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To go to my granddaughter's graduation at Texas Tech in Lubbock meant staying in Lamesa, some 90 miles away. Local hotels booked up early for the many graduates finishing on the same day. Timing to be on campus, however, was good.

When parents and grandparents are scheduled to hit a college town, sales of brooms and mops show the first movement of the year. Detergents become a rage. Sudden surges in the sale of aluminum beer cans and deposits on returnable bottles floods the market. Self-service laundries hum with activity. Stop signs become more meaningful; secondary supporting institutions, such as beer gardens and dance halls, assume a lower profile.

I arose at 6 a.m. to be sure to reach the coliseum in time to find parking outside the building and seating inside the huge place. Several generations of in-laws and immediate family made up the group, plus a stray or two from other parts. All present glowed in fine spirits and good fellowship. Toddlers kept mothers busy digging for toast and apple juices. Kids a bit older expressed their seniority by going to the restroom every few minutes. Like lots of the parents, the mother and father of the graduate gazed off in space, stricken by the realization they were old enough to have a daughter graduating from college.

I sat between a couple of my son's younger children. I suggested we put up five dollars apiece and each choose who

we thought would be the longest-winded speaker on the program. The platform stood right in front of our seats. Governor Bush, the main speaker, sat in the foreground by his wife, Laura. A little to the Governor's left, the former state senator from our district, now Chancellor of Tech, covered his chair in a flowing black gown set off by a headpiece of a crown-looking affair, like high powered dons wear over at Oxford or Cambridge. I pegged him at under five minutes as he makes so much more dough being chancellor than being senator, he wasn't about to overperform in front of a whole row reserved for the board of regents.

The Governor carried a handicap going into the game. The night before, his wife delivered the commencement address at Angelo State University. She kept smiling into the flash cameras that morning, but the giveaway was the way she crossed her legs and swung her foot like an old house cat switching her tail, tired of a bunch of kittens.

First term first ladies may enjoy the attention of the klieg and spotlights. But Mrs. Bush took a pretty big dose of the limelight being President Bush's daughter-in-law, before she became a second term governor's wife and a two-day feature on May college speaker stands. Odds are high that after she spent an hour the night before listening to destiny's ring in double time waiting to speak, she ordered the "Guv" to shave off the 39 minute chapter on his

dedication to education in favor of a swift ending and a faster farewell.

The Governor and the Chancellor soon had plenty of company. Doctors of laws and deans of some-such climbed up on the stage dressed in bannered gowns and wearing distinctive black mortarboard caps. My son kept frowning and shaking his head each time we marked our programs. He hissed something or other too low for me to hear about "influence" and "Dad," or "bad." Most of his working life is spent in courts of law. Looks like he'd appreciate having a father willing to teach his children the perils of trust in this hard old life. But judging from his scowl, he was going on and making the mistake of being an over-protective parent and raising a couple of bright-eyed suckers for the world to fleece.

So I gave up and called all bets off. Having spent time myself on the stage, I knew a bit about microphone hypnosis and locked fingers on lecterns. My choice was a sleeper in the form of a retired admiral. I spotted him right away to be a wind blasting air churner of the upper leagues. He received an honorary degree from the University, but the award wasn't for brevity.

Commencement halls are designed to work like giant bellows. The beams and the walls expand and contract as the speaker's harangue builds force. Based on Frank Lloyd Wright's theory of earthquake-proof foundations, the

supports weave in the breezes instead of holding firm and breaking.

If a student uttered a word, I missed his part. The Governor shook hands with every graduate. I had to strain to see my granddaughter pass among so many dignitaries. To the end, Mrs. Bush kept swinging her foot. Ol' George probably really caught it back at the hotel. I clocked him at 22 minutes, or 10 percent into overtime ...