

## Karen's Commencement Address

**D**uring May, you will probably attend a graduation ceremony or two. Therefore it is timely to reprint my commencement address given at a Dallas high school graduation last year. While this presentation was meant for the graduating seniors and their families, I think you will gain from my message as well:

Welcome! You're almost out of here. You've heard a ton of speeches by this time between the ring ceremony and baccalaureate, and today, you're beyond listening to more speeches. That's why this won't be a "real" speech. What I'm going to do is share three letters that will have meaning for all of us.

The first letter is directed to the parents of our graduating seniors. Parents, you may or may not identify with this scenario. My daughter, Courtney Reisman, graduated from this incredible school three years ago. For the last two years of her high school experience, she developed a severe allergy ... toward her father and me. We'd end up in the same room and she'd wheeze, sneeze, and leave. Really! College did not come soon enough. Off she went to Drew University, a small liberal arts college in northern New Jersey — a short train ride from Manhattan.

Here's my first letter, written by Courtney to me, around Thanksgiving of her first year in college, after she was at Drew University for a couple of months. Actually, it's a wonderful card. The front says, "Thank you, Mom." The inside reads, "I bet you think I only remember the bad stuff, but you're wrong. I remember the 62,000 little things you've done throughout my whole life. I love you."

Courtney just completed her third successful year at Drew University. She can't wait for her senior year, and that allergy is history. So, parents, this day is the beginning of a great journey for you as your kids take on more responsibility and you empower them to do so.

My second letter is for you, graduating seniors. Many of you know that my family is related to Albert Einstein, that guy with the really bad hair. He was a cousin to my grandmother, and they were also great friends. They had a lifelong correspondence, and this letter has significance for you. Einstein, sitting at his desk in Princeton, N.J., writes this letter to my grandmother who's living in South America. He writes this letter just a few years before his death:

Dear Lina,

I muddle by, but in no way beyond moderation. I don't do much work anymore. I do not accomplish much and I must be satisfied with it. About politics, to be sure I still get dutifully angry but I do not bat with my wings anymore, but ruffle only the feathers.

I now wish you from the bottom of my heart quiet and more careless days in the smaller house. You will probably be surprised that you didn't arrange it that way sooner. One does not jump however so easily out of deeply rooted habits — not even you.

Heartfelt greetings,  
Your Albert\*

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Reisman, author of "The Naked Truth About Giving Great Speeches," teaches organizations how to increase productivity by communicating effectively. She has been a visiting faculty presenter at The Pankey Institute, a speaker at dental meetings, and president of Speak for Yourself® for 14 years. To buy Reisman's book or purchase her other CDs, e-mail her at [karen@SpeakForYourself.com](mailto:karen@SpeakForYourself.com). Reach Reisman at [www.SpeakForYourself.com](http://www.SpeakForYourself.com).



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As you leave Shelton and move on in your lives (and out of your own deeply rooted habits), you'll end up in situations that will make you happy, challenges that will make you crazy, and everything in between. And as you deal with all of your ups and downs, I hope you figure out when to bat with your wings, when to just ruffle your feathers, and when to take no action at all and just sit on your perch to mull it all over.

Finally, my last letter is a reminder to all of us here today — seniors, parents, grandparents, faculty, siblings of the graduates, family friends, the Shelton board, stepfamilies, and administrators. My father-in-law, Dr. David Reisman, died in February. He had a distinguished career as a physician in Dallas for around 50 years. Several days after his death, we received this letter from one of his former patients. She writes:

To the members of the Reisman family,

Dr. Reisman saved my life in 1983. Because of his knowledge and skill, I lived to see my two youngest children graduate from high school.

...

She goes on to list all of the things she accomplished since her illness. She concludes with:

When Dr. Reisman checked me out of the hospital after my surgery, he smiled broadly and told me I was cured, to go home and enjoy life, and to try not to get hit by a bus. With a grateful heart, I've tried to do just that.

As we all leave Shelton today to continue on our respective journeys, let's go home and enjoy life, and, please, let's try not to get hit by a bus!

Thank you. ■

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