

Community Comment – June 6th, 2016

By Jon Sapper

Graduation Speeches

This is the time of year when we read about the accomplishments of those who have successfully completed an educational program and are graduating with a diploma, certificate or degree. Thousands of graduation speeches are given across the country and most, if not all, give congratulations and well wishes for nothing but success in the future. A couple of years ago in a Community Comment I talked about a graduation speech that was given in 1976 by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. She was a well-known psychiatrist working with elderly patients near the end of their life.

In this address she says, quote, “What impresses me about commencements is that all of you celebrate a very special day at a highlight of your life and you are at the peak of a mountain. Most people send you congratulations; almost everyone wishes you a happy life and success and sunshine; and I want to wish you the opposite. And I say that because I have worked with dying patients over the last twelve years, and when I sit with them, when they are not on a mountain peak but in a deep valley, and I sit and listen to them and ask them what life was all about; they do not tell me of too many mountain peaks, but they tell me something that we too often forget; that it is not the super happy sunny days that make human beings out of you or that give you strength or faith or trust or love, but it is the moments of hardship in life that make you a man or a woman.....At the end of life, when people look back and evaluate, they do not tell you how many mink coats they have; they do not tell you how many mansions they built or how much money they made. An 85 year old patient of mine looked back on her life and said, “God, if I had my life to live over, I would dare more mistakes next time. I would relax and ramble around and would be sillier than I have been this trip. I would take fewer things so seriously and take more chances. I would climb more mountains and swim more rivers. I would eat more ice cream and less prunes. I would perhaps have more actual troubles to deal with, but I sure would have fewer imaginary ones. I never went anywhere without a thermometer, hot water bottle, raincoat or parachute. If I had to do it over again, I would come lighter next time. I would go to more dances. I would ride more merry-go-rounds. I would pick more daises. Yes, I had my moments, but if I had to do it again, I would have many more of them.” End quote.

So to all the graduates and frankly, to all of us, let us put the gifts we have been given and skills we have learned to good use, for the benefit of ourselves, our families and our communities. And while we work hard to accomplish this, let's not forget to climb more mountains, swim more rivers, eat more ice cream and pick a few daises.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.