

The secrets of life

How to live, love, and prosper: The best advice and hard-won wisdom from 2011's commencement speakers.

"Don't settle for happiness"

TONI MORRISON
Rutgers University

I HAVE OFTEN wished that Jefferson had not used that phrase, "the pursuit of happiness," as the third right—although I understand in the first draft it was "life, liberty, and the pursuit of property." Of course, I would have been one of those properties one had the right to pursue, so I suppose happiness is an ethical improvement over a life devoted to the acquisition of land, acquisition of resources, acquisition of slaves. Still, I would rather he had written life, liberty, and the pursuit of meaningfulness or integrity or truth.

I know that happiness has been the real, if covert, goal of your labors here. I know that it informs your choice of companions, the profession you will enter, but I urge you, please don't settle for happiness. It's not good enough. Of course, you deserve it. But if that is all you have in mind—happiness—I want to suggest to you that personal success devoid of meaningfulness, free of a steady commitment to social justice, that's more than a barren life, it is a trivial one. It's looking good instead of doing good.

"Be fully present"

SAMANTHA POWER
Occidental College

IN WHATEVER YOU do, try to be present, fully present. As Satchel Paige put it, "Work like you don't need the money. Love like you've never been hurt. Dance like nobody's watching." You gotta be all in. This means leaving your technology behind occasionally and listening to a friend without half of your brain preoccupied by its inner longing for the red light on the BlackBerry. I have gotten some glimpses of modern learning: In many college classes, laptops depict split screens—notes from a class, and then a range of parallel stimulants: NBA playoff statistics on *ESPN.com*, a flight home on Expedia, and a new flirtation on Facebook....I know how good you are at multitasking. You have developed the modern muscle set. I know of what I speak because I, too, am a culprit. You have never seen a U.S. government official and new mother so dexterous in her ability simultaneously to BlackBerry and breast-feed. But I promise you that over time this doesn't cut it. Something or someone loses out.

No more than a surgeon can operate while tweeting can you reach your potential with one ear in, one ear out. You actually have to reacquaint yourself with concentration. We all do. We should all become, as Henry James prescribed, a person "on whom nothing is lost."

"Choose to stand up"

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA
Miami Dade College

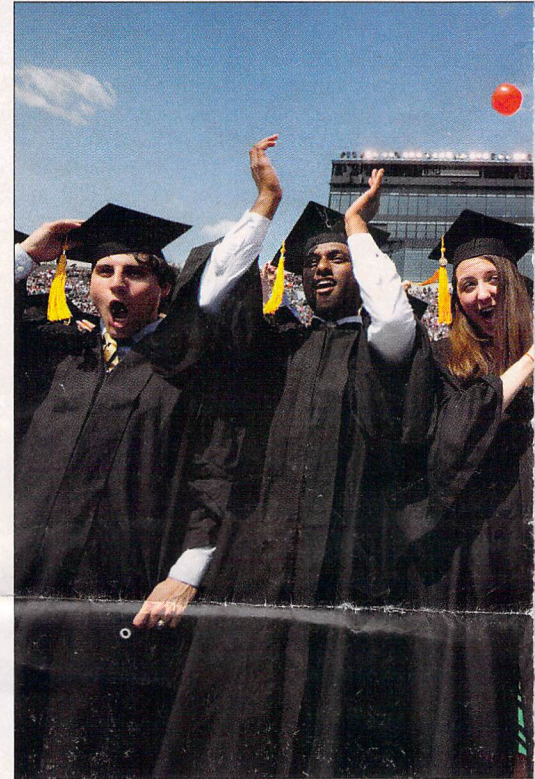
WE'VE GONE THROUGH periods of great economic turmoil, from an economy where most people worked on farms to one where most people worked in factories to now one fueled by information and technology. Through it all, we've persevered. We've adapted. We've prospered. Workers found their voice, and the right to organize for fair wages and safe working conditions. We carried forward.

When waves of Irish and Italian immigrants were derided as criminals and outcasts; when Catholics were discriminated against, or Jews had to succumb to quotas, or Muslims were blamed for society's ills; when blacks were treated as second-class citizens and marriages like my own parents' were illegal in much of the country—we didn't stop. We didn't accept inequality. We fought. We overcame. We carried the dream forward.

We have carried this dream forward through times when our politics seemed broken. This is not the first time where it looked like politicians were going crazy. In heated debates over our founding, some warned independence would doom America to "a scene of bloody discord and desolation for ages." That was the warning about independence. One of our greatest presidents, Thomas Jefferson, was labeled an "infidel" and a "howling atheist" with "fangs." Think about that. Even I haven't gotten that one yet. Lincoln, FDR, they were both vilified in their own times as tyrants, power hungry, bent on destroying democracy. And of course, this state has seen its fair share of tightly contested elections.

