

JULY 7, 1983

Sufficient time has passed to safely tell you this story. The principals have scattered and retired, or are no longer active with the college where they reigned as deans and presidents.

I'm unsure, but I think the graduation ceremony that I am going to write about took place in the mid-70s. I do know that the lady who did the speaking was making a come-back from an over-matured retirement. On the day she opened her speech she broke all records in free style captive speaking. Her address lasted so long and caused so much human agony that the National Chiropractors Assn. later gave her an award. Once she did finish, the audience was so overjoyed that pictures of them leaving the parking lot were used by an advertising agency to depict the coming of spring.

The exact length of her speech has escaped my memory. I recall resetting the calendar on my watch at an intermission. For certain, the seasons changed while we were indoors; but as unfamiliar as I am with the flora of the cities, I can't say whether spring came and passed, or a long winter dragged on into summer. But however long it was, along in the twilight of the ceremony the audience began to sense that we were under test to withstand a historic graduation session, and that the ones of us that held out to the end were going to be interviewed some day as survivors of the longest monologue of record.

The way she was introduced was an exceptional form of trickery. The master of education acted as if an impromptu thought passed under his bald pate and caused him to invite her from the audience to make this final address after 50 years of working for the college. I know now that the reason she was omitted from the rows of dignitaries on the stage was to keep students that knew her from bolting for freedom before she seized the floor.

Only a scattering of the audience failed to rise when she was invited to say these final words. The reason I'm sure I didn't honor her ovation is that later on my hindlegs developed serious circulatory problems from the paralysis of sitting in one position too long. I don't think that standing those few seconds would have prevented the illness. By the time she'd finished, wooden chair slats had dug so deeply into my posterior that nerve damage was cramping my legs.

Her speech covered the minute history of education from the first school in Greece up to and through the complete biography of 900 of the major educators who have lived in the past 300 years.

Grown men openly began to weep and mothers of small children were escorted to the safety of private waiting rooms. Hat veils and flowered neckties faded into neutral colors. One man in a wheel chair had to be restrained to keep him from driving off the mezzanine.

Lemonade and punch bowls became stagnant on long-ignored refreshment stands. But on and on this lady windbag chanted of her calling as if the world had nothing to do but to meet the command of her tongue.

After all these years, I still shudder at the sound of a chair folding, or the rustle of a program or the hum of a sound address system. Why did I wait so long to tell I was there? Well, this spring was the first time that not one of our eight children were

graduating. I wanted to be sure the record was safe. It is and I am too, except for a slight loss of hearing and bad limp that comes back in the spring of the year.