

President James' Words of Wisdom

Congratulations to all of our scholarship recipients!

A sincere thank you to our Scholarship Committee

Tristan Shanley, Marie Brownell, Lindsey Hery, Leo Gagnon, and Cindi Shanley. Although a tremendous guy, Vladimir Putin had no influence on the outcome of this process.

The Committee was tasked with going through many applications (and they are long), determining who to interview, and finally - agreeing on who we would honor today. It was a lot of work and they did a great job as you have witnessed. Thank you!

Cindi has asked me if I would perhaps offer a few words of wisdom to this year's recipients. On the wisdom part I am completely drawing a blank.

And I am also hesitant to give advice. It has been said "Never give advice... a wise person won't need it; a fool won't heed it." So since you're all *wise* beyond your years I will not give any advice.

So what is there to say then?

I thought I'd take this opportunity to dwell on my own personal regrets in life. And let me tell you I have a few.

I don't like it when people say "If I had to do it all over again, I would do it exactly the same, I have no regrets." "Phonies" as far as I'm concerned. Or maybe I'm just jealous.

First a few words for the parents and loved ones here today. I have two daughters ages 12 and 17. One of my regrets is having kids. Just kidding!

They're expensive and to add insult to injury, they're highly critical of my parenting skills.

My 17 year old called me just yesterday. She was cheerful and in a good mood. And then I knew almost immediately what she was calling about – she needed my credit card number.

So parents and loved ones – thank you for your sacrifices, your patience, love and support. You've done a great job.

And now a few words just for the students here today. It's amazing the dumb things our parents say and do isn't it? They're especially dumb about technology. How do they even get through life?

They're embarrassing as well. Especially when they get near one of your friends.

And it's just terrible how much they have held you back. You've accomplished so much but just imagine where you could have been.

They don't trust you and they continue to treat you like you're a child that doesn't know anything, and will take candy from a stranger.

**So now you finally have your clear shot at freedom.
Congratulations!**

Mark Twain said "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to 21 I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

So, let's get onto some of my regrets in life, and for this audience I will focus on the chapter called college year regrets. Just a few of them.

- 1. I wish that I did not drink so much in college. Shortly after I graduated from college I realized what a colossal waste of time drinking and hangover are. I regret how many hangovers it took me to figure that out.**
- 2. I wish that I was better at relationships with women in college. At my job at the dining hall I wore a hair net and lab jacket that said "Dining Services" on it. I wish I knew that that**

was not my best look, and that approaching girls, from out of nowhere, while they were waiting in line for food, and asking them out, was not a good strategy for success. A bit more self-awareness would have been nice.

3. I wish that I had joined a club or played a sport earlier. My senior year I joined the cycling team and it was great. The best thing is that it put me on a schedule – go to classes, ride with the team, eat dinner, go to the library. Wake up, do it again. It helped me with a great source of suffering in life – procrastination.
4. I wish that I had picked better roommates. My last roommate for example was not enrolled in school. He was living in an off-campus apartment just to be near his girlfriend who *was* in school. He was a bad guy which I found out quickly, and flash forward to the present, he now resides in federal prison where he's been for a very long time.
5. I wish I had understood the true nature of community service sooner. At age 28 I had an epiphany. (In my case youth was definitely wasted on the young). Here's the epiphany: community service is not a sacrifice at all. It is rewarding and in so many ways. Service is good for the community and it's good for me. The personal reward for community service is all bundled up in the good deed you are doing. What a perfect win-win situation. When I understood this, it changed a lot of things – community service became more enjoyable and

enriching. I didn't feel like I was missing something else- I was already there. New opportunities to contribute began appearing around every corner. What previously would have appeared as obligations, I now recognized as opportunities. Although being thanked and appreciated is nice, I didn't need it when I understood the true nature of community service. Community service is not a sacrifice at all. In fact it is one of the best things in life.

6. I finally wish that I had discovered my love of humanities sooner. When I found humanities I was out of college several years. Like a bolt of lightning I was struck by what Socrates said to the youth while standing on a stump in Athens's version of Market Square: "The unexamined life is not worth living." I learned how to read and write and enjoy enriching conversations with others using complete sentences strung together to form coherent paragraphs. It was the best.

But to be clear, it is not humanities at the expense of science. Science is not going away, so having a direct understanding of nature is a must. By working hard at math and science I uncovered the delight and power in understanding of the laws of nature and how she worked.

But this understanding of how nature works is difficult to communicate and apply without an appreciation for things like: what do I understand about the past (history), and the present (politics); an appreciation for the ability to read and write

(English), and exposing ourselves to all sorts of ideas (literature, religion and philosophy).

Conclusion

Now that I think about it; maybe having regrets is a good thing. When one experiences or identifies a regret, one learns and changes. One moves onto new regrets, and one learns and one changes. And when you are old, you have accumulated many regrets, but each of those regrets, it perhaps turns out, was coupled with a new step in the right direction, and hopefully a few good stories too.

Good luck to each and every one of you. On behalf of the Portsmouth Rotary Club I wish you all the best.

Thank you.