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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

BY

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SURGEON GENERAL

OF THE

U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

PRESENTED AT COLBY COLLEGE

WATERVILLE, MAINE

MAY 29, 1988

(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HONOR AND YOUR KINDNESS. AND
THANK YOU FOR ENCOURAGING ME TO GET AWAY FROM WASHINGTON TO SPEND
A DAY OR SO IN THIS BEAUTIFUL PART OF THE WORLD.

I AM YOUR SURGEON GENERAL AND I SUPPOSE I SHOULD TALK ABOUT
HEALTH MATTERS. AND I WILL. BUT PERHAPS NOT THE ONES YOU'D
EXPECT ME TO TALK ABOUT.

THIS IS THE SEASON OF COMMENCEMENT SPEECHES AND THIS YEAR I ACCEPTED TEN INVITATIONS. SIX OF THEM ARE MEDICAL SCHOOLS AND I'VE CHOSEN TO SPEAK ON SIX ASPECTS OF ETHICAL IMPERATIVES FOR YOUNG PHYSICIANS. EACH GRADUATE OF THOSE MEDICAL SCHOOLS WILL RECEIVE A BOUND COPY OF ALL SIX SPEECHES PLUS FOOTNOTES.

THE OTHER FOUR SCHOOLS ARE UNDERGRADUATES, EACH WITH DIFFERENT MISSIONS. SO I HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK NOT ONLY TO SOME FUTURE PROVIDERS OF HEALTH CARE, BUT ALSO TO SOME RECIPIENTS.

IF YOU DIDN'T EXPECT SOME KIND OF HEALTH MESSAGE TODAY, I HAVE TO REMIND YOU THAT IT IS ONE OF THE RISKS YOU TAKE WHEN YOU INVITE THE SURGEON GENERAL TO SPEAK.

BUT THIS WILL BE A HEALTH MESSAGE WITH A DIFFERENT TWIST. I DON'T WANT TO CROWD JANE FONDA, DR. TIMOTHY JOHNSON, OR EVEN DR. RUTH.

FIRST OF ALL -- EVERYTHING YOU WILL DISCUSS ABOUT MEDICINE, HEALTH CARE OR PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY FOR THE REST OF THIS CENTURY WILL BE MERELY SYMPTOMATIC OF THE OVER-RIDING TENSION BETWEEN OUR ASPIRATIONS AND OUR RESOURCES. OR TO SAY IT ANOTHER WAY -- THE TENSION BETWEEN WHAT WE WANT IN THE WAY OF HEALTH CARE AND WHAT WE CAN AFFORD.

THAT WILL BE TRUE WHETHER YOU ARE DISCUSSING THE MEDICARE TRUST FUND, -- OF CURRENT INTEREST TO YOUR GRANDPARENTS, OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST TO YOUR PARENTS AND -- DON'T LAUGH -- OF EVENTUAL INTEREST TO YOU, -- OR THE GRAYING OF AMERICA, OR HOW WE WILL MANAGE, PAY FOR AND SURVIVE THE EPIDEMIC OF AIDS.

WE AMERICANS HAVE HAD A WONDERFUL, EXCITING, EXPENSIVE HISTORY OF REPARATIVE AND REHABILITATIVE MEDICINE AND SURGERY.

FOR EXAMPLE, I KNOW YOUR INTEREST HAS BEEN AROUSED AND YOUR CURIOSITY TITILLATED BY HEART TRANSPLANTS, REPLACEMENT OF ARTHRITIC HIP JOINTS WITH TEFLON, AND LIPOSUCTION.

BUT WE CAN'T AFFORD ALL OF THEM FOR EVERYBODY AND I'M AFRAID YOU WILL HAVE TO LOOK FORWARD TO SOME KIND OF RATIONING.

