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My Last Lecture

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Duty Is Joy

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When I was an undergraduate at the University of Arkansas, an acquaintance gave me an anthology of essays from the world's prominent philosophers. I occasionally read one of the essays. One day I came across a short essay from the writings of the Indian Brahmin philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore, who declared:

I slept and dreamed that life was joy.

I awoke and found that life was duty.

I acted and, behold -- duty is joy.

I shrugged my shoulders and thought to myself, "Yeah, sure!"

A decade later Ouida and I were working on our doctoral degrees at the University of Iowa, and we sublet an apartment for the summer. Taped to the refrigerator by the previous occupant was that exact quote. I read it every day, and by the end of the summer I said to myself, "Oh, I get it"—life is duty; so get to work and stop worrying about the joy. I looked for people who seemed to have fulfilled their duty and found four role models, all at Ouachita.

Charles Wesley was a graduate assistant in the last year of his master's work when I arrived at the University of Arkansas as a freshman. He held the reputation as the smartest student in the department and one of the best in recent memory. He left Fayetteville at the end of that year and took a job on the faculty at Ouachita, which is where I found him again when I joined the faculty some years later. Charles was not only

extremely smart but also he had acquired a reputation as the campus intellectual. In addition, he was a fine performer on the bassoon, a good composer, an outstanding teacher and scholar, and a mentor to the best and brightest students on campus—everything that I thought a faculty member should be. I chose as my first duty to become a good teacher and faculty member and to follow the example of Charles Wesley to get there.

I found another model on the faculty of the School of Music, Francis McBeth. Mac was a professor that all of the music students loved. He knew his stuff, he was entertaining and clever, he demanded that the students come up to his expectations, and he would not take no for an answer. I was most interested in the fact that he had created for himself a very important and visible career outside of his life as a faculty member. He became a leader in the field of instrumental music and is known today as one of the outstanding composers and conductors of band music. Mac had arranged with the administration a four-day teaching week, and every Friday he went out of town to conduct performances of his own compositions and conduct band clinics.. He traveled throughout the United States and even to Europe, Asia, and South America. Mac was a role model for both students and faculty, and from him I learned it is important to be active in the profession and to become important outside of Ouachita.

As my third role model, I decided on Joe Nix, professor of chemistry and the creative mind behind the first research project that connected Ouachita to the world of research universities. Joe's water research project had outside funding, employed a staff, involved professors and students, published results, held seminars—all those activities that should engage a real university. Joe was a great role model for creative and

innovative thinking that involved teaching, mentoring students and colleagues, and that resulted in practical applications of the research results.

The fourth person from whom I learned so much is my wife, Ouida. She was one of the first people I met at Ouachita when I came for the interview, because the dean asked her and two others to take me to lunch. All three were students at the time, and, I suppose, were to give the student perspective on whether to hire me. We have been married for 34 years this summer.

Ouida helped me put the package together and to create a world view that has allowed me whatever successes I have enjoyed and to become a happy and secure person. She taught me that it is okay to have emotional reactions as well as intellectual ones. She civilized me and smoothed off a lot of the rough edges. She made me think by constantly asking what I call Ouida questions, and her sense of duty and attempts to find joy in life influenced me to do the same. She encouraged me to develop my skills as a teacher and as a scholar. She helped me to become a person by encouraging my good qualities and trying to negate the lesser qualities. It's a work in progress! Our friendship and love has been the greatest joy in my life.

So I identified as my duties teaching, scholarship, service to the profession, and reforming my character. Since this is my **LAST** lecture, and I get to decide on the contents, fortunately I don't have to tell in what ways I have fulfilled or failed to fulfill my duties. Instead I want to tell you about the joys I have received.

