

Finding Our Way: Shared Perspectives on the Those Who Help Guide Us

2023 Commencement Addresses, Juniata College

Anne Baker and Andy Murray

Anne Baker is Trustee Emerita and Andy Murray is Elizabeth Evans Baker Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies Emeritus and Director Emeritus of the Baker Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies at Juniata College.

Anne Baker's Address:

MY years of involvement with Juniata College have been extremely meaningful to me and this recognition by the President of Juniata and the Board of Trustees is a highly valued honor.

Thank you again. And thank you to Trustee and friend Randy Deike for his presentation of my citation.

And now the reason we are all here today: congratulations to all of you students on your achievements culminating in your graduation today from Juniata College. During your time here you have successfully completed rigorous course work, learned a great deal, made new friends, been exposed to new ideas and developed new skills. You are now equipped to make meaningful contributions to our country and our democracy – and our country and democracy need you. Your achievement is particularly impressive considering the very difficult circumstances you lived through while attending college – COVID.

We all had to deal with it one way or another. But as you know all too well, you had to attend classes online, limit your personal contacts with friends and, often for many, exist in semi-isolation. All this, combined with fear of the disease.

We are here today to celebrate your success in triumphing over these difficult circumstances. Graduating from Juniata is a wonderful and exciting achievement and will open up important opportunities going forward. You should be very proud of your achievements and relish the opportunities and responsibilities which come with them:

1. Today's world is particularly challenging given the existing high level of conflict and tensions we are all living with. We must think, analyze, be critical, and work always towards

constructive solutions. Most of all, effective communication is crucial. The importance of careful listening, especially to people with views and opinions other than your own, can't be emphasized enough. Careful listening – really hearing – takes skill, but that skill is essential to understanding others and to your ability to interact with and influence others.

2. When President Troha called and asked me to join Dr. Andrew Murray in speaking to the graduating class at Juniata it took me totally by surprise. What an honor to be speaking to you at your graduation and in the company of Andy Murray! As President Troha was speaking to me, I realized what a wonderful opportunity it would be for me to communicate some of my thoughts and feelings about Juniata College and, most of all, the importance of the values it represents. So here goes.
3. Even though I did not go to Juniata College, my family connections with Juniata probably go back farther than almost anyone else's here today. My grandmother, Jennie Calhoun, went to Juniata and graduated in the class of 1881 (Can anyone here top that?). At that time, it was called the Brethren Normal School. Later, in 1896, the name was changed to Juniata College.
4. Early support in Pennsylvania for education for all (female and male), as far back as the 1830s, resulted in legislation, which created great demand for teachers. These teachers had to be trained. In Pennsylvania, teacher training was accomplished at what were then called "normal schools." Unlike many schools at that time, these normal schools were co-ed. Co-education was very controversial in those days, and here at Juniata there were rigid disciplinary measures to control students' behavior. As I understand it, many of these disciplinary measures survived for years. As an illustration of this – and this illustration may be just family folklore – but maybe not: in 1915 or 1916 two of my father's sisters, my aunts, who were enrolled in Juniata, were "let go," a nice way of saying kicked out of Juniata College due to their participating in dancing. Thankfully times have changed! (By the way, they did finish college successfully elsewhere.) In all, my grandmother and four of her five children, including my father, went to Juniata. My father graduated in 1917. So, my connections to Juniata run very deep.
5. All of this early family history is just to illustrate that from my earliest days I have heard about and been taught the importance of the values supported, communicated, and taught at Juniata College and how essential they are in creating a civil society. I know civil society can be defined in different ways, but one personal definition is: a society where truth, decency, knowledge, and understanding prevail. Speaking and telling the truth. Particularly at this time in our history when distortion is frequent, speaking and telling the truth is a prerequisite to trust, and we must not lose trust in our country and way of life. We must each personally take on the challenge to nurture these qualities and values of a civil society. These values will be fundamental to the impact you make going forward.

6. Here is a piece of advice I would like to add: stay open to new opportunities. They usually take you by surprise but can lead to wonderful new experiences. In my life, I made a major change fairly late in the game and became a lawyer after many years of being a professional musician. These careers were very different, but I would not have wanted to miss either experience – both enriched my life in very meaningful ways. Leaving the door open to new opportunities expands your future, and continuing to learn is one of the most exciting aspects of both growing up and growing older.
7. In the context of the importance of values that Juniata College so strongly supports, I want to mention the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at Juniata, which many of you may have participated in and know all about. It offers courses that teach negotiation, analysis of the complex issues involved in conflict and conflict resolution, communication and mediation among many other skills. And please take note, these skills are fundamental to all professions and all walks of life.
8. Finally, I'd like to pay tribute to my parents, John and Elizabeth Baker, who founded the Peace and Conflict Studies program, and also pay a special tribute to Dr. Andrew Murray, the first Director of the Baker Institute, whose ongoing participation in developing and growing the program has been invaluable.

These three individuals believed in and articulated the founding purpose of the Peace and Conflict Studies program, which was and is “to create an educational program which focuses on the study of warfare and deep-rooted conflict as human problems and to the study of peace as a human potential.”¹ We all realize what a dangerous and complicated world we are experiencing right now, and these conflict resolution skills are essential.

Going forward we must remember that, indeed, peace is a human potential, and working and educating for peace an all-important goal.

I believe, and deeply hope, that the process of your education here at Juniata College leaves you wiser, transformed, and well equipped to tackle your future.

Thank you and my very best wishes to you all.