IN FACT, THAT ERA IS ALREADY UPON US. THE STATE OF OREGON MADE THE DECISION A FEW WEEKS AGO THAT THEY WOULD FOREGO 30 ORGAN TRANSPLANTS IN FAVOR OF 1,500 WELL BABIES BORN AFTER EXEMPLARY PRENATAL CARE.

THE FIRST VICTIM AFTER THE DECISION WAS A LITTLE BOY WHO NEEDED BUT DID NOT GET A BONE MARROW TRANSPLANT. HE DIED. HE COULD HAVE BEEN YOUR BROTHER.

THIS IS BUT AN EXAMPLE OF THE TYPE OF TRAGIC CHOICES THAT ARE BEING MADE FOR YOU TODAY. HOW DO YOU PLAN TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE FUTURE?

LET ME GIVE YOU WHAT I THINK ARE SOME INCREDIBLE NUMBERS ON WHICH SOME OTHER DECISIONS WILL INEVITABLY BE MADE.

OF ALL THE PEOPLE WHO EVER REACHED AGE 65 IN THE UNITED STATES, ONE-HALF OF THEM ARE ALIVE TODAY. THE MOST RAPIDLY GROWING SEGMENT OF OUR POPULATION IS 80 TO 90. WE HAVE 12 THOUSAND PEOPLE AGED 100 OR MORE IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY; IN 2005 THAT NUMBER WILL BE 100,000.

TODAY THERE ARE FIVE TAX PAYING WAGE EARNERS FOR EVERY PERSON OVER 65; IN 2005 THAT NUMBER WILL BE BUT 3.

ALL OF THIS BY WAY OF SAYING, THE GRAYING OF AMERICA IS GOING TO REQUIRE SOME DECISIONS IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF HEALTH CARE AND THE RATIONING OF SERVICES, CAUSED BY THE ECONOMICS OF THE ADDITIONAL NUMBERS OF SENIOR CITIZENS.

AND I'M NOT JUST TALKING ABOUT OLD CROCKS. I'M ALSO TALKING ABOUT ME! I'M IN MY 72ND YEAR. I MAY NOT BE MUCH FOR SPEED, BUT WHEN IT COMES TO STAMINA AND MAYBE EVEN PRODUCTIVITY -- I'LL COMPETE.

YOU WILL BE MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THOSE FUTURE DAYS IN TWO WAYS; AT THE BALLOT BOX AND IN THE WAY YOU CARE FOR YOURSELF.

SO JUST IN YOUR OWN SELF-INTEREST, IF THERE IS GOING TO BE ANY KIND OF SHORTAGE, IT WOULD BEHOVE YOU TO ARRIVE AT THOSE GOLDEN YEARS IN THE BEST HEALTH POSSIBLE. THE TIME TO START IS NOW.

THE PREVENTION OF DISEASE AND THE PROMOTION OF HEALTH IS NOT GLAMOROUS, BUT IT IS EFFECTIVE AND IT IS EXTRAORDINARILY CHEAP. I'M TALKING ABOUT LIFE STYLES. MY RECOMMENDATIONS ARE FEW AND THE BEAUTY OF IT IS THAT IT'S ALL DO-IT-YOURSELF.

LET ME START WITH THE DON'TS. DON'T TAKE DRUGS. DRUGS NOT ONLY DISRUPT LIVES AND CAREERS, BUT THEY CAN AND DO KILL YOU.

DON'T SMOKE. IF YOU HAVEN'T STARTED, DON'T. IF YOU DO SMOKE, STOP. SMOKING IS NO LONGER SEXY -- AND IT DOES CAUSE PREMATURE WRINKLES. YES, I KNOW ALL ABOUT ADDICTION TO NICOTINE. TO YOU SMOKERS I SAY, 43 MILLION PEOPLE ALIVE TODAY HAVE QUIT. YOU CAN TOO.

ALCOHOL IS ABUSED BY ABOUT 12 PERCENT OF THE ADULT POPULATION. IF YOU ARE ONE OF THOSE, THE ADVICE IS THE SAME AS FOR SMOKING. STOP. IF YOU ARE NOT AN ABUSER OF ALCOHOL NOW, FINE AND GOOD, BUT YOU COULD STILL BECOME ALCOHOL DEPENDENT, SO USE IT IN MODERATION.