As a teacher I have been blessed with truly wonderful students: Among the best are Bryant Moxley, my first student with a nearly perfect 4.0 GPA (he made one B) and now chairman of the music department at Bluefield College in Virginia; Andrew

Granade, the hardest working student I ever had. Andrew began study of the piano with me in the seventh grade. Neither his mother nor I thought he was going to survive that first year, but Andrew became a Pew Scholar and received a Pew Fellowship, is now assistant professor of musicology at the University of Missouri Kansas City and preparing his first book for publication. Steven Granade began piano with me in the eighth grade and continued throughout the four years of his undergraduate study in physics at Ouachita. He now holds a Ph.D. from Duke and is employed as a physicist. After his last piano lesson, I said as he prepared to depart “we have worked together for a long time and it has been one of the great joys of my life.” Steven extended his hand for me to shake, but I suggested that a hug was more appropriate for such an important occasion, and so he submitted to the hug. But as he withdrew I noted a tear rolling down from his eye.

It was a joy to teach many of the other children of OBU faculty that I watched grow up in Arkadelphia: Terri Jeffers, smart and beautiful like her mother; Gene Trantham; Pam Estes; Kimberly Wright; and Tad Hardin. I have stayed long enough now to teach the children of former students and alumni such as all three of the boys of the Greenwich family, sons of Alana Ichter who was a student herself when I first came to Ouachita. It has been a special joy to have my colleagues as students: Ray Granade who took both semesters of Music Literature; Herman Sandford took Music Literature, American Music, Twentieth Century Music; and Susan Wink has studied piano with me for 12 years. I find their interest in what I do to be a constant source of inspiration.

I found joy in the silly things students do: the student who innocently told me on a test that Mimi, the lead female character in Puccini’s opera *La Bohème* died of

alcoholism, because I had told the class that she died of consumption. And I treasure the note from a student who told me that she admired my passion for music and hoped that one day she would find something in life to be so passionate about.

Professionally, I thought it was my duty to teach young piano students outside Ouachita and conduct seminars and judge piano compositions, fortunately resulting in an event that has brought me joy for 30 years. I was judging a piano festival for seventh and eighth grade level students. A young girl came in to play one of those pieces that ends in an arpeggio covering the entire keyboard, hand over hand. She began playing beautifully, but as she played she became more flustered, got red in the face, and breathed loudly. Finally, she came to the concluding arpeggio, crossed hand over hand, played the final note, and hit the wrong note. She said in a clearly audible voice, “Oh, I miss that son-of-a-bitch every time!” This story always brings to mind Carl Goodson, because he laughed louder than anyone the first time I told it in the coffee lounge, and repeatedly asked to hear it again.

For years, I taught two sisters who had little interest in piano but were there because their mother made them come to lessons. Every week after the lessons I would tell Ouida, I can't teach them any longer--we are wasting our time. But she assured me week after week, those girls need you not as a piano teacher but as a friend and supporter. One day the younger sister had a red welt across the back of her hand; so I asked what caused it. With tears in her eyes she replied, “Mother hit me with an umbrella.” I was horrified. From these kinds of experiences I learned that to teach is much more than conveying information, that I could be a positive influence, role model, mentor, cheerleader, surrogate parent, and often counselor.

I also found it my duty to attend performances of music as often as possible. I used to keep a journal of the performances I heard but finally gave it up. I wish now I had a list of the number of concerts I attended, who performed, and the music performed. Many of these performances were clearly a duty, but most were sheer joy. I heard Alicia de la Rocha, the great Spanish pianist, one night in New York when she had a severe cold. She played through the printed program of Mozart pieces, blowing her nose between every movement. And her playing was surprisingly mediocre. After two hours of that, she came out to make it up to the audience by playing 45 minutes of encores from her Spanish repertory, music that came from her soul. It was sheer joy!

There was the Jewish pianist who had a sudden memory lapse in his piano concert and could not continue. He said in a loud voice, "Oh Jesus!", immediately turned to the audience and compounded the problem with "Please excuse me. I didn't mean to say Jesus. I meant to say shit." You can imagine the joy that an undergraduate got from that experience! I learned two things: never make a comment audible to the audience in a performance and that extemporaneous speaking is extremely dangerous.

