

**Yakima Valley Community College**  
**Commencement Remarks**  
**June 12, 2014**

Thank you. It is an honor to be here to be here to recognize this outstanding graduating class of 2014. Congratulations to each and every one of you on your hard work toward achieving this remarkable step in your life.

I have always been a big fan of our state's community and technical college system. Here in the state of Washington, about 400,000 residents, or almost 6 percent of our total population, take advantage of our 34 community and technical colleges each year.

As one of the oldest community colleges in the state, Yakima Valley Community College has been an important educational hub in this region since it was founded in 1928.

I personally do not have a formal college education, but back when I first owned and operated a convenience store, I enrolled in a course at a community college near me so that I could learn about bookkeeping. My instructor was a fireball of a woman named Jan Smith. She taught me everything I needed to know about keeping my store's books in order. And that gave me the confidence I needed to buy other stores.

One of my employees back in those days was a woman named Nancy Thomas. Nancy was a super hard worker and a great lady. Her husband worked over at the corrections center in Shelton that is until he passed away from cancer.

To Nancy's great dismay her husband had no life insurance, which really left her and their three children in a difficult financial situation. I could not pay her a lot, but one thing I did do was to help Nancy with her classes at our local community college. Through the training and skills she developed there, Nancy was able to land an excellent job with The Evergreen State College in Olympia, which allowed her to become financially secure once again.

Like Nancy, each of you has your own reasons and motivations for advancing your educational levels. This is not usually easy, and for some it is just plain hard. Let me tell you about a student named Ali Kindred, one of our graduates here tonight.

Ali grew up in Yakima and discovered her love for computers at an early age. She was the 'fix it' girl at her house, taking apart broken clock radios and small appliances and repairing them. Ali has had many challenges to fix in her life, beginning at age sixteen when she was not allowed to finish high school because she was pregnant.

Tragically, she lost her daughter from complications during childbirth and has had recurring health issues. Through this experience, Ali has emerged with a strong sense of purpose and hope. She originally started her coursework at YVCC in the winter of 2000 and was within three quarters of completing her degree when she almost lost her life as the result of an abusive relationship. Following her 3-month recovery, her parents relocated Ali to Texas. There she met her husband, married, and the two started their own private investigative business.

Ali, her husband, and stepson eventually moved back to Yakima. Her stepson struggled in high school and was not very interested in finishing. Ali tried everything to encourage him. One day he gave her a challenge. He would graduate from high school and do his very best in his senior year if she, too, would complete her degree. Ali took him up on it. She re-enrolled at YVCC and today graduates with an associate of applied science in information technology degree. And what about her step-son? He is graduating from West Valley High School with straight A's his senior year!

“I wanted to give him inspiration and hope; now we are graduating together,” states Ali. “I have enjoyed everything about my experience at YVCC, the people I have met, the people I still know from when I first enrolled. I want students to know that they can accomplish their dreams; to hang on and be strong.” Ali is recovering from her medical issues and a recent surgery. She will begin work at her new job immediately following commencement. She will be working in the IT field managing web security in Renton.

Congratulations for staying with it, Ali, and congratulations to your step-son on his remarkable academic turnaround as well.

Ali's story is incredible, but not all that unique given the diversity in age and experience among the students at YVCC. I cannot overstate the importance of what you have accomplished by graduation, both for yourselves and your families, and for our state.

Our state's economy is directly tied to the rise and fall of our higher education system. The higher the skills and education of our residents, the more prosperous and productive they become.

An advanced education – whether it is through a community or technical college, a four-year school or higher institution of learning, creates new opportunities and through this achievement sets a new direction in your life.

As a graduate you are better prepared to face a new and changing world, one that in many ways is much different than just a couple of decades ago. We all are always adjusting to change because the world is in a constant state of change. Many of the great paying (and more interesting) jobs in our state did not even exist 10 years ago, such as jobs in video game

production, phone app developer, data scientist and, even a Zumba instructor. Community colleges especially have the flexibility to adapt to these changing needs.

The demand for skilled workers is so high in some areas – especially anything that requires science, technology, engineering, or math, the so-called STEM fields that certain companies are bringing in workers from other countries because they cannot draw qualified workers from our state and nation. By finishing your studies here at YVCC you are a big part of the solution to this problem. While we welcome minds from other parts of the world, ideally we would like to see Washington state residents be first in line for jobs in Washington state.

I would now like to offer a little advice to our graduates, because no commencement speech would be complete without a few words of advice.