STATISTICS INDICATE THAT IT IS AT YOUR AGE THAT MANY YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN TAKE UP THE HABIT OF BOTH SMOKING AND DRINKING. I'M VERY GRATIFIED ABOUT THE DOWNWARD TRENDS OF THE INCIDENCE OF SMOKING IN THE UNITED STATES, BUT I AM QUITE DISCOURAGED ABOUT THE BARELY IMPERCEPTIBLE CHANGE AMONG WOMEN AT YOUR AGE LEVEL.

I ASSUME YOU ARE ALL JOGGING, OR RUNNING, OR BICYCLING, OR SWIMMING, -- AND EATING YOGURT AND SALADS FOR LUNCH. IF SO, YOU WILL ARRIVE AT THE GOLDEN YEARS WAY AHEAD OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT PAYING ATTENTION TO NUTRITION AND EXERCISE.

NOW THAT WASN'T TOO BAD, WAS IT? 2 DON'TS AND 3 ADMONITIONS. ONLY THREE THINGS LEFT: HAVE YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE CHECKED BY YOUR PHYSICIAN WHO SHOULD ALSO CHECK YOUR CHOLESTEROL LEVEL. AND FINALLY AVOID STRESS. BELIEVE IT OR NOT THAT'S ANOTHER LIFE STYLE THAT YOU CAN TAKE CHARGE OF. ENJOY LIFE, BE HAPPY. MENTAL STRESS CAN DISABLE AND IT CAN BE A KILLER.

FOR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN SUCH AS YOURSELVES, THE POST-GRADUATE WORLD IS FULL OF PROMISE AND EXCITEMENT. YOU SHOULD STRIVE TO OBTAIN YOUR OWN FULL MEASURE OF BOTH.

BUT, AS YOU DO SO, PLEASE BE AWARE OF YOUR OWN FRAGILITY AS HUMAN BEINGS.

REMEMBER, PLEASE, THAT THE HUMAN MIND AND BODY ARE VERY RESILIENT ... WITH ALMOST MIRACULOUS POWERS OF SELF-RENEWAL ... BUT YOU CAN QUICKLY RUN OUT OF MIRACLES, AS YOU TRY TO MAKE YOUR WAY IN A COMPLEX AND DYNAMIC SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT.

NOW THAT I KNOW YOUR HEALTH, HAPPINESS AND LONGEVITY ARE ASSURED, LET ME TURN TO SOMETHING PERSONAL AND TELL YOU SOME THINGS THAT IN THE LONG RUN MAY PROVE JUST AS VALUABLE AS THAT HEALTH MESSAGE I HOPE YOU LISTENED TO.

1988 IS OUR GOLDEN WEDDING ANNIVERSARY YEAR, AND, THOUGH BETTY AND I MAY NOT LOOK IT, WE WERE REVOLUTIONARIES IN OUR DAY AS PERHAPS SOME OF YOU ARE IN YOUR DAY. WE WERE 40 MILES APART FOR A YEAR BEFORE WE MET BUT DIDN'T KNOW IT.

WE MET WHILE I WAS STILL AT DARTMOUTH AND SHE WAS AT VASSAR AND WE'RE MARRIED THE YEAR AFTER I GRADUATED AT THE START OF MY SECOND YEAR IN CORNELL UNIVERSITY MEDICAL COLLEGE. MEDICAL SCHOOL WAS -- AND IS -- DIFFICULT, BUT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EVEN MORE DIFFICULT FOR ME - UNMARRIED.

IN THE 1930'S, THAT WAS, VERY DECIDEDLY, A MINORITY OPINION BECAUSE MOST MEDICAL SCHOOL DEANS AND FACULTY AND ESSENTIALLY ALL INTERN AND RESIDENCY COMMITTEES SINCERELY BELIEVED THAT MEDICAL TRAINING AND MARRIAGE DID NOT MIX.