Andy Murray's Address:

Thank you, Anne, for starting us off with such a personal tribute to your family roots in this institution and for your recognition of the work of the Baker Institute. I will finish up with a story that will draw on both of those themes, after I also express my appreciation to President Troha, the

faculty and the trustees of Juniata for this honor. It is not, however, the most precious thing Juniata has given me. It will not really change my life.

What has and will change my life are the beautiful friendships Juniata has afforded me. What has amused me, comforted me, challenged me, made me a better person and made my life rich and interesting has been the opportunity to know people like Anne Baker, Randy Deike, Larry Boch, and Bud Wise. What a special honor to be on the same platform with that crowd.

That is sort of what my story is about.

For five years the Baker Institute ran a program that brought university professors from conflicted regions around the world to a two-week intensive seminar with some of the world's most experienced theorists and practitioners in the field of arms control and disarmament.

The project was jointly sponsored by Juniata College, The International Association of University Presidents and the United Nations. According to the UN staff with which we worked, this was quite a coup for Juniata since it was the first time the UN had approved the use of its name for a joint venture with any institution of higher education.

It took two years of pretty intense planning to set this all up, and in the spring semester, when we assumed that everything was ready to go for our first session in the summer, I left for Costa Rica on my first sabbatical after 20 years at Juniata. My plan was to study Spanish, to spend some time trying to understand the culture of a country that had no standing army, and to get in a significant amount of beach time.

Our apartment in the suburbs of San Jose did not have hot water in the kitchen, but it did have a fax machine in the garage, and there was a fax from Johan Nordenfelt, director of the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs, waiting for me when we arrived.

It was bad news. The legal department at the UN, which had already approved our plan, had now changed its mind and decided that the Secretary General had no proper mandate to lend the UN name to such a venture. This, of course, was devastating for us, since without the imprimatur of the UN we would not get the kind of applicants for the program that we wanted.

I faxed back: "What do we need to get a proper mandate?"

Answer: "A resolution from the General Assembly."

Faxed Question: "How do we get that?"

Answer: "Glad you asked. The best country to get that for us is Costa Rica." He said something like: "Other than Nicaragua, nobody doesn't like Costa Rica. You are there and need to get to the Costa Rican government to get them to help us with a resolution."

Clearly, Director Nordenfelt had an elevated sense of the confidence, and competence, of Pennsylvania small-college chaplains.

I did what people should do when faced with a seemingly insurmountable problem. We packed the car and headed for the beach. "We" included my wife, Terry, my youngest daughter, Kim, and Bob Fisher,

a beloved Juniata biologist who spent a lot of time in Costa Rica studying bird lice and who had found our apartment for us. Kim, a college student at the time, had come with us for the first several weeks of our five-month sojourn in Costa Rica.

Dinner, the first night at the beach, was in a restaurant that featured a better-than-average Calypso band. After dinner I went to bed exhausted and a bit sick. Terry came in about midnight. “Where is Kim?” I asked. “She went for a walk on the beach,” was the reply. This was not what I wanted to hear. Jaco Beach, which was the beach we could afford, was a little rough around the edges, and there were guidebook advisories that it was fine in the daytime but should be avoided at night.

“Is she with someone?”

“The bongo player.”

“The bongo player?”

“You know, from the calypso band.”

Every father’s dream, right?

It turns out that the “bongo player” was a wonderful young man who, much to the distress of his parents, had dropped out of law school to follow his dream of becoming a hand drummer. In time, we became friends with him and with his family, often attending church together and having dinner, afterward, at their home in San Jose.

At one of those dinners, I was lamenting how my plans for a leisurely sabbatical had morphed into a seemingly impossible international mission.

The “bongo player’s” father ran operations for Coca Cola in all of Central America and the northern tier of South America. “Maybe I can help,” he said. He went on to explain, “My lawyer’s best friend is the beloved nephew of Christian Tattenbach.” That name got my attention. Christian Tattenbach was the permanent representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations.

So, my daughter’s bongo playing friend’s father’s lawyer’s best friend got me a meeting with his uncle. Ambassador Tattenbach did not agree, at that first meeting, to help. But, he did invite me to New York to meet again with him and some of his staff. After which, he attached a little noticed resolution to a piece of business that Mexico had before the assembly, and we got our mandate.

The story may come across as an endorsement for what is often called “networking.” That would be familiar corn for commencement fodder. But that perception would distress me. I think of networking as a way of arranging relationships toward some predetermined goal like success, money, or prestige. The story, in my mind is just the opposite: The story is about opening the spirit, to the wonder, the beauty, the pain the fun of knowing others and being surprised about how those connections – through fate, or, perhaps, divine mediation – pull us in directions that we wanted to go all along.

I will finish by appealing to two of my favorite thinkers: the Apostle Paul and Jerry Jeff Walker. I sometimes think of life as a journey through a strange land where we grope along between two ways of

understanding the human condition: we are “desperados waiting for a train,” or we are a part of a creation, which groans in the literal pains of birth to be adopted as children of God. Those we love and those who love us will help us to find our way. And that is the most precious thing for which we can hope.

There is a postscript to the story. The bongo player went on to study at the Berklee School of Music and the Boston Conservatory and to become an internationally renowned Latin percussionist, teaching in New York, playing on Broadway and with bands like Arturo Sandoval, and recording with Latin stars like Rubén Blades.

And he is with us today.

Please give a warm Juniata welcome to Renato Thoms.

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