

Reflections on Retirement

Kern Wildenthal

“A University president is expected to be an educator; to have been at some time a scholar; to have judgment about finance; to know something about construction, maintenance, and labor policy; to speak virtually continuously words that charm and never offend; to take bold positions, with which no one will ever disagree; to consult everyone and follow all proffered advice, and to do everything through committees but with great speed and without error.”

(Brown University President Henry M. Wriston, 1955)

“Our aspirations are modest: we aim to keep students and faculty sullen but not mutinous.”

(Harvard University President Derek C. Bok, 1971)

“We spend so much time justifying what we’re doing that we don’t have time to do what we’re justifying.”

(Yale University President A. Whitney Griswold, 1962)

“There will be times when someone gives you credit for something you don’t deserve. My advice is: Take it. There’ll damn sure be plenty of other times people blame you for something you don’t deserve.”

(UT Southwestern President Charles C. Sprague to Kern Wildenthal, August 31, 1986)

“Dealing with some of these people feels like being pecked to death by a flock of rubber ducks.”

(Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock to Kern Wildenthal, 1997)

“One day when you’re feeling important,
One day when your ego’s in bloom,
One day when you have the great feeling
You’re the most vital man in the room:
Take a bucket and fill it with water,
Put your hand in right up to the wrist,
Pull it out and the hole that is left there,
Is the sign of how much you’ll be missed.”

(Unknown Author)

Marcus Aurelius: Meditations, Book III, Paragraph 2:

“Thou has embarked.
Thou has made the voyage.
Thou art come to shore.
Get out.”

