

First, I want to thank honors for inviting me to give this first Last Lecture. It's humbling to be offered such an opportunity and such a challenge by some of the best and brightest students on our campus. You probably saw the posters announcing the event go up a few weeks ago. I know I came in from teaching a class to my face plastered all over bldg. 50... It kind of freaked me out.

But what freaked me out even more was the number of people who began approaching me after the posters went up. I've gotten so many inquisitive looks and tender questions. Are you okay? Are you leaving UWF? I just tell them I've been voted off UWF's version of American Idol, but that they're giving me one last chance to sing my song.

On a serious note and in an effort to clarify my purpose here today, let me speak briefly to the inspiration behind this lecture series. Dr. Randy Pausch gave the original Last Lecture at Carnegie Mellon. He was a computer science professor who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at the age of 47 and told he had only three to six months to live. We, here at UWF, are saddened by the loss of one of our own faculty in computer science, Dr. Ed Rodgers who passed away unexpectedly this week after serving this community for 27 years.

Dr. Pausch, in one final grand gesture, spoke to the world about the dreams that had inspired him, the lessons that had shaped him, and the values that cut to his very core. His imagination and his fortitude were unwavering, and his legacy continues to live on.

I am blessed to have this opportunity today without the tragic circumstances that enveloped his experience. Randy Pausch wished to speak to his students and his peers. His book is a love letter to his wife and his children. I do not have kids of my own, but, for that very reason, I see my students as so critically important to my life and work. On some level, they are my children. They are my life. So what letter would I write to my children? What would that theme be?

Living with Chickens and Angry Birds... of course! What Does It Mean?

What is really funnier to me than people being so distraught over my possible impending doom is that hardly anybody has asked me about the title.

I guess people around here really do know me. I am just that crazy.... Why would my Last Lecture make sense? Nobody even expects that it would.

I actually hate birds. I think they're disgusting creatures.... It's like a bat, a lizard, and a mouse somehow got together, and what came out of the whole ordeal was a bird. If you are a bird-watcher or bird-keeper, or bird-enthusiast, I don't mean to offend you. Please don't leave, Dr. Tomso. I just need to preface my comments with this foul disclaimer.

I chose to focus on life with chickens and angry birds because I think it is totally random, I think it is pretty funny, and I think it is a true depiction of 2011.... That's life for me, and that's life for today's generation. It's full of randomness. It is ridiculously funny. And it is painfully real.

If today was truly my last opportunity to speak to students about what I find most important – the seminal words of wisdom they need to carry with them as they go forth – I would be really sad. I love students. And I wouldn't want to end here. The current generation of students – 18 year olds – has grown up with a world characterized by reckless spending and endless budget cuts, focus on physical health and dietary nutrition paired with crippling stress and super duper overstimulation, increasing emphasis on environmental sustainability coupled with fear of impending annihilation by terrorists.

How would you make sense of this? What would you tell an 18 year old?

As I thought about the words of wisdom I would pass on to students, I realized that my own personal outlook is a huge web of juxtapositions. So here are my top 10.....

- 1) First of all, don't be a chicken. Be willing to stand up for what you believe to be important. On the other hand, don't be an angry bird. Know when to sit down and shut up.

I think chickens and angry birds would be where I would start. Can you think of a better description of the current political climate? I teach a course called "Analyzing Political Issues." In it, I ask students to think critically and scientifically about some of the pressing policy problems facing our country. We talk about crime policy, education policy, health care, social security, economic policy, and foreign affairs. I will never forget the reaction of one student back in 2009, after the stock market had crashed, the credit markets were practically frozen, and the housing market was in ruin. I showed a video clip on the events leading to the crisis produced by the Wall Street Journal. The clip ended, and I gently turned back on the classroom lights. A doe-eyed early twenty-something female student held her head in her hands and said this is the most depressing class I have ever taken! (That's exactly what I always hoped would be my imprint on young minds, by the way...) It was at that moment that I realized I had a responsibility – a unique charge in my capacity as a teacher in higher education. We deal with impressionable students who are barely adults about matters that are very adult, very difficult, and very important.

I remember when my own ideas about the world were first challenged. It was in a college classroom by a man I truly respected... a man I knew was brilliant who knew far more than I did.

The classroom is an opportunity, but, as I learned from Spiderman, with great opportunity comes great responsibility. In teaching government, I feel I have the opportunity to frame the issues, raise the questions, challenge preconceived notions, explain processes, and encourage healthy debate about our political system. But I also feel I have the responsibility to convey the role of personal agency in producing political change – particularly in democratic societies like our own. As well as the sacrifice involved in public service – whether in government, in education, in law enforcement, or in social services.

It has become particularly difficult as of late to communicate this "sacrifice" when the political scene seems dominated by chickens and angry birds. Party polarization in Congress is truly high. Politicians do not see eye to eye. They find it ever more difficult to find common ground. They hurl insults and make a mockery out of political discourse. In addition, the American electorate has become so fickle – ushering Democrats into office in 2006 and Republicans into office in 2008 – they have become so fickle

that politicians are chicken to do anything that might lead to electoral repercussions in the next election cycle.