Scholarship has been and continues to be one of the most important duties to me, resulting in many of the greatest joys and satisfactions in my life. I am deeply grateful to Ouachita for allowing and supporting that scholarship. I could never have accomplished many of my goals for scholarship had the university not made time for research and writing financially possible. I also would never have developed the skills required for scholarship nor the personal qualities of a faculty member who is at the least engaged professionally and personally happy. I think that I could easily serve as the poster boy for faculty development, something which I am passionate about.

No boy from the hills of northern Arkansas could possibly have been any less sophisticated nor more innocent than I was when the university put me out into the world with two degrees. I learned a great deal from earning a doctorate, but I learned what to do with it through the many experiences I gained through faculty development. I received a Summer Sabbatical in 1984 which allowed Ouida and me to live in New York City for the summer. I traveled to Paris twice on Summer Sabbaticals for research that led to a book on the composer Francis Poulenc. The first time Ouida joined me for a couple of weeks, and we were invited to the home of a wealthy and sophisticated French family we had met through Rotary. Can you just see the two of us traveling out to the suburbs of Paris in a limousine to a gated estate for dinner at 9:00 P.M. with lawyers, jewelers, industrialists, a medical doctor. Four of us spoke English, and Ouida and I were two of the four. We were incredibly intimidated, but it was a unique experience which if nothing else taught us that we could survive and live to tell the tale.

If that dinner taught me grace under pressure, my colloquium report on my summer study sealed the lesson. Faculty colloquium was held in the faculty lounge in those days, a small crowded room filled with people. I was well into the report on my discoveries about Poulenc, when the door of the faculty lounge opened and in walked one of our colleagues with her lunch from the grill on one of those wretched flimsy paper plates. Her hamburger fell from the plate. One-half the bun rolled in one direction and the other half in the other with the meat paddy rolling across the floor in the middle of the two. The pickles, mayonnaise, and lettuce just sat there in the floor in a great glob! Everyone in the room, including the president, vice president and about 40 faculty members, heard the expletive she uttered. I repeated over and over to myself, just keep

going and don't look at Auffenberg, don't look at Auffenberg. All of us learned a great deal that day about grace under pressure.

I assure you that I was in a much better position for the second trip to France, when Poulenc's niece invited me to come down to what had been the composer's country house in the Loire valley, where I found the other guests were Sidney Buckland, the very famous English music historian, and Myriam Chiménes, France's authority on the music of Debussy. Picture this Arkansas boy at lunch, conversing in French with that company in Poulenc's house overlooking the most beautiful vineyards in the valley. Talk about joy! I thought I had died and gone to music history heaven.

Ouachita's faculty development program continues to support my research on Horowitz and the China seminar program at Peking University. The latest Research Grant allowed me to travel to Yale University for two weeks of research. I will travel in the company of seven colleagues to China again in May for the faculty seminar. Through these seminars I have the privilege of participating in interdisciplinary seminars on all kinds of topics, watching my colleagues doing what they do best, enjoying their company, and creating friendships that continue to be sources of great support and joy for me. The seminar has been held each year since 1999 (except for the year of the SARS epidemic) and about 35 Ouachita faculty have participated. I am also very grateful to Tom Greer for getting me involved in his passion for all things China and for allowing me to remain involved.

I have selected only a few of the many opportunities I have been given through the faculty development program, but from this program and experiences have come more articles than I can count, two books, editing two music journals, travel on three

continents, living in Paris and New York, enjoying the company of my colleagues, lifelong friendships, developing whatever level of sophistication I have, self assurance, pride in my work, knowledge, an understanding of the wider world—all of which I know have made me a much better teacher, mentor, colleague, friend, and a more secure and happy person. This is what faculty development is all about.