And we've made it through those moments. None of it was easy. A lot of it was messy. Sometimes there was violence. Sometimes it took years, even decades, for us to find our way through. But here's the thing. We made it through. We made it

through because in each of those moments, we made a choice. Rather than turn inward and wall off America from the rest of the world, we've chosen to stand up forcefully for the ideals and the rights we believe are universal for all men and women.



"Real love"

JONATHAN FRANZEN
Kenyon College

LET ME TOSS out the idea that [as] our markets discover and respond to what consumers most want, our technology has become extremely adept at creating products that correspond to our fantasy ideal of an erotic relationship, in which the beloved object asks for nothing and gives everything, instantly, and makes us feel all powerful, and doesn't throw terrible scenes when it's replaced by an even sexier object and is consigned to a drawer.

To speak more generally, the ultimate goal of technology, the telos of techne, is to replace a natural world that's indifferent to our wishes—a world of hurricanes and hardships and breakable hearts, a world of resistance—with a world so responsive

to our wishes as to be, effectively, a mere extension of the self.

Let me suggest, finally, that the world of techno-consumerism is therefore troubled by real love, and that it has no choice but to trouble love in turn.

Its first line of defense is to commodify its enemy. You can all supply your own favorite, most nauseating examples of the commodification of love. Mine include the wedding industry, TV ads that feature

ply itself and whose makers aren't fixated on your liking it. (I'm thinking here of jet engines, laboratory equipment, serious art and literature.)

But if you consider this in human terms, and you imagine a person defined by a desperation to be liked, what do you see? You see a person without integrity, without a center. In more pathological cases, you see a narcissist—a person who can't tolerate the tarnishing of his or her self-image that

not being liked represents, and who therefore either withdraws from human contact or goes to extreme, integrity-sacrificing lengths to be likable.

If you dedicate your existence to being likable, however, and if you adopt whatever cool persona is necessary to make it happen, it suggests that you've despaired of being loved for who you really are. And if you succeed in manipulating other people into liking you, it will be hard not to feel, at some level, contempt for those people, because they've fallen for your shtick. You may find yourself becoming depressed, or alcoholic, or, if you're Donald Trump, running for president (and then quitting).

Consumer technology products would never do anything this unattractive, because they aren't people. They are, however, great

allies and enablers of narcissism. Alongside their built-in eagerness to be liked is a built-in eagerness to reflect well on us. Our lives look a lot more interesting when they're filtered through the sexy Facebook interface. We star in our own movies, we photograph ourselves incessantly, we click the mouse and a machine confirms our sense of mastery.

And, since our technology is really just an extension of ourselves, we don't have to have contempt for its manipulability in the way we might with actual people. It's all one big endless loop. We like the mirror and the mirror likes us. To friend a person is merely to include the person in our private hall of flattering mirrors....

The simple fact of the matter is that trying to be perfectly likable is incompatible

with loving relationships. Sooner or later, for example, you're going to find yourself in a hideous, screaming fight, and you'll hear coming out of your mouth things that you yourself don't like at all, things that shatter your self-image as a fair, kind, cool, attractive, in-control, funny, likable person. Something realer than likability has come out in you, and suddenly you're having an actual life.

"There will always be evil."

ROBERT GATES

University of Notre Dame

A RECURRING THEME in America for nearly a century has been a tendency to conclude after each war that the fundamental nature of man and the iron realities of nations have changed. That history in all of its unpredictable and tragic dimensions has come to a civilized end. That we will no longer have to confront foreign enemies with size, steel, and strength. Another tendency, repeated over the last century, has been for Americans repeatedly to avert their eyes in the belief that remote events elsewhere in the world need not engage this country—from the assassination of an Austrian archduke in unknown Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1914 to the rise of a group called the Taliban in Afghanistan and their alliance with an organization called al Qaida in the 1990s. The lessons of history tell us we must not diminish our ability or our determination to deal with the threats and challenges on the horizon, because ultimately they will need to be confronted.

If history and religion teach us anything, it is that there will always be evil in the world, people bent on aggression, oppression, satisfying their greed for wealth and power and territory, or determined to impose an ideology based on the subjugation of others and the denial of liberty to men and women. More perhaps than any other secretary of defense, I have been a strong advocate of soft power—of the critical importance of diplomacy and development as fundamental components of our foreign policy and national security. But make no mistake, the ultimate guarantee against the success of aggressors, dictators, and terrorists in the 21st century, as in the 20th, is hard power—the size, strength, and global reach of the United States military.

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Notre Dame 2011: Out into the cruel world

cute young children or the giving of automobiles as Christmas presents, and the particularly grotesque equation of diamond jewelry with everlasting devotion. The message, in each case, is that if you love somebody you should buy stuff.

A related phenomenon is the transformation, courtesy of Facebook, of the verb "to like" from a state of mind to an action that you perform with your computer mouse, from a feeling to an assertion of consumer choice. And liking, in general, is commercial culture's substitute for loving. The striking thing about all consumer products—and none more so than electronic devices and applications—is that they're designed to be immensely likable. This is, in fact, the definition of a consumer product, in contrast to the product that is sim-