is a serv-ice flag. Our tailgunner's grandmother works at Lockheed."

Sometime ago, I sat at a banquet, and the very banquet could only take place in this land of ours—it was so American. It was a banquet of the National Con-ference of Christians and Jews gathered to present two awards for contri-butions to humanity. One of the awards was going to a Greek-immigrant boy who arrived in this country 44 years ago and today is founder of one of the great theatrical fortunes. He is today a member of a family numbered among our greatest philanthropists, the Skouras family. The other award was going to a little man from a far away land, then wield-ing the gavel of the United Na-tions, now the Ambassador to this country from the Philippines, General Romulo. In accepting the awards, General Romulo spoke, and it would have been wonderful if all Americans could have heard this little man from this far off land speak to us about our country. He told us how he saw America, the generosity, the generosity that was evi-denced in those big strapping lads from a place called Iowa, the generosity that has made America the first on the scene wherever disaster strikes throughout the world, that has made America today seek to rehabilitate the entire world and lead it on a better course. Sure, we rationalize and we try to cover what we are doing by say-ing well its for our own defense; we have to do this; it is purely selfish on our part. But General Romulo said, including his own people, he doubted if conditions were reversed if there was

any nation in the world that could embark upon such a program to salvage the rest of the world. And then General Romulo spoke of an incident in his own life in which he was flying back at the end of World War II, for the establishment of Philippine Inde-pendence and they stopped off at Guam. As they landed there at the Navy base they were told, "why don't you wait a few hours, we are waiting to hear the radio reports from the first atomic bomb explosions at Bikini, and then you can take off and you will be in plenty of time." So they heard that awesome spectacle broadcast by the Navy and then the next day were in Manila. And there he said 250,000 of his countrymen gathered in the con-course. Our vice president, senators, representatives, military figures were there, and at a given signal down from the flagpole came the American flag and up went the flag of the Philippines. The General said suddenly he realized he was crying and he felt that all of the 250,000 of his countrymen were crying and then he asked a question. He said, "I couldn't help but wonder if a hun-dred years from now when our chil-dren's children open their textbooks, their history books, whether they will read that on this date we started our experimental denotating of atomic weapons, or will they read that on this date a great nation, a powerful nation that had wrested a small foreign coun-try back from the hands of a brutal and powerful aggressor and in so doing had bled the flower of its youth into the soil of that foreign land, had then, for the first time in the history of man's relation to man, this great government had turned to this small country and said, 'here, here is your land, take it back'."

It is said to you and to all of us that this is a man's world. You young ladies are getting ready to set foot into this man's world. I am not going to take issue with this particular belief or this claim. It's been said for as long as men have controlled the means of saying

... long, but a few years ago, following World War II a new word was coined in regard to this man's world, the term "momism." Many articles were written deplored the influence of the American female on the men of this man's world and blaming them for the fact that a large number of the young men have been unable or unwilling to face the test of war in behalf of their country. I am not going to take issue with this, but if blame is to be attached to the females of our country, if women are going to be blamed under the term of "momism" for this group of men who could not meet the test, then certainly credit must be due, and credit must be given where it is due. For if "momism" is responsible for those failures, then "momism" must be responsible for the sixteen million young men who did meet those tests. "Momism" must have been responsible for the happenings in a B-17 coming back across France from Germany. Disabled by ground fire, losing altitude, they had taken a direct burst in the ball turret underneath the B-17, the ball turret gunner was wounded, and the turret was jammed so they could not get him out. Finally the pilot had to order, "Bail out," and as the men started to leave the plane, the trapped wounded kid in the ball turret knew he was being left behind and he cried out in terror. Even the dry words of the citation in military language for heroism cannot hide the drama and the nobility of what took place then. The last man to leave the plane saw the co-pilot sit down and take the boy's hand and, he said, "Never mind, son, we'll ride it down together." Congressional Medal of Honor posthumously awarded.