Take social security.... It will not be here for us, much less our students if something doesn't change. But Democrats and Republicans both are chickens (fearing the powerful voting block of the AARP) and angry birds refusing to find compromise between the poles of increased taxation and total privatization.

Take the debt ceiling... China now refuses to loan us any more money because of our fiscal irresponsibility and political stalemate. Weeks and months of budget talks and negotiations over the debt ceiling, and what did we get? A downgrade to our Standard and Poor credit rating and a drop in the bucket in terms of budget reconciliation.

I choose to present these problems in terms of deeper root issues endemic to the American political process and human nature more generally. We are a representative democracy predicated on the assumption that people are self-interested and ambitious. "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition," as Madison so simply stated. Do we want our elected officials to represent us? If so, can we expect them to get along? We don't. Why should they?

To see politics as conflict is to see it as human. But the general feeling about politics right now is one of dismay and confusion. On the first day of class, I asked my freshman taking introduction to American Politics to characterize politics in one word. The most frequent responses were: confusing, complex, off-track, controversial, and discouraging. Why would one want to study that? We might as well all go home. This class is totally going to suck.

But politics is people, and people is us.

We live with chickens and angry birds because we are chickens and angry birds. But on the same token, if we expect politics to be civil, politicians to be statesmen, and problems to be solved, then we should be able to expect the same of ourselves. Maybe it starts with us... or at least it could start with us.

Maybe a first antidote to the current situation is rule number 1: Don't be a chicken. Be willing to stand up for what you believe to be important. On the other hand, don't be an angry bird. Know when to sit down and shut up.

2) Be the last in line and the first to say "thank you."

My father has taught me many things. As a lifelong elected official, a circuit judge here in Pensacola, he has given me an appreciation of the personal sacrifice required of public service. But he has also taught me the sacrifice associated with good character. Good people aren't just good when there are people watching, when they want to impress a girl or a guy, when there's a prize at stake, when the cameras are rolling, or when the crowd is fun or interesting. Good people are good when no one is watching and when the decision has already been made, when everyone is tired and hungry and when the food doesn't taste good at all.

So what does good look like?

My father has taught me that good looks like being the last one in line at a family gathering with a limited amount of food. Good looks like being the first one to say thank you for a random act of kindness. Good looks like staying overnight in the hospital with someone who is scared that they might not wake up. Good looks like listening to a long story because somebody needs you to listen.

It's really hard to be good... because sacrifice is hard. We don't like to make sacrifices. But imagine what life would look like if we all lived by this simple creed. What if we as a society didn't eat until the hungry had been fed? What if we as a society thanked our garbage man or postal worker for a regular job well done? What if we as individual families promised our parents and our grandparents that they had a place to live and food to eat no matter what happened to Social Security or Medicare? In Asian and Hispanic cultures, it is very common for multiple generations to live together. In fact, in China, the one-child policy has reportedly led to young couples foregoing having any children to make sure that they can care for their parents. While this isn't a sustainable solution for the Chinese, it does powerfully depict the contours of sacrifice and places our current problems in a little bit of perspective. What if, instead of worrying about the ultimate impact of Obamacare, we took our own care of one person who was sick and who didn't have the insurance to go to the doctor?

3) Life is tremendously hard, but it is also amazingly good.

One of my favorite shows on tv is Bravo's Flipping Out. The main character is Jeff Lewis, a former political science major turned interior designer who flips houses in LA. It is also painfully obvious that he is OCD and flips out on his employees on a daily basis for not abiding by his eccentric policies and practices. On some level, Jeff Lewis is my alter-ego. I need him as a guilty pleasure at the end of long days filled with difficult conversations. Jeff Lewis doesn't take crap, and he always gets his way.... No matter how crazy his way is.

OCD is a legitimate psychological disorder, but for many of us we see the manifestations of the illness as a totally understandable response to a chaotic environment. On some level, we all need control. We crave control. At 18, this control might look like needing constant reassurance from a partner who is reluctant to commit. At 38, this control might look like needing constant reassurance from a partner who is reluctant to commit! At 68, this control might look like needing the tv remote. It's all relative. Priorities change. Some much faster than others.

I joke, but this is something which is truly serious. The hardest thing for me is to relinquish control. It's not like I'm some kind of dictator or something. I just mean control over the basic things that serve to define us. Control over a spouse.... Rather than trusting a spouse, trying to control a spouse. Control over a schedule. Rather than doing one thing at a time, feeling overwhelmed by a busy schedule. Control over an illness. Rather than accepting the cards that have been dealt – accepting that for everything there is a reason, a purpose, or not... rather than accepting and totally moving on, trying to cry it away, or work it away, or fill that void that hole with something else.

My grandmother was an amazing woman. She studied Latin in high school and received a scholarship to go to college – at a time when women didn't go to college. Her father was a fireman, and he died on her 17th birthday. She passed up the opportunity to go to college to take care of her widowed mother.

