

Community Comment
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Sam Pennisi

College Graduation 2016

I have been to or been part of college graduations since 1969. I graduated from Humboldt State College with a Bachelor's degree in science, specifically Forest Management. ~~My parents came from southern California to attend the ceremony. For them, it was dream come true; both their son's, their only children and second generation Italians, had graduated from college.~~ *SP*
Americans

For my parents, this dream meant that their sons would be successful, limited only by their talents. As first generation Americans, this is what they lived for. This is what drove them. I once asked my mother why they didn't teach us to speak Italian. Her answer was quick and heartfelt; they didn't want us to have an accent. My brother and I grew up in the 50's and this was a real concern for them. My father got to see his first born receive his Master's in Engineering. He died too young to see me start graduate school. He was clearly proud of both of us and relieved to know we would be alright.

My Mother had a high school degree but was discouraged from going to college because she was a woman. To my grandfather, college was for boys. He was not only old world but was also old school. My Mother was smart and she taught piano. It's too bad she wasn't encouraged to reach for her potential. My dad was orphaned at nine and dropped out of school at about 4th grade to work. Yes, 4th grade. His life was saved by the CCC program instituted by the Roosevelt Administration. As a result, he never had to use public assistance again.

Graduation from college is a big deal; still. College is not job training. It is intended to be an education. College graduates are more prepared to work and advance in that work than those with a high school degree. The act of going to college is more than the sum of the classes you take. It is the exposure to many different points of view. It is the learning of critical thinking and the ability to read and write with analytical competence. It is the ability to write and defend a creative thought. It is competence in a field of study. And it is who you meet. Professors and other students have a profound impact on how you develop. In my day at Humboldt, this impact was not in the form of thinking like them. Instead, it was learning from them while I established my own outlook on life.

In 2019, I will celebrate my fifty year anniversary of my college graduation. In these 47 years, I have had the privilege to know graduates from almost every year. Some were students of mine when I taught Environmental Planning. Some worked for the City of Arcata as employees or interns when I served on the council. Some helped out at our bed and breakfast over the years, and some just became good friends. In the last few years, the Rotary Club has been a great way to meet and work with recent graduates as they began their careers in Humboldt County.

My observation is these young people are well prepared to advance our county, our state and our Country into the future. These young adults think globally because this is the world they inherent. And the College experience is in no small part responsible for their competence and values. We are leaving our society and our world in good hands.

College graduation is a big deal. It is a blessing to live in a college town where we can witness this celebration each May. We all influence them in small ways everyday. If you know a graduate, tip your hat to them. They have earned it.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.