MY RECORD IN MEDICAL SCHOOL WAS FINE AND FOR ALL OF MY INTERVIEWS FOR INTERNSHIP AND RESIDENCY, I WAS WARMLY RECEIVED. YET I WAS TURNED DOWN FOR MY TWO TOP CHOICE INTERNSHIPS BECAUSE I WAS MARRIED. AND THE TRAINING DIRECTOR OF THE FIRST SURGICAL RESIDENCY I APPLIED FOR WROTE BACK: "DEAR KOOP, YOU DIDN'T SAY WHETHER YOU WERE MARRIED OR NOT, IF YOU ARE, DON'T ANSWER THIS LETTER."

SO, BETTY AND I WENT TO MEDICAL SCHOOL TOGETHER, -- I WAS A MEDICAL STUDENT AND SHE AS AN EMPLOYEE OF THE SOCIAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT OF THE NEW YORK HOSPITAL. I STILL THINK SHE LEARNED MORE ABOUT MEDICINE AT LUNCH WITH ME AND MY FELLOW STUDENTS THAN SOME OF THE MEN WHO GRADUATED WITH ME. AND OF COURSE, IT MEANS SHE KNOWS MORE MEDICINE THAN SOME DOCTORS DO TODAY.

I AM SOMETIMES INTRODUCED AS BETTY KOOP'S FIRST HUSBAND, AND I AM ETERNALLY GRATEFUL THAT SHE'S KEPT IT THAT WAY.

I KNOW THAT BETTY HOLDS THE TOP SPOT IN THE HEARTS OF OUR CHILDREN AS WELL. WE HAD FOUR ... AGAIN, MORE CHILDREN THAN TODAY'S AVERAGE COUPLE HAS.

WHAT I WANT YOU YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN TO REMEMBER IS THAT THE FACTOR OF "MUTUALITY" HAS BEEN VERY IMPORTANT IN OUR MARRIAGE. THERE HAS BEEN MUTUAL SHARING OF LIFE AND CAREER EXPERIENCES AND MUTUAL RESPECT FOR WHAT EACH OTHER DOES ... AND IS.

I'VE ALWAYS SEEN BETTY'S ROLE AS AN EQUAL PARTNER IN MY CAREER, SHARING IN ALL MY VICTORIES AND -- ALAS! -- ALL MY DEFEATS AS WELL.

AND I'VE BEEN ABLE TO SHARE HERS, ALSO -- THE VICTORIES AND DEFEATS OF FAMILY AND CHILDREN AND FRIENDS ... THE KINDS OF THINGS THAT, INCREMENTALLY, ADD UP TO ONE'S REAL LIFE.

AFTER OUR SON, DAVID, WAS KILLED IN A MOUNTAIN-CLIMBING ACCIDENT, BETTY AND I SHARED OUR GRIEF AND OUR MEMORIES.

AFTER A TIME, WE CO-AUTHORED A BOOK ABOUT OUR SON AND THE MEANING OF HIS UNTIMELY DEATH. WE CALLED IT SOMETIMES MOUNTAINS MOVE. WE HOPED OUR BOOK WOULD, IN TURN, HELP OTHER PARENTS WHO EXPERIENCE SUCH A TRAGEDY. AND BY ALL REPORTS IT HAS.

DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES, WOMEN LIKE ELIZABETH KOOP HAVE SERVED THE HUMAN RACE VERY WELL ... KEPT IT GOING AND KEPT IT DECENT. BUT THE HUMAN RACE HAS GENERALLY NOT RETURNED THE FAVOR.

BUT I BELIEVE THINGS HAVE IMPROVED, ESPECIALLY OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES. MEN -- AND WOMEN THEMSELVES -- ARE GIVING WOMEN THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE AS EQUAL PARTNERS IN THE WRITING OF HUMAN HISTORY.