She eventually married my grandfather whose own mother had died in childbirth, and my grandmother worked for the family business keeping the books. In her spare time, she enjoyed ceramics. She was a potter. We have closets full of her beautiful vases and bowls, hand-painted with irises – her favorite flower. We started seeing signs of Alzheimer's in about 1994. She wasn't able to attend my wedding in 2003. I've been married for 8 years, and she has never really known my husband. She is still living. She lives in a nursing home in Milton. She has had Alzheimer's for 17 years. We make trips to visit her on her birthday and on holidays, but she doesn't know us. But that's the thing.... the really hard thing. It's not about us. It's about her. She needs clothes – even though they get lost in the laundry at the nursing home. She needs visits – even though half the time she's asleep while we're there. She is alive even though this is no way to live. Nothing can get rid of the nightmares my mother has after visiting her. Nothing can bring her back. And nothing can speed up this process. Life is very hard, and yet we have to live it.

But, you know what? Life is also amazingly good. Last year, my brother and sister had children (not together – that's just wrong). We're not that deliverance-ish. My sister had a boy, and my sister-in-law had a girl. Those babies could not be more different. One is a monkey, a spit-fire; he crawls all over everything, touches everything he's not supposed to, and is a total charmer. The other is a thinker; she studies things closely; she mimics everything – unfortunately.... She wants to be entertained... She demands to be entertained. They are alive, and they are sweet and precious. They are innocent. Everything is new. Every day is an opportunity to learn a new word, to eat a new food, to hear a new sound. My niece loves animals, but my brother hasn't exposed her to little stuffed animals. He watches discovery channel and animal planet to expose her to real lions and real wolves. So you ask her what a lion says, and she utters this deep guttural growl. You ask her what a wolf says, and she rears her head back and howls at the moon. Right now, I'm teaching her to chant the names of dictators. It's awesome.

So life's not just hard.... It's also good.

4) Have role models so you can be a role model.

I've been criticized more than once for idol worship.

There are some people who just amaze me. I love Taylor Swift – even though I can't listen to her live music because of all the screaming pre-teenage girls. I love her because she raps to Eminem. That's right; she's gangsta-fabulous. In 2009, an intoxicated Kanye West stormed the MTV Music awards yelling that Beyonce deserved it over Taylor Swift. Befuddled, Taylor Swift gave him room to cause his scene and gracefully she retreated from the stage. Even afterwards, when others provoked her to badmouth Kanye, she couched her comments in grace. This year, she's on tour. My husband pulled up a YouTube clip of her performance in Detroit. Her "theme" this year is to do an acoustic medley of location-specific songs at each concert. So in Detroit, she rapped to Eminem's "Lose Yourself" and "Smile" by Uncle Kracker.

I don't know if you've ever tried to rap. It's really hard. Students sometimes tell me, "Dr. Evans, I cannot memorize stuff. Your tests are impossible." I just think, "You'll never be a rapper." That's why Taylor Swift is so unique. She doesn't have to do anything at a concert. She walks on stage and little girls scream and she sings "Fifteen" – heck, she doesn't even have to sing it. The pre-teens sing it for her... and she blows some kisses and flies off the stage like some kind of fairy. But no... NO! not Taylor freakin' Swift. She learns a rap, learns the guitar music, and performs it one time only in Detroit.

Back on a more serious note, I also have intellectual idols. In college I had my first real brain crush. I fell in love with someone's mind.... The way he thought... the way he provocatively challenged students to engage the big ideas, to connect the dots from one author to the next, to draw the implications for contemporary life and society. I couldn't get enough of it. It was intoxicating. He didn't use Power Point. He didn't use textbooks or "supplements." He didn't give multiple choice tests. And he didn't have elearning to facilitate virtual discussions. He had a podium, a really, really old book that had seen far better days, and a quick and dry wit. He spoke in hushed tones so that you had to lean in and focus. And we hung on every word. I still have my notebooks – my treasures from undergrad. In the margins I wrote funny quotes that make absolutely no sense to me now, but at the time they were totally hysterical. That's what I wanted to be. I wanted to be him. I wanted to create this magical environment where students were transported in their mind's eye "out of the cave" – if only for an hour.... Or even for just a few moments. I wanted to take students with me on an intellectual trip that would challenge their views and maybe even change their lives.

As a college professor, I now have professional idols. When I see somebody like Dr. Koppes who is an industrial psychologist orchestrate a day-long conference of over a hundred people in higher ed (not the easiest crowd) that ends with people feeling worn out from all the productive dialogue but feeling really good and still being able to and wanting to laugh with each other... that's amazing! When I see somebody like Dean Halonen who is able to juggle administrative responsibility for the largest college on campus with teaching responsibility in the honors college, and who is still able to be an active scholar in her professional field, that is amazing. It is something I can appreciate because it is difficult, and both of these women do it with grace. I'm teaching a course right now about the architecture of civic space. We just discussed the virtues of beautiful buildings, and one of these virtues is elegance.

