

KENYON COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS 1991  
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Of all the wonderful affirmations and invitations that flowed in upon my receiving the Pulitzer Prize, speaking to you today is among my most treasured honors. Thank you for inviting me to share ~~a~~ very ~~great~~ day with you.

*your special*

~~And there have been so many kind and generous messages. So many, in-fac~~

So many people have said so many kind and generous things to me in the last month that, oddly enough, it has thrown me off balance. I count on angry readers to keep my equilibrium in check with their regular sorties into the Letters to the Editor section of the newspaper. ~~xxxxxy~~ Occasionally their smart bombs come right through the front door or down the chimney while I draw, scattering my papers and pencils with comments like, "Stop drawing Dan Quayle as a stickman!"

Lately, though, everyone has been telling me that my cartoons are marvelous -- so much so that I've begun thinking, "Gee, you know, maybe these things are a lot more marvelous than I had ever really realized!"

*requiring to get used to all this attention and adulation*

So I'm sitting at my dining room table a couple days after the Pulitzer announcement, reading letter after letter saying, "Your cartoons are ~~xxxxxxx~~ just marvelous," surrounded by flowers and balloons and telegrams... and the phone rings.

"Mr. Borgman?"

"Yes."

"Is this Mr. Jim Borgman?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Borgman, this is Sarah <sup>Perkins</sup> ~~(somebody)~~ at the New York Times. How are you?"

"Oh," I said, "I'm just marvelous! I'm thrilled and I'm overwhelmed and I'm exhausted and I'm just so grateful to all my friends and family and to all my colleagues who've been so supportive to me over the years." I'M JUST OVERWHELMED."

*There was a long pause.*

She said, "That's nice. We were just calling to see if you'd like to take advantage of our special low home delivery rates...."

You maybe wondering what this thing is that you have in your hands.

I wanted to talk to you today about creativity, at a moment when you are about to explore how you will share your creativity with the world. And because the upper limit of my ability to communicate without pictures is somewhere in the neighborhood of 3 1/2 minutes, my first thoughts on the topic <sup>of creativity</sup> were applied to the challenge of how to show drawings to 3,000 people on a bright sunshiny day on a lawn in central Ohio.

Friends helped me brainstorm (an important part of the creative process, in which one chases any little idea wherever it wants to go.)

<sup>OUR</sup> ~~The~~ ideas were colorful:

We could scatter TV monitors throughout the audience.

We could project slides on Samuel Mather while a blimp cast a shadow <sup>from</sup> overhead.

Mimes, or drama majors, could act out the concepts I was presenting.

President Jordan could hire eight aircraft to pull large pictorial banners across the sky, timed and in sequence <sup>with my remarks.</sup>

Several people ~~independently~~ suggested handing you a sheath of drawings to follow along with my thoughts and, (creatively, I think), I let each one of them believe it was their own idea-(part of the key to being creative is nurturing creativity in the people around you) ← ...but in truth I owe this solution to my wife Lynn, who first suggested it.

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One of the first things you will learn as you begin to share with the world\* this beautiful, well-nurtured, wild-hearted, lovingly-developed gift of your creativity is that <sup>the world</sup> they want no part of it. Oh, very few people are dull-witted enough to openly prosecute creativity (and most of them join the sheriff's department in Cincinnati.) Most others, however, learn the delicate art of gently suffocating ideas with phrases like these:

"Let's review that in committee."

"I like it, but will the guy out on the street-like it?"

"This idea is not only good, it's too good! The world just isn't ready for it yet."

"If this idea is as good as it appears to be, why wasn't it done long ago?"

"Let's all think about that and put it on next week's agenda."

"Your idea's got merit, but, trust me, I've been in this business a long time, and it won't fly."

Learning how to silently kill a good idea is Management 101. You will need the full loyalty of your inner warrior to set your ideas into motion, so develop a good relationship with him/her.

