

# Valedictorian Address

## By Payton Mayes

### May 26, 1995

Adversity is defined by Webster as a condition of suffering, destitution, or affliction. In the presence of adversity, we often choose to escape for fear of being tainted by corruption. Fleeing provides some hope of preserving our innocence but denies our responsibility to alter, rebel against or sometimes grow to accept what we see as threatening. Part of our adolescence is spent in destroying our idols by watching them closely to discover the belief that we can flee an imperfect world. Part of maturing means we must embrace a world which we believe to be flawed.

Fellow classmates, we do live in a flawed world. We cannot sit back and accept this, and I believe that many of us will not. The first notion that we must dismiss is that life will be easy. From here on out, it will only get more complicated and more complex. I believe that each one of us will do one of three things.

1. First of all, unfortunately, some of us will give up. We'll quit, be content with defeat and blame our failures on someone else, lay down and just plain give up.
2. Secondly, some of us will adapt to hardships. We'll become calloused and hard. We will learn tolerance and we will survive through our endurance.
3. Still others will become the fighters. We are the ones who will choose to make a difference. We will choose not to quit nor will we choose to tolerate. We'll choose to make a change, to stand out, and to become the voices of the future. I challenge you, the Senior Class of 1995, to become the fighters. I realize that we can't do everything, but we can do something. Only a handful of men and women working, striving, and drafting a document that would guide a new country created the Constitution of the United States.

Thomas Edison, a man who is unequalled in scientific achievements, and to whom we all owe so much, said that he never did anything worth doing by accident, nor did any of his inventions come by accident; but rather they came by hard work and that there is no substitute for hard work. Hard work frequently is the key to success rather than brilliance or ability. Many people with mediocre ability have surpassed the brilliant because they were willing to work hard.

Too often we think about what we want to be rather than want to do. The misconception of striving based on what you want to be is that through ambition and hard work, one day you might achieve your goal – and then what? You may find it a hollow victory. The person who strives, who dreams of what he wants to do, the work that he wants to carry out, never has his dream completely fulfilled. His life can be made rich by continuing to fulfill and to work toward his dreams and ambitions.

A truly successful person is not the one who has accumulated the most money, the most social prestige, but rather the one who has participated in life in a

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useful and meaningful manner. True success thrives on giving more than we get. Knowledge is a powerful source that we should strive after, and yet if it is not used, it has little meaning. Service, honesty, fairness, and concern for others are the ingredients for success that we too frequently overlook.

Criticism is an interesting thing that we encounter in this life. Strangely enough, it can be the occasion of stimulating our very best efforts or it can be the reason for bringing out the worst in us. I prefer to classify criticism as wholesome criticism and malicious criticism. Usually it is not the words that are spoken, but rather the motives behind them that make the difference.

We face criticism every day, and we will continue to face it. We have faced the criticism of our leaders and parents. This criticism was motivated only by a keen desire for our well being and improvement. By our positive reaction to this wholesome criticism, we have bettered ourselves. We will continue to receive such wholesome criticism from people who desire to be genuinely helpful. We must be alert to recognize this criticism. We must take it, receive it, and apply it to our lives. We can improve ourselves by doing so.

Unfortunately, not all the criticism we encounter will be wholesome. A great deal of it will be motivated from malice, from littleness, from envy, and from a host of ignoble motives. This criticism can cause us great harm only when we react toward it with the same motivation that caused it in the first place. If a person gives us unjust criticism because of malice and we react with the same malice, we have not served ourselves. Indeed, we have belittled ourselves.

We must learn to accept such criticism in our stride. First, see if there is any basis for it. If so, heed it and receive it from those who really do seek to help. If there is no basis, forget it. There are two quotes along this line that have been of great value to me. One of them is "Little things bother little people." Consider unjust criticism a little thing. Ignore it. Slough it off. Don't dwell on it. Another quote that Dale Carnegie includes in one of his books is, "People don't kick dead dogs." This is certainly true. You have never seen a man go by and kick a dead dog. If people confront us with unjust criticism, stretch a point and consider it to be a compliment of sort. Somehow, they see something in our life that they want or envy and rather than try to emulate us by doing something positive, they bring themselves to a lower level by unsound and unfair criticism. Remember – "People don't kick dead dogs."

I would like to take the opportunity to thank some people who have certainly helped me get to this point. First of all, students, faculty, staff and administrators of Coleman I.S.D., we have a great school system. I have seen many different schools this year, and I can say without a doubt that ours is one of the best around. Thank

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you Dad and Marci and Mom and Paul and Matthew. You have given me the desire to excel. I would also like to thank all of my family, especially my paternal grandmother who passed away a little over a month ago, and I just want to say to her, "Nina, I did it!" Most of all, I would like to thank the Lord above for always guiding me in the right direction.

In closing, it is my hope, prayer, challenge, and desire that these years that lie ahead of us will be filled with the joy, blessing and fulfillment of life realized through hard work. We will not play ourselves down. We will not minimize what we can achieve. The impossible of yesterday has been achieved today. We will be ready to accept the opportunities of today and tomorrow.