- One of our authors suggested that elegance is: A quality present when a work . . . succeeds in carrying out an act of resistance . . . with grace and economy as well as strength; when it has the modesty not to draw attention to the difficulties it has surmounted.

For me, this is a character worth modeling: carrying our burdens, doing our job (as teachers, as scholars, as public servants, as counselors, as spouses, as parents, and as friends – quietly carrying our own with grace, economy, and strength.

So I'm not good with accepting the "natural aging process." I don't like it. I'm not good with it. And I think anybody who is good with it is delusional or smoking crack. So... when I was turning 30, I planned a big trip with some girlfriends and family to travel for my first time overseas to Italy for three weeks.

I took some Italian and planned some adventures, but in large part, it was to give me something to look forward to... so that I didn't spend my birthday wallowing in self pity. The group of us shared an apartment overlooking a square in Florence bustling with farmer's markets and pastry shops, cafes for espresso in the afternoon and evening gatherings around the fountain. It was a magical experience. But what was perhaps even more magical is what happened inside our little flat. In the cramped quarters of the centuries-old kitchen was a long skinny butcher block table. Every night my mother would take the fresh tomatoes and focaccia bread, mozzarella and fresh herbs and make the most amazing bruschetta. Over a glass of wine, we would talk about the day, the amazing masterpieces in the Uffizi Gallery, the elaborate collections in the Medici Palace, the transcendent heights of the cathedrals and we would laugh – at each other, at tourists we had seen, at mishaps and misadventures.

I now have albums full of photos from that trip. I've taken subsequent trips because I discovered I love to travel. I've picked up photography as a hobby because of that trip. But when I think of the one image that captures the magic of that trip, it is the "family dinners" we had together at the end of our days. You see, my friends grew up in dysfunctional families. Dinners consisted of whatever you could find on your own in the refrigerator, and they were spent alone on the couch or away from home altogether. For some of them, this was the first time they had experienced the meaningful quality time of cooking together, eating together, and then just sitting and visiting over dessert. We were a family – a family that ate together.

In this moment, I realized my place in the procession of life. My parents insisted on outdated, outmoded, antiquated habits... dinner habits that as kids we hated. We wanted to eat at Taco Bell! Before the days of DVR and Tivo, we wanted to order pizza and watch our much-anticipated sitcoms! But our television was not on during dinner, and we did not leave the table until everybody was done. It was also not okay for one person to dominate conversation. When necessary, we had what we fondly called "the conversation ball." A wadded up napkin that you had to hold if you were going to carry the conversation. And if you didn't have the conversation ball, you could expect a napkin ball to be thrown in your drink. This was some serious stuff.

From my parents' model, I've carried values into my own life. Though Jeremy and I do not have any children, at dinner, we sit at the table and we catch up. It might be only 15 minutes, but it is 15 minutes of together. And my friends have now learned to cook in order to have their own "family dinners." For others, Florence is the birthplace of the Renaissance. For me, Florence is the cradle of family tradition passed from one generation to the next. We have role models so we can be a role model.... And in the process make a life for ourselves and those around us.

5) Dare to dream others' dreams.

My mother has many nicknames. She's a GTC – "good time Charlie." She's "Money" because she's the real deal. Students have branded her the "co-ed" because she's been known to crash a class from time to time. My Dad calls her "Nin," and I don't think I even want to know why. We have the same laugh, and so people joke that you can never lose the two of us in Walmart.

My mother is a dreamer. She sees potential in everything and everybody. When people ask her what she does, and she tells them she's an orchestra director, they often confess that they have no musical ability and couldn't even imagine playing an instrument. That's open season for my mother right there! She circles in for the kill as she begins to get all up in their face, analyzing their lip shape, sizing the length of their fingers and the span of their hands. She takes mental notes on their height and their personality flipping through her virtual rolodex of woodwinds, brass, and stringed instruments to pick the perfect fit. She's also self-serving about it. She's been known to say on more than one occasion, "Your lips are perfect for brass instruments, and I could really use a trombonist." And before you know it, she's taken them from the rental agreement at the music store through their beginning and intermediate books to playing with the full orchestra. She's also been known to tell a massage therapist that her hands were her instrument.... That was one of the more awkward conversations.

My mom has grown bands numerous times from a few kids in a minivan to 60 kids winning superiors at state band festival. She's fought for legislation she believed in. She's coordinated community concerts. She's run campaigns. She's raised three children and seen them through college, through weddings, through the trials and tribulations of homeownership, and through the birth of their own children.

The first and last pages of my most recent book are dedicated to my mother. Let me just stop here for a second. Nobody wants to read your book. People make it sound like such an accomplishment... such a big deal. Oh, you wrote a book! That's amazing! That's so interesting.... Blah, blah, blah. But who ever sits down and actually says "may I please borrow a copy of your book to read (because goodness knows I could never actually buy a copy)." Nobody reads your book. Not ever going to happen.... So anyway, I was doing final revisions on my last book project, and my mind was just absolute mush. I had been reading the same pages over and over again. The lines were all running together, and I couldn't make heads or tails of it anymore. I was done. I needed – truly needed – someone with no subject-matter expertise to read my book cover to cover and point out anything that needed work. Only your mother loves you that much. Your mother thinks you're the greatest thing since sliced bread, and your mother will read your book. Luckily for me, my mother has a Masters and actually knows a thing or two about writing and about academics.