You, as Kenyon graduates, have very little choice but to undertake the tougher mission of force-feeding your ideas to a world that, Lord knows, needs them. My experience is that 364 days a year people will TRY TO RUN YOU OUT OF TOWN for doing it, but ~~one~~ on the 365TH day they hand you the Pulitzer Prize, as if to say, "Don't expect us to like it, but just keep doing it." The world needs you, <sup>what you're doing,</sup>

and they (we) know we need you. Just don't expect to be thanked very often.

BOOKLET →

~~This is~~ <sup>legitimate</sup> the second-last handout of your college career.

The question I'm most often asked is, "Where do you get your ideas?" Let me say right up front that I haven't the foggiest. But I do know a lot about the conditions under which they come to me.

The little guy hiding up there in the corner is an Idea. The other character, searching under every paperweight and coffee cup, is, of course, you.) I always draw Ideas wearing party hats, because that's how it feels each day when I get my idea for a cartoon. The rest of the process is just drawing.

(I apologize if these drawings aren't politically correct, but inasmuch as they are autobiographical, the figures do tend to be indiscriminately-hairy anthropomorphic humanoids.)

INSIDE NOW,.... :

Usually I sense there are hundreds of ideas out there...

Rare day....

More often I panic late into the day...

Contrary to popular opinion.....

Herculean task.....

Squeeze the most out of a tiny idea....

Basically sound, but unexciting....

Idea draws itself.....

Ideas have small voices and cannot be heard above much commotion..

and to illustrate this concept I like to turn to Winnie the Pooh, who, you may remember, is a Bear of very little Brain, but who is quite good at making up ~~XXXXXX~~ whimsical songs. Coming up with a song "isn't easy", ~~says~~ <sup>with his friend Piglet</sup> Pooh ~~to~~ ~~himself~~ "because poetry and hums aren't things which you get, they're things that get you. And all you can do is to go where they can find you."

And while I'm quoting Pooh, his method for catching a heffalump, is similar to the way we go about hunting for ideas:

You dig a Very Deep Pit. The best place ~~is~~ <sup>with his friend Piglet</sup> to do this is somewhere where a heffalump would be, just before he fell into it, only about a foot farther on.

Be willing to give birth to your ideas. Unlike our human gestation cycle, birth of an idea can be held back. We are able to block our creativity. Be aware that this is done at your own peril. It takes tremendous energy to carry an idea beyond its natural gestation-period. Though birthing these babies can be an excruciating process, you will find that it is ultimately easier than holding them back.

It takes guts to put an idea out into the world where people can see it. I wish you courage.

A lot of us never take the time to actually read our own owner's manual. What does it take to maintain your vehicle? What do you have to do to remain a creative individual? I have a very specific list of maintenance behaviors:

I must be reading for pleasure, as well as for my work.

I must be engaged with the world, feeding myself new experiences and images.

I must be recording all the tiny shards of ideas that come to me, dutifully, and with discipline, in my sketchbook.

I must let my fields lay fallow, respecting the soil's need to replenish itself.

I must send my spirit on walks in both the sun and the rain.

I must nurture a playful state of mind.

*I must put myself in front of blank paper more often than I'd care to.*

If my engine starts knocking I have ways of ~~approaching~~ <sup>looking for</sup> the problem.-- the clues are almost always on my maintenance list. What are the items on your regular maintenance list? What are the conditions under which you can do your best work?

*In my college years I got away with a lot. Your machine will require finer tuning as the years go by.*  
For most of us it is rare, but it is a moment of great joy and wonder when we truly break new ground.

*This is a picture of today's graduation.*

Today is a celebration of your talent and creativity and hard work. Everyone here is knocked out by ~~xxxx~~ what you do. We promise to keep supporting you in the work you go on to do.

Your parents have given you the greatest gift you will ever receive by sending you to this good, good ~~xxxxxx~~ college. You really have no idea how far we will all go to support you in being all you can be.

Be it with integrity. Be it authentically. Be it playfully. Be it in the spirit of giving, for it is in giving that we receive.

*Congratulations and  
God bless you.*