We often hear that our children are our future. I don't totally agree with that. I believe that we are your future; me, President Kaminski, state Senators Honeyford and King and state Representative Chandler, all of us old folks we were and are your future. My parents and grandparents were my future. You see, in 1928 somebody laid the foundation for the wonderful institution that you are graduating from today. It was like building a house. Once the foundation was built the next generation added the framing and the next the infrastructure and the generation after that the walls and then the roof and they made it even more beautiful on the inside and out so that you could have a better place to learn and a better future.

When I first started in the legislature many years ago there were no community colleges with four- year degrees. Now YVCC and several other traditional two-year colleges in Washington are starting to offer bachelor degrees. So my generation built on this magnificent community college system and made it better. What we did laid the groundwork for your future, and now it is your turn.

Look what Bill Gates and Paul Allen, the founders of Microsoft; Amazon founder Jeff Bezos; Facebook founder Mark Zuckerman and others did for you and your future. It is simply astounding what you get to build on and live with because of them.

The energy efficient light bulbs that we have today are not the bulbs that Thomas Edison invented, but he laid the foundation for the bright and beautiful lights we enjoy today. And now it is your turn to make the light shine brighter and more beautiful for your kids and grandkids, to build on the home of the future where they will live because you are their future.

The lights that were most common in Thomas Edison's day were gas lights.

Let's consider for a moment the lamplighter story. I knew it when I was a kid in the fifties as another beautiful song that went, "He made the night a little brighter wherever he would go, the

old lamplighter of long, long ago.” In actuality it came from a bit of history and literature that goes something like this—some people come into our lives and quickly go: some stay for a while and leave footprints on our hearts and we’re never the same. Sir Harry Lauder, the Scottish humorist and singer, loved to tell the story of the old lamplighter in the village where he lived as a boy:

Each evening as dusk came, the old man would make his rounds with his ladder and his light. He would put the ladder against the light post, climb up and light the lamp, step back down, pick up the ladder, and proceed to the next lamp. ‘After a while,’ said Sir Harry, ‘he would be down the street and out of sight. But I could always tell which way he had gone from the lamps he had lighted and the glow he left behind.’

Graduates, life’s highest tribute would be to live in such a way as to deserve the words, ‘I could tell which way he went by the glow he left behind.’

As you leave here you are setting off on the greatest adventure—life. How will you take what you have learned and apply it to make the world a better place—or will you? What shape will your life take? Who will you touch? Who will you impact and who will you help along the way? What lamps will you light? You can’t know the answers to these questions. But you must know that what you do in each moment is an opportunity to spread light and hope. Every time you help another you will bring hope to the world.

As you go forward from here, you will find so many chances to benefit your fellow men and women by taking what you have gained from your experiences and hard work as a student, and lighting flames wherever you pass by. I encourage you to not hesitate to light a lantern because you think it will not make much difference. The mighty Columbia River begins with a drop of rain, a melting snow flake, and builds to this magnificent wonder that lights our cities and irrigates the fields that grows the crops that feed the world.

And even though you have accomplished a great deal by getting to this incredibly important point in your life, I urge you not to wait for opportunities to come your way, but go out and find them. Seek them out. Get up early, stay up late, leave no stone unturned in your search for success and opportunities.

You may hear one person bemoaning as they sit waiting for that special opportunity to show up, “Man I never get a break. I am so unlucky.” And you can hear the opposite kind of person, if you can slow them down for a minute, saying, “Man, it seems like the harder I work the luckier I get!” You see—opportunities are not known to make house calls.

With opportunity comes responsibility to others. Now, we know that there at least two kinds of people in the world. Those who walk into a room and say, “Here I am—look at me,” and those who walk into a room and say, “There you are!” Those who recognize, respect and value others know that everyone is someone. They rapidly achieve success in all that they do by genuinely caring for others. They are the people who understand that “when you are all wrapped in yourself you’re in a very small package.”

Our task is to make our lives stepping stones for the success of others. Success in life comes from helping others achieve their goals. Highly effective people learn early in life that when they help others achieve their goals, their own dreams come true.

As you begin this chapter in your life, I’d like to offer you a few words of humble advice:

- Risk more than others think is safe
- Care more than others think is wise
- Dream more than others think is practical
- Expect more than others think is possible

Then while you are setting the world on fire, remember the words of the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, who said, “If you find your life is empty, try putting something into it...such as kindness. Kindness is the language the blind can see and the deaf can hear. You can never do a kindness too soon because you never know when it will be too late.”

You can begin with knowing that your contributions to the world will not be small if you give them that extra bit of care. Light a lamp wherever you go, and illuminate the places and people that you touch. No flame is too small, and every moment is an opportunity.

Thank you.