My mother read every page. In two days, she read every page with a red pen.... Stopping me when she hit passages that were too jargony or theoretical, making me explain in laymen's terms, making me rewrite to elucidate a point or justify a claim. She read my book. And, when she finished, she had an idea. From the stacks of photos in the closet, she pulled a photograph of my first trip to the Capitol. This picture is now on the last page of my book thanks to my mother.

My mother still has yet to write her own book, but she has been indispensable to all of mine.

6) Get into yourself, and then get over yourself.

If I had to identify one thing that is different for college students today than college students back in my day, I'd have to say it's the technological revolution. Back in the dark ages of the 90s when I went to college, it was a big deal to have a computer in your room. I remember getting my first personal email address in college. I remember having to go to the library – my first work study job was actually in the campus library in the periodicals. By graduate school, we were IM-ing, and I was using online databases like JSTOR rather than going to the physical library and thumbing through the hardcopies of books and journals. I had a cell phone, but it literally was just a phone.... And you paid by the minute and waited until after 8 because it was cheaper. We had CD players... even in our cars! It was huge to have a 5-disc CD changer! Imagine the possibilities!

Today, students have multiple email accounts, multiple social networking sites, the latest and greatest phone covered in some bling bling. They g-chat, skype, facebook, twitter, vlog, game, text, and probably so many other hip things that I don't even know about. We now have phone-induced maladies – repetitive strain injury from texting too much. In fact, TMI no longer only means “too much information.” It now also means “text message injury.” Virgin Mobile has suggested some sensible preventative measures to avoid the incredibly painful symptoms of TMI.

- If texting starts to hurt. Stop. Use the other hand or call instead
- Vary the hand you use
- Vary the digits you use
- Don't text for more than a few minutes without a break

Maybe I'm the only one who thinks this is hilarious. My brother has abandoned the world of talking on the phone to other humans and replaced it with “hey telling” – voice recognition that basically turns your phone into a walkie talkie and allows others to get back to you at their own convenience. Human interaction need not interfere with technological engagement.

Needless to say, I find us to be technologically-saturated. It reminds me of the scene in Wall-e when the robots have taken over and the humans are fat and stationary in traveling recliners drinking meals through straws and watching big screens to lull them into complacency.

There's something exhilarating about a class full of people focused on a single topic for a concentrated amount of time. Where else in this world can you get that anymore? Certainly not at home. Between the Xbox, facebook, the Iphone, the Kindle, Google, the Ipad, cable, the Ipod, DVR, Skype, and the refrigerator.... Who has time to think, much less talk about it. My husband humors me by playing Call of Duty 27 (or whatever version is out now) without sound. I can't handle my house being a war zone, and he looks stupid wearing huge headphones on the sofa.

It's the focus of the classroom that I think we need to encourage students to embrace. When I say “get into yourself,” I mean spend time without noise, filler, entertainment. Spend time with your eyes and ears open, with your head up, and your thinking cap on. Who are you? What are you doing? What could you contribute? For some of you this is obvious. Your identity is so clearly woven into the fabric

of your DNA and the expectations placed on you by your family and friends that this is a relatively short mental discussion.

That was somewhat the case for me... a whole lot of nature and a little bit of nurture, and whala! I'm a teacher. My mother loves to tell the story of the time she found me in my bedroom at about 4 years of age with all of my stuffed animals lined up in a row as I seriously taught them about "electricity." It was the biggest word I knew. Granted I had no idea what it was... not much has changed... but I knew that I had something to say. My siblings were often the subjects of my lecturing. I was always choreographing skits or music videos or "commercials." During one of our plays around Thanksgiving about the pilgrims and Indians, I made my brother dress up in some garb with fringe and a Davie Crocket coon-skin cap (because of course that's what Indians wear). He was moving so slowly... and the show had to get started! I asked him what was taking so long, and he calmly said, "I'm trying to get my axe together."

My profession has developed from a constant mix of nature and nurture. As an academic, part of my job is to do research – to write – a lot. Which is good... because I love writing, and I never am at a loss for something to write about. But I've always drawn inspiration from my surroundings... I tell this to students: "Do what you know."

We just commemorated the 10 year anniversary of the tragic events of 9/11. For this generation, that is the defining moment – the moment in time where we lost our innocence and we hurt as a nation. I was in D.C. on that day – working on the Hill in a leadership office. A lot of people overlook the impact of 9/11 on the nation's capital. The attack on the Pentagon was terrible, and the defense community suffered great loss. But the Capitol Complex also suffered a psychological attack on that day. And, in the months that followed, the Capitol was the target of a second attack – letters with anthrax distributed through the mail system to Senate office buildings. Terrorism became real for us... for the hundreds of twenty-something year-olds tasked with making the morning coffee and opening the mail... it was real. As roads were systematically shut down across the Hill and hallways and entrances were systematically closed off to the public... as the perimeters of buildings were lined with bollards to prevent truck bombs and police were armed with greater and greater firearms, we felt it. We feared it. We very much knew it.

