

Quincy College
Commencement Address Spring 2011
Given by Henry Rubin

Mayor Koch, President Tsfarras, Distinguished guests, Graduates, friends and family,

Thank you for giving me the honor of addressing you today. I have been to many, many commencements but this is my first opportunity to deliver a commencement speech. At first I considered several genres: comedic, profound, or political etc. And then I thought of the commencement address given by my mentor at UC Santa Cruz in 1988. My mentor, the prominent sociologist, G. William Domhoff, predicted the end of the Cold War in his address. My parents and, I suspect, the rest of the audience thought he was crazy; but sure enough in 1989 the Berlin Wall tumbled and we entered a new socio-political era. Thinking back on Domhoff's keen insight, it prompted me to try and pull something together about the Middle-Eastern spring or the death of Osama bin Laden and what we can expect next in socio-political terms, but I don't think my insights would be quite as startling as his.

The more I thought about this memory of my graduation, the more I was reminded of the mentoring relationship I had with Bill and how grateful I still am to him. Bill was a highly regarded political sociologist whose books on American power elites *Who Rules America* and the *Bohemian Grove* defined the field for 40 years. This pre-eminent scholar taught me in a small first year seminar. Together, in that intimate setting, we read some of the classics of Western Civilization. Bill

heard my somewhat naïve, but impassioned first analyses of American society and saw my *potential*. He said that he thought I could be a scholar and a teacher.

It was he who suggested I try this professorial thing in the first place. And I suppose it is thanks to Bill that I stand before you. He gave me the chance to TA a large lecture course and encouraged me to teach a college course on the sociology of sport as my senior project.

After my time with him at Santa Cruz I went in search of academic success in some of the biggest factories of higher education on the East coast. I spent time at Harvard, Yale, Tufts, Brandeis. While this experience was valuable it was not fulfilling in the way I'd hoped.

By the time I found Quincy College, I'd had enough of the large, hard impersonal research institutions. Perhaps these institutions were different in an earlier era, or perhaps I was more constitutionally suited to teaching than research. But by the time I had finished graduate school, it was clear to me that any future I had at those institutions would mean giving up my passion for teaching.

After more than ten years of searching for my niche in higher education, I considered leaving academia entirely, but then I found Quincy College and I was reminded of a now-popular expression that reads "Never let the odds stop you from doing something you know in your heart you were meant to do."

I had been committed to this idea of myself as a teacher, but I had no classroom to teach in until I came to QC. I knew this is a place where I could mentor

students in the way that I was taught by Bill. I feel so lucky that I now have a context for teaching in a way that is aligned with my own moral sense.

My day-to-day experiences in the classroom at QC have convinced me of the importance of building this kind of teaching and learning relationship between Professor and student. Every day I speak to my colleagues, the faculty of QC, and they tell me the same. We are all as a group, I think, committed to identifying the *potential within our students* and helping them flourish. That is what makes Quincy College such a unique educational institution. And I think it is probably one reason why you are standing here today.

Every year, commencement reminds us of why we teach. As mentors, we all feel pride in your achievements. I truly believe that the difference between students who finish their degree and students who don't finish is whether they have a mentor and a community of support – family, friends, partners, spouses, children, parents, etc -- all pitching in to make it possible for them to complete their degree. I feel good that the work I do helps to identify and cultivate your dreams.

Today, we celebrate your accomplishments! I have known some of you directly and others I recognize from the halls. As a member of the faculty, I believe I can speak for all of us when I say how proud we are this moment of you. We are happy to see how much you've accomplished and we know that even greater things are on the horizon for you. We'd like to claim that we are somewhat responsible

for your success. But the truth is, if we are good mentors we merely watch over you, like angels whispering over individual blades of grass “grow” “grow”.

This is just the beginning!! We’re so excited to send you out and on to your next challenge. To the students graduating today, I hope you’ll stay in touch with your mentor the way I managed to stay in touch with Bill. We can’t wait to see what you do next. I wish you, the Quincy College class of 2011, the greatest of success in all your future endeavors.