I know that one of my greatest contributions to the profession and to Ouachita was the enormous success in hiring David Allen Wehr at Ouachita. When Bill Trantham retired in 1994, I convinced the administration to replace him with an artist-in-residence. We were fortunate enough to hire David, whose performance skills, outstanding teaching, ability to recruit and retain students, professionalism, and connections to the wide world of music are still making contributions to our music program. David started teaching in the fall of 1994 with six poor, bedraggled piano majors and increased the number and quality to a total of 24 majors at one time. He invited his friends to come to campus, and often they performed at a fraction of their normal fees, increasing our awareness of what is going on the piano world. He encouraged us to bring in string players, the Arkansas Symphony with which he performed a concerto, and to organize faculty recitals around themes, mostly anniversaries of famous composers. David created a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm in the Music Division and brought many area residents to the campus. Any time he played, the recital hall was full. In addition, David included in his biography wherever it appeared that he was artist-in-residence at Ouachita, publicity worth a fortune. When he accepted the position, I said, “well, let’s enjoy whatever time David is here which will probably be three years.” He remained for eight years, maintains his ties with friends, and returns to perform on occasion.

I cannot enumerate the joys of my life without discussing my colleagues. I have learned something useful, found great support, much laughter, some tears, and a deep appreciation for all of you. Where else except at Ouachita would a colleague like Johnny Wink write a poem on the occasion of my finally getting the red sports car I so deserve; where Susan Wink declares to this day that I saved her life on a trip home from China; where Lavell Cole told stories while we rode over to Old Washington with Tom Greer driving the van while looking everywhere except at the road; where Tom Auffenberg has already written his vision for the end of my days; where Virginia Queen took it as her duty to criticize my dress, performances, teaching, conduct, character. In other words, I somehow brought out Virginia's mother instincts, and she took it upon herself to raise me. But we became the best of friends, and there is no one for whom I have more admiration.

Joe Jeffers and Ray Granade have been my friends and supporters for 35 years. Glen Good came the same year I did; so we have always been colleagues, as have Alex and Bill Downs; Tom Greer is my friend, confidant, confessor, and fellow China hand. Raouf Halaby is a friend, supporter, and fellow traveler who used to be my room mate in the good old days of faculty retreats. Hal Bass and Tom Auffenberg are dependable sources for advice and the institution's memories; the faculty who were once upon a time my students such as Bryan DeBusk, Terry DeWitt, Sim Flora, Mary Worthen, and Jay Curlin; Scott Holsclaw whose balance of discipline and creativity are a constant inspiration; and Randall Wight who is the current campus intellectual.

Then there are all of my young colleagues from whom I continue to learn new things every day, who give me hope for the future, and in whom I see Auffenberg's next

generation of visions: Larry, Trey, Marty, Bryan McKinney, Margo Turner, Cindy Viala, Krista Peppers. My hope for you is that you enjoy the journey half as much as I have.

Now it sounds as if I am preparing either to retire or to fulfill Tom's vision and take my leave of this world (no, Charlie, neither will be happening anytime soon.). Raouf in his recent faculty colloquium presentation referred to these as "autumn years." If they are, bring them on. I had always thought that in later life the options became fewer, that we were left with less to choose from, would be settled and comfortable with our duty done and our joys in the past. I now find exactly the opposite. Never in my life have I had so many choices to decide among. Many of you heard the colloquium presentation on my latest research interest, Vladimir Horowitz, with projects there to carry me into my second century. I am also running for a county office, have taken a new Rotary Club office, am applying for a Rotary exchange program, will travel to China in May and Russia in July, will teach the Honors section of Liberal Arts in the fall, have accepted an offer to give a series of lectures on Poulenc and French music in Missouri next October, and perform a Poulenc four-hand sonata with Ouida in September. In a recent conversation with a member of the administration I expressed the opinion that I am a relatively optimistic person. His reply was that he has noted I have become a much more optimistic person over the years. I believe that is true. Yes, I have had a great many disappointments and sorrows in my life, but I have been extremely lucky. I discovered very early in life what I wanted to do with my life, teach, and I found a place that allowed me to do that while helping me to develop as a teacher, scholar, and person. There are two things that I appreciate very much about Ouachita, the freedom we have to develop our gifts rather being required to fulfill a quota and the wonderful people with whom to

share the journey. I have found a philosophy that works for me. When I concentrated on duty, I found joy.