When I took my position here at UWF, there was never a question of what I would write about. 9/11 changed my life. And it changed our nation's capital. Last summer, my book about these events was finally published. It recounts these moments when we acted as a community with a collective spirit. Former Mayor Rudy Giuliani spoke at the commemorative ceremony in New York a few weeks ago. His remarks were simple and brief, but his voice reminded us all of the leadership he demonstrated 10 years ago. In 2001, he was in the midst of writing his own book – a book about leadership. He had spent the better part of two years thinking about and contemplating his own perspective on leadership – his strengths, his weaknesses, those who had influenced his views on the subject. In fact, on the night of September 11th (it was so late by the time the Mayor actually was able to retire for the evening that it was actually the wee hours of the morning of the 12th), he took time to read a chapter from a biography on Winston Churchill on the Battle of Britain in 1940. The point is that even in the most dire of

circumstances, he took time to “get into himself” to prepare his heart and mind for the challenges he would face.

And all of this introspection was focused on the end goal of getting beyond himself to serve his community.

It strikes me that there is this tremendous emphasis in our culture on winning, on performing, on celebrating our individuality. Even in team sports, there is great attention given to recognizing the all-star performer, the amazing quarterback, the record-breaking pitcher, the David Beckams of the world. But it is the team who wins a game. Just as it is the community who rebuilds New York and the nation who moves us forward.

As I thought about this duality between individuality and community, between the part and the whole, I was reminded of my school my campus– the people and the place that makes up the UWF culture. It is this perfect blend of personalities and purpose that makes for a unique identity.

If you slow down to think about the tokens of individualism across our campus, we have so much to celebrate.

In the summer, Dean Halonen can be seen strolling across campus wearing her straw hats

If you run into Dean Podemski, it is always... always “Happy Monday” (or Tuesday, it just depends)

Our own Provost, Chula King is an awesome photographer

Dr. Claudia Stanny has an amazing collection of hand-crafted jewelry

Dr. Laura White has a beautiful waterfront home where she nurtures a family of ducks

Dr. Greg Lanier, or DL as the honors kids fondly call him, has a life-size Spiderman... Yah!

Dr. Sally Ferguson is obsessed with Elton John and has every spare space of her office covered in paraphernalia

Dr. Steve Belko is obsessed with Andrew Jackson – to the point that he named his kid AJ

Dr. Tim Royappa blows things up in the chemistry classroom and meticulously prunes his rose garden at home

Dr. Greg Tomso has worked with students to build a community garden... and he has chickens!

Dr. Patrick Moore rides his bike to school and makes cross-country road trips with students every summer.

Dr. Kelly just talks... and it’s amazing.

I could go on and on, but my point should be obvious by now. We are a campus of wonderful individuals who work together to make an amazing tapestry of learning communities for our students.

I love this school because of the people. They lack pretention, and they are overflowing with personality, intellectual curiosity, and humanity.

7) Sing and dance (even if you're the only one). Be still and be strong.

My students know that I'm crazy. I have very little shame. Sometimes this is refreshing, and sometimes this is really annoying. And I'm aware of that. I try to closet it sometimes... when I really have to.

Part of the problem is that I really get a high off of entertaining people. I want people to smile. I want them to laugh and to truly enjoy themselves. If I'm honest with myself, I've always been a ham. My parents didn't help. They encouraged me. I did ballet and twirling; I played piano and took voice lessons. In fact, in high school, I seriously thought I was going to be a rock star. I sang at all kinds of events. And then I joined the speech and debate team at PJC (PSC) and then again at Berry College. But more important to me than the high I get from performing is the psychological effect music has on me. I have to have the radio on while I'm driving.... And it can't be NPR. I know I'm supposed to listen to NPR. I'm supposed to use every spare second of my entire life taking in news so that I can be up on current politics. But I can't do it. I have to listen to Rhianna. I have to car dance to Pink. And I have to sing at the top of my lungs to Adele. I have to jam out to Rodrigo e Gabriele, and I have to exercise to Eminem. And.... I'm going to make the claim that it makes me a better teacher and a better person. I know the psychic imprint music is making on this important time in my students' lives because I just bought it all on iTunes and I never left college. Music makes an indelible mark on our lives. Singing and dancing frees us from the constraints of the conventional and the rules of what's expected. I think every student should take music appreciation and should take a dance class to be transported, to be free, and to laugh at themselves and at each other.