IF I WERE TERRIBLY EGOTISTIC, I'D SAY THAT THE HUMAN RACE IS JUST GETTING AROUND TO DOING WHAT BETTY AND I HAVE DONE FOR THE PAST 50 YEARS.

BUT I WON'T.

I WILL ADD ONE MORE THOUGHT. MARRIAGES LAST BECAUSE OF COMMITMENT TO -- MARRIAGE. ROMANTIC LOVE IS WHAT GETS IT ALL STARTED AND I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER HOW GREAT IT WAS. BUT IT IS SLOWLY -- AND AT BEST IMPERCEPTIBLY REPLACED, IN A SENSE, BY A DEEPER, ABIDING AFFECTION, LOVE AND RESPECT.

BUT SOME DON'T WEATHER THAT TRANSITION AS IDEALLY AS I JUST DESCRIBED IT. I TRULY BELIEVE THE PRICELESS INGREDIENT IS COMMITMENT TO MARRIAGE -- NOT TO ROMANCE, NOT TO EACH OTHER -- THAT GETS YOU OVER THE BUMPS.

YOU HAVE BEEN TOLD MANY TIMES THAT YOU WILL GRADUATE INTO A WORLD WHICH OFFERS MANY NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND ROLES, BUT NEW ROLES DON'T AUTOMATICALLY BRING EQUALITY. ALTHOUGH OUR MARRIAGE CONFORMED TO THE TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES OF TWO GENERATIONS AGO, IT WAS BASED UPON AN EQUALITY FOSTERED BY MUTUAL RESPECT.

TOO MANY PEOPLE -- WOMEN AND MEN -- CONCENTRATE THEIR EFFORTS UPON ACHIEVING A CHOSEN ROLE IN SOCIETY RATHER THAN ON HOW THEY PERFORM -- AS PEOPLE -- IN THOSE ROLES.

I'M SURE YOU REALIZE HOW IMPORTANT THAT IS NOW THAT YOU HAVE SPENT FOUR YEARS IN THIS EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT. TRUE EDUCATION WILL NOT TAKE HOLD UNLESS THERE IS RESPECT AMONG THE ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY, AND STUDENTS. IN LIKE MANNER A MARRIAGE WON'T SUCCEED UNLESS THERE IS MUTUAL RESPECT.

IN YOUR NEW ROLE AS GRADUATES OF THIS COLLEGE I'M SURE YOU WILL FIND ONCE AGAIN THAT IT IS NOT THE POSITION YOU HOLD BUT RATHER WHAT IS GENERATED BY THE EXPOSURE OF YOUR HUMAN QUALITIES.

I AGREE WITH THE PSALMIST WHO SAID WE ARE FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE. AS A SURGEON WHO HAS POKED INTO THE NOOKS AND CRANNIES OF THE HUMAN BODY, I CAN CERTAINLY ATTEST TO THAT. THE THINGS I SAID ABOUT THE PROMOTION OF GOOD HEALTH AND THE PREVENTION OF DISEASE ARE NOTHING MORE THAN ANOTHER KIND OF RESPECT -- RESPECT FOR ONE'S BODY.

AND RESPECT RATHER THAN ROLE PLAYING SHOULD MARK A RELATIONSHIP AS WOMEN AND MEN AS COLLEAGUES, HUSBANDS AND WIVES, WELL PEOPLE, AND ILL PEOPLE, ALL CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, GO ABOUT THEIR APPOINTED TASKS.

THIS TOO, MAKES FOR A HEALTHY AMERICA.

AND WITH THOSE REMARKS I'LL SAY GOODBYE WITH THIS BRIEF BUT
SINCERE WISH FOR EACH ONE OF YOU:

THAT YOU HAVE GOOD HEALTH ... A LONG LIFE...

AND A TRUE LOVE TO MAKE THEM BOTH WORTHWHILE.

THANK YOU.