

I AM HUMBLLED AND HONORED TO ACCEPT THIS GOLDEN ALUMNI AWARD FROM MY CHERISHED ALMA MATER, NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY.

AND I AM PLEASED, ON BEHALF OF MY FELLOW HONOREES FROM THE 70S, TO REPRESENT THIS DECADE OF ALMOST 40 YEARS AGO.

THE SEVENTIES WERE A TIME OF POLITICAL UNREST—UNLIKE TODAY, RIGHT?

WE SAW THE RISE OF FEMINISM AND ENVIRONMENTALISM AND THE CONTINUATION OF DR. KING’S STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES RESIGNED IN DISGRACE AFTER NEWS OF THE WATERGATE SCANDAL SWEEPED THROUGH THE COUNTRY.

AN OIL CRISIS IMMOBILIZED GAS STATION LINES AND RATIONING BECAME A REALITY IN MUCH OF THE WORLD.

WE WITHDREW FROM “A MILITARY CONFLICT” IN VIETNAM.

APOLLO 13 ASTRONAUTS RADIOED “HOUSTON WE HAVE A PROBLEM,” DURING AN ABORTED MOON MISSION.

WE SAW TREMENDOUS STRIDES IN TECHNOLOGY: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MICROPROCESSOR, THE FIRST SUPERCOMPUTER, PERSONAL COMPUTERS, POCKET CALCULATORS, VIDEO GAMES, FIBER OPTICS, MICROWAVE OVENS AND VCRS.

“THE GODFATHER” FASCINATED MOVIE AUDIENCES, AND ARCHIE BUNKER REIGNED SUPREME ON THE TV AS THE COUNTRY’S MOST FAMOUS BIGOT.

AND DON’T GET ME STARTED ON FASHION!

WHO CAN FORGET HOT PANTS, PLATFORM SHOES AND POLYESTER LEISURE SUITS?

DISCO MUSIC? ENOUGH SAID.

TODAY, ALMOST 40 YEARS LATER—WITH THE HELP OF TECHNOLOGY—THE PACE OF LIFE SEEMS FASTER. WE’RE STILL WAGING POLITICAL BATTLES, BUT HOPEFULLY, WITH A RENEWED RESPECT FOR CIVIL DISCOURSE.

WE’RE STILL WEARING ECCENTRIC CLOTHES, MANAGING OIL CRISES, EXPLORING OUTER SPACE, AND SADLY, ENGAGING IN YET, ANOTHER “MILITARY CONFLICT.”

BUT ONE THING THAT THANKFULLY HASN’T CHANGED IN FORTY YEARS IS THAT A GOOD, QUALITY EDUCATION IS STILL THE KEY TO A BETTER FUTURE, A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE.

WE ARE ETERNALLY GRATEFUL TO NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY FOR THE EDUCATION WE RECEIVED IN THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES.

MY TWO DEGREES IN ENGLISH AND SECONDARY PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION OPENED DOORS FOR ME THROUGHOUT MY LIFE.

I WOULDN'T BE WHERE I AM TODAY, AT THE PINNACLE OF A LONG CAREER AS A COLLEGE PRESIDENT, WITHOUT THE TREMENDOUS FOUNDATION I RECEIVED AT NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY.

I'M SURE THAT ALL OF THE DISTINGUISHED HONOREES HERE TONIGHT—CHOSEN FROM AMONG THOUSANDS OF OTHER GRADUATES OF THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES—HAVE RECEIVED NUMEROUS AWARDS AND ACCOLADES IN THE LAST 50 YEARS.

UNTIL TONIGHT, I THOUGHT I HAD RECEIVED THE HIGHEST HONORS THAT ONE COULD EXPECT TO ACHIEVE IN A THIRTY-SIX YEAR CAREER IN EDUCATION.

BUT I WAS WRONG. WHEN A UNIVERSITY ACKNOWLEDGES ITS GRADUATES, IT IS A VERY GENEROUS GESTURE, INDEED.

RECOGNITION BY ONE'S ALMA MATER CLEARLY IS A TWO-WAY VALIDATION.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ARE KNOWN BY THE SUCCESS OF THEIR GRADUATES AND THE CONTRIBUTIONS THESE GRADUATES MAKE TO CREATE A BETTER SOCIETY.

BUT AS NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY HAS EXPRESSED ITS PRIDE OF US—WE ARE EXTRAORDINARILY PROUD TO BE GRADUATES OF NIU, TOO.

WE ARE PROUD OF THE WAY NIU RESPONDED WITH SENSITIVITY, CARING AND LOVE IN THE FACE OF THE MOST MONUMENTAL TRAGEDY TO BEFALL AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO PRESIDENT JOHN PETERS FOR PROVIDING THE LEADERSHIP THAT MADE ALL OF US PROUD, FROM WHATEVER QUARTERS WE WERE IN THE WORLD AT THAT MOMENT IN TIME.

WE BONDED TOGETHER AS NIU ALUMNI TO RESPOND TO THE NEED OF THE FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF THE STUDENTS WHO'S LIVES WERE CUT SHORT IN AN INSTANT.

WE BONDED TOGETHER TO RESPOND TO THE NEED OF THE FACULTY AND STAFF AND GREATER COMMUNITY WHO WERE LEFT TO FIND MEANING IN THAT SENSELESS ACTION.

CERTAINLY THIS GALA CELEBRATION TONIGHT IS A TRIBUTE, NOT ONLY TO THE ACADEMIC STRENGTH OF THIS DYNAMIC INSTITUTION, BUT TO THE COURAGEOUS SPIRIT AND FORTITUDE OF NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, TOO.

ON BEHALF OF MY FELLOW HONOREES FROM THE 1970S, I SALUTE YOU, THE FACULTY, STAFF, ADMINISTRATION AND STUDENTS OF NIU. YOU ARE THE HEART OF THIS GREAT INSTITUTION.

THANK YOU PRESIDENT JOHN PETERS;

- DEAN CHRISTOPHER MCCORD OF THE COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES;
- PROFESSOR PHIL EUBANKS, CHAIR OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT;
- DR. TIM RYAN, MY HOST FOR THIS EVENING;
- AND THE GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY SELECTION COMMITTEE,

FOR ACKNOWLEDGING AND EMBRACING YOUR ALUMS WITH THIS PRESTIGIOUS RECOGNITION.

BELIEVE ME, WE HAVE TRIED TO MAKE YOU PROUD. AND, AS I CLOSE, I PARAPHRASE THE WORDS OF RALPH WALDO EMERSON:

- WE HAVE TRIED TO WIN THE RESPECT OF INTELLIGENT PEOPLE.
- WE HAVE GAINED AN APPRECIATION FOR HONEST CRITICISM.
- WE HAVE ENDURED THE BETRAYAL OF FALSE FRIENDS.
- WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO FIND THE BEST IN OTHERS.
- WE HAVE MADE A COMMITMENT TO LEAVE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE.

THANK YOU, NIU, FOR VALIDATING OUR EFFORTS.

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