When I came back from Florence, I started doing yoga with one of the friends who went on the trip with me. She wanted to become a yoga instructor, and so I committed to be one of her guinea pigs as she practiced "leading class" in her living room. Once a week, we would come together for an hour and have our yoga practice. At first, the simplest positions (down dog, plank, and warrior) would make my legs shake and make me sweat. It was hard! But I'm just a little competitive and a lot perfectionist, and I was gonna do this thing! I would be a warrior! A yoga freakin' warrior! The first year was one of exercise. The second year we really started working on inversions... For those of you who don't know much yoga, that's standing on your head. It's important to the process, but it's one of the most frightening parts of the entire experience. The whole idea of balancing all of your weight on your head is unnatural and terrifying! You know that you are going to break your neck; you are going to fall and bruise your knees; you are not going to get your butt up in the air. People are watching, and you are going to fail. For those of you who do know yoga, you know that it's about 90% mental and about 10% strength and balance. Yoga is about facing your fear and about facing yourself... perhaps the scariest person of all for a lot of us. Beginners who are trying to do a headstand have to be spotted – just like when you're bench-pressing a lot of weight. For a couple of years, we spotted each other as we

awkwardly flung our legs in the air, just hoping to get them high enough so that somebody would catch them before they came crashing down. It's not pretty. And then, we moved to the wall. For the third year, we kicked our legs hard enough to meet the wall and began to practice lifting one foot – or one toe sometimes – away from the wall. Pretty soon, we were able to find our balance off the wall and hold it there for a few seconds. And then the day came when we were told to move away from the wall and do it on our own. This would have been impossible the first year. We didn't have upper body strength or core strength. We didn't have balance. We didn't have focus. The magical day finally came when I was able to lift me feet off the floor, to slowly raise my bent knees waist-high, and then straighten out my legs without losing my balance. Just a few weeks ago, I began staying in a headstand for 3 full minutes. I also pushed myself to go from crow into tripod headstand. I now practice yoga on my own every day. It is my quiet time – my time to shut out all of the input from the day, to focus my mind, to stretch my tight muscles, and to grow in strength and patience. If I could encourage you to do one thing for yourself, I would propose that you find that quiet place where you can grow in physical and mental strength. Days become months which become years, and soon enough you find that you are stronger - strong enough to stand on your head, to run a marathon or to truly have mastered something.

8) Be a chicken, and be an angry bird!

I recently moved out to Cantonment – the country. And I soon discovered that life in the country is full of chickens AND angry birds. There are chicken coups all over the place and hawks circling in the sky to find some small bunny or my Chihuahua for a light afternoon snack.

You might ask... Why in the world, Dr. Evans, did you move all the way out to the country? Why ARE people moving to the country? Some of it is natural population growth. But I would argue that some of it is part of a quest – people searching for a small piece of the natural, the authentic, the peaceful, and the quiet.

While I have moved to the country, I have yet to fully embrace the country life. So... though I understand the appeal of the natural, I by no means claim to be an expert. But I do think that the movement becoming ever more popular by the day of raising chickens, building compost piles, and growing vegetable gardens is a reaction to something... something oppressive about our current state of affairs.

To prepare for my talk, I consulted our resident “gentleman farmer,” Dr. Gregory Tomso, about the contemporary attraction to country life.

And, of course, He was more than happy to share....

According to Dr. Tomso, and I quote:

“There is tremendous value in having one's own flock in the backyard. There are four main benefits here:

1. I'm not harming the animals, whereas industrial egg/meat production is manifestly cruel.
2. I'm not harming the planet, whereas industrial egg/meat production leads to massive run-off problems, pollution, and pesticide use.
3. I'm not harming myself, whereas industrial egg/meat production relies on the routine and heavy use of antibiotics, grain feeds, and hormones.
4. I'm actually creating value. I'm supporting local businesses, supporting organic co-ops that produce my chicken feed, and sharing eggs with neighbors, and I'm lowering my blood pressure. It apparently is rather peaceful to watch chickens.

The industrialization of our food supply is, outside of the exploitation/alienation of labor under capitalism, the single most costly and tragic outcome of industrialization. We are paying the price in our health, and in the medical costs to keep us alive as we stuff ourselves with chemicals, sugar, preservatives, fat, antibiotics and refined carbohydrates and grains." See, I knew Dr. Tomso would have something to say about this.

I also asked him in all sincerity about the emerging movement of raising free-range chickens. Dr. Tomso, in your professional opinion, what are the virtues of the hen?

And in all seriousness, he replied: "Hens have additional virtues:"

1. They live in flocks, and stick together, even though they sometimes fight and they establish strong pecking orders. They provide a model for living in the world--It's not exactly fair, but you stick together somehow anyway.
2. They aren't warm and fuzzy mammals, so though we want to cuddle them, they are more interested in us as food suppliers. Thus, they challenge our human-centric and sentimental assumptions about our place in the world (i.e, that we are the center of everything and everyone loves us).
3. They come in all shapes, temperaments, colors and sizes. They are absolutely beautiful to behold.
4. They provide companionship, eggs, meat, and endless hours of fun.

In sum, according to Dr. Tomso (and I think he is right on this point), the organic movement is an effort to combat the effects of capitalism, the loss of community, and the preservation of healthy living.

I'm also going to argue that we should think about being angry birds.

