

Community and Caring, Courage and Character

Remarks by John C. Bogle, '47

Chairman Emeritus of the Board of Trustees

Blair Academy Commencement

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It is an extraordinary privilege for me to have the opportunity to speak to the members of Blair Academy's Class of 2010 at your graduation, and at the commencement of your long journey beyond these halls into college and then out into the real world. I'm especially proud to see your classmate and my grandson Chris St. John receive his diploma, along with Bogle Brothers Scholars Asia Bryant, Collin Stahlkrantz, and Neil Zimmermann.

What on earth, you must be asking, can an aging alumnus like me—a proud member of Blair's great Class of 1947—possibly tell you that would help you appreciate even more your years at my beloved Blair, atop these glorious hills on this bright new day? This morning I'd like to remind you, not only of how much Blair has changed, but, of far more importance, how much endures. Change is the easy part. Just contrast Blair today with the Blair that my late twin brother David and I saw as we began our junior year here all those years ago, driving up the hill to this lovely campus in fall, following my older brother William, Class of 1945.

The change is astonishing. Then, Marcial Field was a thicket. Bogle Hall—named in honor of my beloved parents—wasn't even a gleam in my eye. Memorial Hall—which became Timken Library in 2006—had not yet been built. Armstrong-Hipkins Hall didn't exist, nor did Mason and Freeman, nor Annie (Ann Siegel) Hall. And our small gymnasium of all those years ago would remain pretty much the same until its recent rebuilding as our splendid Hardwick Hall. Then, we students were all boys, for coeducation would not return to Blair until 1971.

Yet much has remained the same. Clinton, Insley, the Arch and Ivy, West and Locke remain the core of our campus, now in the process of being graced with a lovely new pedestrian walkway and plaza. While surrounded by all those new buildings, this core, it seems to me, remains the paradigm for the character of our school: iconic, traditional, strong as that granite, stable, lofty, seemingly an eternal monument to the foresight of our founder John I. Blair and his early associates 162 years ago.

But the most important element that has remained unchanged is the character of our school. Yes, we've had our share of ups and downs since I first arrived here to study 65 years ago. But the strong and durable leadership of yore has been reaffirmed—and then some—by our Headmaster Chandler Hardwick (and of course Monie), soon to begin their 22nd year here, the longest serving tenure in Blair history, save only the 29-year headmastership of Dr. John Sharpe, from 1898 to 1927.

We also continue with the same high quality of teachers, dedicated, as I have so often said, to helping you young men and women learn more than you might otherwise would have learned, accomplish more than you might otherwise have accomplished, and develop your characters more fully than you might otherwise have developed them. Your remarkably successful college admissions record suggests that Blair's Class of 2010 has attained a level of scholarship and service that compares favorably with the very best of the past.

It is that enduring character that drives our Academy's continuity. So as you graduate and move on, please never forget that you will remain part of Blair's strong legacy for the rest of your life. In return, I ask each one of you to assume the responsibilities, now citing my remarks at the start of our successful "Ever, Always" Capital Campaign, "to preserve, to protect, and to defend this fount of liberal education, this island of opportunity, this community of teaching and learning."

As it is everywhere, the concept of community is changing at Blair. In your headmaster's words, this campus is no longer the remote island "isolated from the non-boarding school world . . . and the diversions of urban/suburban culture" that it was when I sat where you sit today. No, today's constant communications and creative connectivity have shrunk our world to a fraction of its previous size. But building a community—being a member of a community—is what engages you students and your teachers in all aspects of your daily lives. However much it may change, the concept of community must remain Blair's hallmark.

What is required of you and your fellow students—and, truth told, of me and my fellow alumni and alumnae—to maintain and indeed build on these attributes of this amazing, enduring academy, this special institution? In my 2008 book, *Enough. True Measures of Money, Business, and Life*, I said that *caring* must be the soul of any institution that aspires to greatness. I paraphrase the idea here:

Blair Academy must be the object of intense human care and cultivation. Even when she errs and stumbles, she must be cared for, and the burden must be borne by all who come here, all who teach here, all who study here, all who learn here, all who have been served here, all who lead Blair, all who govern her. Every responsible person must care, and care deeply, about every institution that touches your life.

So your job, as well as mine, begins with the simple exhortation, *care. Care!* The job of caring is by no means easy, nor will it ever be perfectly completed, certainly not in my lifetime, nor, with all due respect, in yours. For while you still have much work to do as you mature and grow to your full potential, Blair has provided you with a solid foundation for your future education, your career, and your life, just as it did for me.

But fulfilling your potential is rarely an easy task. In today's ever-busy world of multiple tasks, responsibilities, interests, passions, and easy access to a world filled to the brim with information, there has been too little attention paid to two of the most important traits that will define those of you who are prepared to lead our communities,

our companies, our professions, even our politics, in the years ahead. Hear the words of my favorite columnist, David Brooks of *The New York Times*:

Highly educated young people are tutored, taught, and monitored in all aspects of their lives, except the most important, which is character-building. But without character and courage, nothing else lasts.

Character and Courage. I used David Brooks' words in *Enough.*, and added these words of my own: "If character is not taught, (and perhaps it cannot be taught) how can it possibly be learned? The affluent world in which so many young citizens exist today doesn't easily create the ability to build character. Often character requires failure; it requires adversity; it requires contemplation; it requires determination and steadfastness; it requires introspection—that rarest of human traits—it requires finding one's own space as an individual. And it surely requires not only courage, but honor."

In the excitement of this grand day, these ramblings of an aging alumnus will soon be forgotten. So please try to remember—and live up to—those "four Cs" I've talked about this morning—community and caring, character and courage—the essential elements that a Blair education seeks to foster. To help you remember these four Cs, I have a small gift for each of you, a copy of a new edition of *Enough.*, hot off the presses, with a foreword by President William Jefferson Clinton. I've signed each one, "from one Blair graduate to another," and we'll present it to you shortly. Please enjoy the book.

There is one more "C" on my list—Celebrate! In a few moments, each of you will receive your diploma. Congratulations for earning it. Let your well-deserved joy and pride in your accomplishments and your lives at Blair Academy be remembered, and celebrated, for as long as you live. Echoing that powerful senior class video that we saw yesterday, this lovely day is indeed "a brand new day. You're going to be OK." I promise!

Good luck and Godspeed.