



Spring Commencement Speech

SUNDAY, MAY SEVENTH, TWO-THOUSAND SEVENTEEN



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TOLEDO
1872

UT COMMENCEMENT SPEECH, MAY 7, 2017

Christine Brennan

Thank you – Dr. Gaber, board of trustees, faculty, honored guests, parents, friends, family and, most important, graduates:

Congratulations. What a day this is, a great day for you, your families, your friends, classmates and professors. You've done it. You are college graduates. Congratulations, you Rockets you, all of you!

A show of hands: Who is the first in his/her family to graduate from college? Congratulations. That's especially meaningful. You'll blaze the trail for others, for sure. Encourage others to follow in your footsteps. Cheer them on as others cheered you on. You are wonderful role models for them. Know that and be proud of it.

Now, before I go any further, I want to call on someone out there. If you're seated in Section 6, Row 4, Seat 24, please raise your hand, stand up, give a shout. Does that seat have that kind of sat-in feeling? Like somebody's been there before?

Well, that somebody was me. We had six season tickets in Row 4 and Row 5 from the late 1960s all the way through the 1970s. It was from that seat – right there – that my siblings and our father and I – and occasionally our mother – cheered on one of the winningest football teams in college football history, the 1969-71 Toledo Rockets.

Sometimes people will say in a very nice, complimentary way, "hey you've come so far." You think about it, actually I've come – what? – about 60 yards? 60 yards in nearly 50 years. About a yard per year.

I don't know about you, but to me, that doesn't seem so far. Come on. You can do better than that! Seriously, it's especially meaningful to me to be here in this stadium, in the beautiful Glass Bowl. As a young girl in love with sports before Title IX – before girls and women were encouraged to love and play sports – I threw my heart and soul into that Rockets football team. And what did it do? It won. And won. And won. For three consecutive years, I cheered for that team, and it never lost. The louder I cheered, the more the team won. The Rockets never, ever disappointed me. They never let me down. They always rewarded my devotion with more victories, with more happiness. How often can a fan say that about a sports team? And, any wonder that I then became a journalist covering sports. I've come to know several of those players and coaches, especially the great Chuck Ealey, and I thank them for inspiring me every time I see them.

So, just as this stadium helped launch me into the adventure of a lifetime, so too does it launch you into the world today. Rockets...launch...get it? I know, I know.

I did a little research on commencement speeches and it seems that when people are asked years later about theirs, they always say two things:

The speech was too long.

And, they don't remember the name of the person who gave it.

Well, I'm going to work hard to ensure that neither of those things happens here today.

Many graduation speeches this year will no doubt focus on the especially uncertain times in our country right now, and your role in them. I'd rather look at it this way: where there is uncertainty, there also is great opportunity. Where there is a void, there will be people who rush in to fill it. Where there is decay and fear, there always will be the dawn of the possibility of something new, and there will be hope.

So who out there wants to take that opportunity, fill that void, try something new and be our hope for the future? Where are you? There is no doubt we will be voting for some of you. Who's the future U.S. Senator in this crowd? The future teacher of the year? Who's going to be the CEO of a Fortune 500 company? Who's helping to find the cure for cancer? Who's writing a best-selling book? And so many other cool things.

You're out there. It's your call. Is it you? Will it be you?

How will that happen, exactly? How do you get from where you are right now, to where you want to be in 5, 10, 15, 20 years, or more?

This is the moment when we turn to the Glass Bowl Life Lessons. You haven't heard of them? Well, that's probably because I just made up that name. You see, over the course of a decade or so, as I sat next to my father in Section 6 – between touchdowns, after first downs, during timeouts – he would tell us stories. And we would listen. And in those stories, there were some very simple life lessons.

Glass Bowl Life Lesson No. 1: The secret to success is that there IS no secret to success. With the wonderful education you received here at the University of Toledo, what happens next it up to you. If you are willing to work harder than your peers and your colleagues, if you find something you love or are interested in, and throw yourself into it with everything you've got, if you don't cut corners, if you listen and learn – you will be a success.

What worked in 1980 worked in 2010 and will work in 2040. Hard work. Dedication to the task. An open mind. A quest to learn more.

Glass Bowl Life Lesson No. 2: No one said it's going to be easy. If you expect someone to hand you something, the likelihood is you'll be standing there empty handed. And if you bite off more than you can chew, there's only one solution: Chew faster.

Glass Bowl Life Lesson No. 3: Put your brain in gear before you put your mouth in motion. Or, put another way, you have two eyes, two ears and only one mouth. Listen. Think. Analyze. Don't just talk.

Glass Bowl Life Lesson No. 4: Write thank you notes. Not thank you emails. Thank you notes. If you have a job interview, an informational interview, if someone recommends you for a job – buy yourselves some note cards or stationery, get some stamps, take out a pen, write a kind, several-sentence thank you, double and triple check to make sure you spelled the person's name right, put the day's date on the note, put it in an envelope and drop it in a mailbox.

You will knock the socks off the person who receives it. Guaranteed. And they will remember you. Oh, and the occasional "yes ma'am, no ma'am, yes sir, no sir" works too. In other words, respect others. I don't care what certain people are doing or saying on Twitter and other social media. Being polite to another person will never, ever go out of style.

Glass Bowl Life Lesson No. 5: Choose happiness. Be positive. Look at the bright side. We all know things aren't always great. Obviously, if there are serious problems, of course speak out.

But in our daily life, you will hear plenty of negativity. People will tell you that you can't do something. Some will be your friends. Don't listen to them. Charge ahead with your plan. You are in control of your life.

Glass Bowl Life Lesson No. 6: Stand up straight, shoulders back. Act like you belong in the room. Even if you don't. And, if everyone else acts like they know what they're doing, guess what? They don't. They're acting like they belong too. It's okay to be nervous. It's okay to have doubts. We all do. Know that, embrace it, and run with it.

And, Glass Bowl Life Lesson No. 7: With apologies to the English professors in the audience – “This ain't no dress rehearsal.” I asked my Dad once if it shouldn't be: “This isn't a dress rehearsal,” and he said no, you've got to say it the other way, the wrong way: “This ain't no dress rehearsal.”

What does that mean? This is your one chance at life. This isn't the run-through for the real thing. This IS the real thing. So go for it. Take chances. Follow your heart. You don't want to look back and say you shoulda or you woulda done something. No! Go for it. Live life to the fullest.

So there you have it. Seven thoughts – seven – worth a touchdown and an extra point.

These have all worked for me over the years and I'm happy to share them with you today. I still think of these things every day. And I think – I hope – they will work for you too.

Now, here's our deal. You're seated in the Glass Bowl on May 7, 2017. I was seated in the Glass Bowl all those autumn Saturdays through the 1970s.

So, I have a question: in 20-30-40 years, who is going to be up here, giving that speech? Which ones of you will be giving speeches in other venues, leading groups, giving advice, showing the way, helping your community in ways big and small? I don't pretend to have all the answers. None of us do. But that path, that can be yours, and yours, and yours. I want it to be, for all of you, in your own way.

So when you're giving the commencement speech of 2037...

And you're giving the speech in 2047...

And you in 2050...

I have just one favor to ask: if I'm still around all those years from now, would one of you wheel me in to the stadium, maybe in the back there somewhere?

I would love to hear what YOU have to say.

Thank you, congratulations again, and Go Rockets!

– *Christine Brennan*