"Momism" must have been responsible for an incident in Italy. A war correspondent friend of mine told me about walking down an Italian road one day and there at the side of the road in a stream, he saw a chaplain baptizing 19 boys. Thinking there might be a story here, he went over and the chaplain said, "Well, the story here is

the youngster over there. He brought the other 18 in." So as they moved on down the road he started talking to the boy, and the lad said, "Wait'll my mom hears this. You know, all my life she was trying to get me to go to Sunday School and Church and I didn't have time for anything like that, but Boy, will she be happy when she hears now she finally won." A short time later my friend held this boy in his arms while he died. The boy said two things, asked two things. He asked first, "Will you be sure and tell my Mom what I did," and second he said, "Don't let this happen again." "Momism" must have been present there.

You young ladies are going to embark on many graduation days on through your lives. There is a form of graduation day that marks each one of our passing from one phase of life into another, but none will be more important nor linger in your minds more than this. None will be more important from a standpoint of making a decision, of choosing your way. I know it is very easy for all of us to say; the events in the world are so large, the happenings of our nation are so great; what can I as an individual do; I have no place in this; this is for people who control the movements of mankind.

Well sometime ago, I attended a football game, a night football game at the Coliseum in Los Angeles. This is one of the truly great stadiums of our country. One hundred three thousand people were present in that stadium that night and between halves they turned off the lights and suddenly you found yourself in a darkness you could almost feel, and then a voice on the public address system said, "When I give the signal I am going to count three and when I give the signal on three each one of us shall light a match." Well, it sounded a little silly and you wondered what a match could do in this darkness, this velvet darkness, but, suddenly on this number three, 103,000 people scratched matches

and there was a great glow that bathed that field down below in light that battled back the darkness, an arch of light clear up above the stadium. It was one of the most spectacular sights I have ever seen, just because each one of the people there did what he could to contribute a little light.

Now you, in making a choice in embarking upon a course, can choose a form of "momism" as the boys I have talked about in the B-17, the boys your age, are tonight or today are standing, I guess it is night there now, in Korea. General Ridgeway spoke of their courage, their heroism a few days ago. These are the boys that you are going to marry. You are going to teach and heal and mother their sons. You have an opportunity to decide now whether you will strike a match and whether you will help push back the darkness over the stadium of humanity or whether you will contribute to the other kind of "momism." You have a chance to decide whether to this man's world you will contribute men who will believe in a love of humanity and love of their fellow men regardless of race or creed or national origin. If you embark on the right course and do this, you may bring closer the day when your sons and their sons will not have to prove their worth by bleeding all that they are and all they ever hope to be into the sands of some far flung beach head. And now on this day of congratulations to you, I would like on behalf of all these people around you who have preceded you into the world, I would like to bid you welcome. We need you, we need your youthful honesty, we need your courage, we need your sweetness, and with your help I am sure we can come much closer to realizing that this land of ours is the last best hope of man on earth. God bless you!

Wanted—Yearbooks

For some reason or other a complete file of Woods ECHOES does not exist on the campus. It's a pity and a situation all of us want to correct. The new library has a space that is waiting for the following issues: all prior to 1922 and following, those for '23, '24, '28, '29, '30, '31, '38, '49, '51. Are there Willies who would give or lend for safe keeping copies of these Woods ECHOES? If so, please send them c/o Editor.

Commencement '52

(Continued from Page 7)

'52 of San Antonio, Texas, and Nancy Riffe '52 of Kansas City, Missouri. Miss Marilyn McIlroy '52 of Clarksville, Missouri, received the "Alpha Iota Award" and Miss Raydene Myers '52 of Bristol, Oklahoma, the "Vera Chenoweth Memorial Trophy for Outstanding Horsemanship" given by Miss Vida Chenoweth in memory of her twin sister, Vera.

It was all a happy time—a time to be remembered.

Is There A William Woods Club?

Frequently letters come to the editor's desk with the inquiry, "Is there a William Woods Club in our city?" We are delighted with such interest and hope that because of it many clubs will be reactivated or organized during the coming year. Our most recent inquiries come from: Gladys Hagan, '26, 504 E. High Street, Jefferson City, Missouri; Betsy Ann Drescher Jennings '39, 424 E. Henry Clay, Whitefish Bay, (Milwaukee suburb), Wisconsin.

To each of the persons who make the inquiry we are sending a list of alumnae in her city, that is if no club is in existence. The lists will be helpful in connection with club organization.