ABC News recently summarized the viral game available as a phone app – Angry Birds. The premise is simple -- use a slingshot to launch angry birds into the air. Their mission? Destroy the evil pigs. Those angry birds aren't just cute, they are determined. The more pigs they take down, the more player-friendly features the birds get.

The creator of the game, Vesterbacka, said it's the characters that get players hooked. "People really love the birds," he said.

From the yellow bird that breaks bricks to the blue birds that multiply to the black bomb birds that explode, angry birds are where it's at. People love this game because: people love characters; people love distraction; people love challenge.

This game provides lots of different birds with lots of different potential.

The one thing these birds all have in common, however, is that they are willing to hurl themselves headlong into imminent danger – horrible pigs - in order to save that which has value for them – the precious eggs. They are willing to sacrifice their lives for their eggs. I think we all could use a little more of that kind of sacrifice. And the world can always use more characters with different potential and unique talents.

9) What I never did is done...

One of the ways in which I probably do not act my age is that I love all kinds of music. I love pop and alternative and rap and all kinds of stuff. At the same time that I've moved to the country, I've grown out of country music, even though I can definitely appreciate some Carrie Underwood on a good day.

I don't endorse most of the messages of contemporary music, certainly not the domestic violence of Eminem and Rihanna's Love the Way You Lie (though Eminem is a guilty pleasure), or the stalker-like qualities of Lady Gaga's Paparazzi. And I certainly don't endorse Katie Perry's typical Friday Night. I mean really? Really? Do you know a single person other than Barney Stinson on How I Met Your Mother who really lives that way? And though I love Doogie so much, he's not real. Katie and Barney's lives are not real. The lives they endorse are shallow and are caricatures of reckless youth.

The Band Perry is hot right now. The band's song "If I die young" has topped charts, and now there are remixes coming out. But what do the lyrics of this song, based on a Tennyson poem, actually tell us? "If I die young bury me in satin, lay me down in a bed of roses." The lyrics focus on dress and procession, but what about accomplishments? What about family? What about service and sacrifice? One of the last lines of the song is a haunting warning...."what I never did is done."

One of my clearest memories of my childhood was holidays at my granny's house. With six kids and their spouses and about 20 grandkids and their spouses, her little house filled up fast. A day at granny's was a whole day. There was eating and talking and singing and napping and more eating. At the time, I didn't like it. There were too many people and nothing to do.

With granny gone now, there are rarely huge family holidays. We have our own families and holidays, and we're all too busy to make time for big gatherings.

Last summer, however, the family did get together, but it was for an altogether different reason. My cousin, Billy, was hit by a drunk driver at 3 in the morning while he was walking home from a bar. For this, the family came. We gathered together, and we cried together. There are no words to describe viewing someone – a family member – close in age and in good health in a coffin. My father gave the eulogy. It was one of the most surreal experiences of my life. Hearing my father describe the youth and vigor of my cousin hit my heart like a freight train.

Billy was beautiful. He worked out upwards of three times a day. He never ate carbs. He always was tan and put together. He worked for an architect, and he knew how to do all kinds of construction. He also did modeling for a number of local agencies. He had souped up cars, and he lived fast and partied hard. When we buried Billy, our families came together.... And Billy's friends came together. They were models and the Seville crowd. All of them were beautiful and had very different priorities than my family. But they loved Billy, and for one day they were part of our family. They spent time in the covered carport, while the rest of us consoled my aunt and uncle consumed with grief and still paralyzed with shock.

Why do I find this important to share? Because it is all about identity. We are born to a family, but we choose our friends. We set our goals, and we shape our lives. What will be valuable when you are 30? How about 50? 70? Billy's loss is inexplicable, and it has driven me to take stock of my own life and the lives of the students I teach. Our culture speaks to values, but not meaningfully. There are songs that are now difficult for me to hear because they serve as haunting reminders of this need for meaning.

I visited the International Spy Museum this summer and in one of the displays on intelligence in WWII, was a copy of the letter from Albert Einstein to President Roosevelt in 1939 about the possibility of nuclear warfare. As an academic and a "scientist" who studies government, this particular artifact gave me chills. The power of one scientist to change the course of history is almost inconceivable. He found himself in a moment of history that held great potential, that required great sacrifice, and that challenged the very foundations of civilization. A German theoretical physicist, Albert Einstein gave us the theory of general relativity. He also gave us a warning. He was plagued by the ethical dilemmas that his ideas introduced. A year before his death, he confessed to a dear friend that he had made one great mistake in his life... signing a letter encouraging the development of the atom bomb. How do we reconcile this life? A genius...who took personal responsibility for the most deadly weapon the world had ever seen.

At the end of the day, we do what we can and that is all we can do.

And hopefully, when all is said and done and we, just as Einstein did, weigh the balance of our lives, the deepest wrinkles marking our faces are laugh lines rather than furrowed brows. In parting, let me give you one final summary admonition. If you don't hear anything else, hear this... Dr. Evans' 10th piece of advice:

10) Don't let the pigs steal your eggs, and don't let a clipped wing hold you down.

Thank you.