

## Graduation 2016

**To the School Board**, Superintendent, Principal, Teachers, Staff, Parents, families and friends, and New Graduates of 2016.....HEY, THAT'S GOT A NICE RING TO IT, DOESN'T IT?

**I'm very honored** to be here and it's really exciting and fun. As I watched you march in, I couldn't help but flash-back to this very gym 46 years ago. We also wore red and white and as I marched I tripped on my gown almost did a faceplant, while a couple of our mates who, thought they had flunked, were gliding in as if on air. You guys look so excited. I bet that excitement caused some of you to forget to charge your phones! Oh NO..... No texting! Gotcha, made about 8 of 'em check their charge. I'm glad you have and use phones today but please do your loved ones a favor and DON'T TEXT AND DRIVE! Folks, as for Emma and Katherine great job. If they are representative of this class and if this class is representative of today's youths then we have nothing to worry about going forward. ....Folks one more time for the 2016 graduates from WP!

**I loved and love** this place. It's home for me. But while I was here, few would have thought of me as a stand out student. In fact, when my English teacher asked me to write a sentence with a double negative, I wrote, "Billy is ugly and he smells!" Now, there's a double negative, for ya.

When my history teacher asked "Mark, where was the Declaration of Independence signed? I said, "Ahh...At the bottom?"

**I joke, but along with me**, many others sitting all around you were prepared by this school and graduated here and went on to do wonderful wonderful things.....  
*and you can to!*

**Now a story** with some takeaways:

The date was May of 1944 during WWII. And the location was near Anzio, Italy one of the deadliest and bloodiest stalemates in the history of this terrible war. As the dawn breaks a nightfighter pilot limped his aircraft back to his home base, near Pompeii, with a failed engine. Two Generals, who were ordered by their superiors and in desperate need of intel, were there, and witnessed his emergency landing. They talked to this pilot and "volunteered" him for a top secret and very dangerous mission. That night the 4 of them would somehow squeeze into his two man fighter and fly north on their 1st low level reconnaissance pass up the Liri

Valley, awaking a smattering of resistance. The second pass was different though, as the guns they were trying to entice, did indeed come out to play. The third pass was incredible as all around them it would appear that every gun the enemy had lit up the sky in a display of awesome power and even beauty..... if it weren't so deadly! On the pull up of this 3<sup>rd</sup> pass, the pilot turned and asked the generals (without regard to his own neck), "do you want to try'er again?" The generals quickly said "Oh no, we marked the positions well and we've seen enough!" And with that the assault plan had its necessary intel for the 4<sup>th</sup> Battle of Monte Casino which would soon begin finally giving the allies progress. And soon, before the infamous Normandy, around this time of year 72 years ago Clark's 5<sup>th</sup> army marched victoriously into Rome. The Nazi's southern front was shattered the war had turned.

**That young aviator**, with the weight of the world on his shoulders, risked it all and in a real sense like the thousands of other unsung heroes of the war, did it for you and for me. Who was that man willing to die so others would have freedom and a better life? Well, that pilot was my greatest hero from the greatest generation.....my father, A. Emil Sztanyo, who left this world for glory last September.

**To be honest** when Michelle called me about speaking here it was a big surprise, I almost dropped my cup of coffee. Now I could share with you a mountain of personal flying stories but that is not why I accepted this invite.....I accepted because of my dad and who he was. I learned a ton of lessons from this great man but today I would like to share with you 3 of Emil's best. The **first value**, was in dad's wartime story and modeled by that whole generation, which is to **live for others!** And that theme continued after the war, as he along with a group of other great area people, organized and built this very school district.

**When their organizing** had advanced, and they needed land, he alone, representing the committee, talked to CT Prescott and approached the ranch manager to see about the possibilities and was surprised to be graciously offered, this 40 acres where we are today, for the sum of \$1. The ranch and the Prescott family's example of generosity shows how many different people sacrificed in order for WP to become a reality and we should all be thankful for that.

**Later, Emil served** on our school board for 25 years and 21 years straight as president of this newly consolidated district. And he handed out hundreds and hundreds of diplomas at this very spot *with a handshake and smile*.

**It was common trait** that for these organizers and my dad that it was all **about others**, supporting neighbors and improving our community. After all, **“Its’ not about you!”** Oh, to be sure this DAY is about you, and we all want you to enjoy it. But I’m speaking about an important life principle of humility. That line **“Its’ not about you!”** is the opening sentence in one of this century’s most read and important books entitled “The Purpose Driven Life” by Rick Warren. After the ceremony Barb and I would like to gift this book to you as our way of congratulating you on this big accomplishment and we hope you read it. We’ll be in the library later to hand you your copy with *a handshake and smile*.

#### **Persistence:**

**On a different wartime mission**, dad lost control during takeoff of a difficult & troubled airplane and crashed. The airplane was a total ball of mangled metal and both he and his backseat RO frantically and desperately attempted to open his escape hatch before the aircraft caught fire but couldn’t. Then he glanced over his other shoulder and he discovered the whole aircraft’s right side was missing so he simply unbuckled and walked out to safety. Grads, here is the message..... stay persistent. Persistence is the fuel for success. In this life, you’ll face what will appear to be closed doors and your path may appear blocked, yet that may not be the end of it. Stay persistent and look all around you, be *willing to even change directions* and never forget to **“look over your other shoulder.”** Persistence.

#### **Can’t:**

**The third in Emil’s top 3**, is related but independently just as important.....***stay positive!*** A phrase my dad would often say is, “There’s no such word as can’t.” In my growing years, Dad often used this phrase to bolster my optimism and courage that things seemingly impossible to a young teenager, could indeed change and get done. This is your day yet many questions about your future lie ahead. Negative thoughts can invade and enter your mind and dissuade you from setting high goals. WP grads (as all grads), can easily get on the “no-can-do” train. After all you can’t garner support of so many communities to pull together to consolidate

and form WP's large school district. You can't win a state titles in football, in wrestling in shop, and others. You can't become a teacher, a mechanical engineer, a lawyer, a doctor. You can't even become a pilot and fly thousands of people all over God's creation. You can't.... you can't..... you can't. But I am here to share with you this third learning and repeat what my dad so often told me, "Son, there's no such word as can't!" No, you CAN'T change the direction of the wind, but you CAN adjust your sails to reach your destination. With the God's help, you can do so very very very much..... for this world. Stay positive!

**About a month ago** I was in Bucharest contemplating that a few of you may go on to do great and mighty things. Later, I thought that notion is all whack! I am not here to challenge some of you to become special, I am asking ALL of you to live purpose driven lives that accomplish much. Grads, there is no elevator to success, you have to take the stairs. And as sure as I am standing here today if you will: 1. Let purpose drive your life and I repeat; **live for others**. Because after-all, *its' not solely about you!* 2. And secondly, when the way appears blocked.... stay persistent *and* **look over that other shoulder**. 3. And lastly, stay positive and jump on the CAN DO train, **dropping the word CAN'T from your vocabulary**. **If** you'll practice these three tips coming to you directly from my dad of three generations ago, you will be fueling your own success and will be smashing hit with your families, friends making this world the beneficiary.

**Graduates of 2016** we congratulate you and are proud of you. Enjoy this moment, and we wish you all of God's best for this day and every day forward. And now as I close I'd like to give you the same sendoff, that aviators have wished one another for decades and decades, as they embark on a new and adventurous journey, including given Charles Lindbergh before his epic trans-Atlantic Ocean crossing:.....to one cardinal graduate...and to all..... **GOD SPEED!**

Given June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2016 at Whittemore-Prescott Graduation.