



Summer Commencement Address

Louisiana Tech University

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by **Angela Kennedy**

Good Morning! What an honor it is to be speaking to you this morning. Garry Trudeau stated, "Commencement speeches were invented largely in the belief that outgoing college students should never be released into the world until they have been properly sedated." This morning I'm going to try very hard to contradict this statement.

I retired from Louisiana Tech in October of last year. In fact, I have spent approximately ½ of my life right here on the Louisiana Tech campus. I attended Tech as an undergraduate and as a graduate student served as faculty here for 19 years. I have so many wonderful college memories as a student and as a faculty. My guess would be that we have shared a some of the same experiences.

As a student I clearly remember the hours I spent studying for exams, researching information, writing papers, listening to lectures, looking for parking places (because of course of I was always late), buying books, selling books, searching for classes, getting advised, registering for classes, walking to class, running to class, attending class, skipping class, visiting with old friends, making new friends, staying up late, having a blast, and most importantly learning. When you started this journey it probably seemed like it would last forever, but just like that, in the blink of an eye, it's over, and here we are.

While you may not spend quite as much time on campus, and in fact you may never register for another course, your education will never end. You will never stop studying, researching, and learning. While I have learned so much in the classroom and from experiential learning, I also must credit a lot of what I have learned to personal experiences, friends and family.

My grandmother was born in 1921. Her name was Eva Pearl Jackson and she was a resident of Lincoln Parish for most of her life. We all called her Granny Jack. I learned so much from my grandmother. She was quite the character. She visited me once while I was teaching class.

Granny Jack heard my voice while in the hall of George T. Madison and entered the classroom in the middle of lecture and introduced herself to my students. She told them you are going to learn a lot here...and life will teach you the rest. There's a lot of truth in what she shared that day and this morning I thought I would share with you a few things I learned from my grandmother.

Granny Jack was very independent and lived alone for 44 years after the passing of my grandfather. She loved people, she loved finding treasures; she was a bit of a hoarder; and she adored a pup named Prissy. Prissy was a great companion to Granny Jack. They had a set schedule of daily activities. One morning Granny Jack let Prissy out for a walk and Prissy failed

to return. After many calls to the neighbors and searching, Prissy was MIA. The neighbors were convinced that this cute companion had been abducted from her yard. This was unsettling to my grandmother. She didn't understand how this could happen. She followed all the best practices for taking care of Prissy. She trusted her neighbors. There were no obvious dangers in her yard. It just didn't add up, but she moved on.

A few months later Granny Jack headed out to run a few errands and her car wouldn't start. After a few attempts this 80 something year old firecracker hopped out of the car and opened the hood. She wiggled a few wires and hopped back in the car with no luck. Again, she hopped out of the car and reached under the hood. As her hand moved toward the engine, their eyes met...YES...I said their eyes met!

Fear stricken, my grandmother froze. She told me she wanted to scream but immediately she reacted and ran into the house and called my Mother. She told my Mother, "come quick Martha Ann, there's a rattle snake wrapped up in the engine of my car." My Mom said, "stay away from the car." Granny Jack replied, "no way I've already called the police." Granny Jack returned to her car and carefully watched the creature nestled up around the motor. She thought "I almost touched it!" She was so close, but it was only when she stepped away did she clearly see the bigger picture. When the police arrived, she said, "see! I told you there was an enormous rattle snake in my car." The officer said, "Ms. Jackson, that's not a rattle snake, that's a python." He probably has enjoyed living in your yard with your chickens and cats." Immediately her mind went back in time to that morning when Prissy didn't return and in that moment, it occurred to her that Prissy and the Python might have crossed paths. The police called the zoo and verified that it was indeed a python. It took two men to pull the 9-foot snake from Granny Jack's car.

I'm certain that my grandmother had never dreamed of coming eye to eye with such a mysterious creature. She told me later that she was indeed terrified of snakes, but she knew she couldn't just let it go. This story reminds me that fear is a state of mind. It's something that only exists because we let it. In life you will face unexpected challenges, things you never dreamed you would encounter. You must use your knowledge and intuitive to guide you in your decision making. Remember that if 50% of the decisions you make aren't the wrong ones you probably aren't making enough decisions. Weigh and mitigate your risk.

J.K Rowling stated, "It is impossible to live without failing at something...unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all...in which case, you fail by default."

Sometimes you may have to step away from the dilemma to gain a sense of understanding and to see the big picture. Remember that in most cases, the target exists somewhere in the middle. So, shoot for perfection and achieve excellence and in doing so you will gain wisdom. You may never hear another Granny Jack tale quite like Prissy and the Python, I can assure you it's genuine.

You may not remember this story or the speaker but keep in mind that today is the only day that today will happen, and it will never happen again...as with any day. So, seize every opportunity that today has to offer and enjoy every second because in a few short minutes you will join a prestigious group of individuals known as Louisiana Tech alumni.

I'm going to leave with a little Dr. Seuss:

You have BRAINS in your head.

You have FEET in your shoes.

You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.

You're on your own.

And you know what you know.

You are the guy or gal who'll decide where to go.

So, Bulldogs go chase those dreams, face those challenges, forget those fears, and live life knowing you will forever be a part of the Louisiana Tech Family.



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