

(from 03:31 to 07:53)

I just love saying "Stanford." Because the truth is, I know I would have never gotten my degree at all, 'cause I didn't go to Stanford. I went to Tennessee State University. But I never would have gotten my diploma at all, because I was supposed to graduate back in 1975, but I was short one credit. And I figured, I'm just going to forget it, 'cause, you know, I'm not going to march with my class. Because by that point, I was already on television. I'd been in television since I was 19 and a sophomore. Granted, I was the only television anchor person that had an 11 o'clock curfew doing the 10 o'clock news.

Seriously, my dad was like, "Well, that news is over at 10:30. Be home by 11."

But that didn't matter to me, because I was earning a living. I was on my way. So, I thought, I'm going to let this college thing go and I only had one credit short. But, my father, from that time on and for years after, was always on my case, because I did not graduate. He'd say, "Oprah Gail"—that's my middle name—"I don't know what you're gonna do without that degree." And I'd say, "But, Dad, I have my own television show."

And he'd say, "Well, I still don't know what you're going to do without that degree."

And I'd say, "But, Dad, now I'm a talk show host." He'd say, "I don't know how you're going to get another job without that degree."

So, in 1987, Tennessee State University invited me back to speak at their commencement. By then, I had my own show, was nationally syndicated. I'd made a movie, had been nominated for an Oscar and founded my company, Harpo. But I told them, I cannot come and give a speech unless I can earn one more credit, because my dad's still saying I'm not going to get anywhere without that degree.

So, I finished my coursework, I turned in my final paper and I got the degree.

And my dad was very proud. And I know that, if anything happens, that one credit will be my salvation.

But I also know why my dad was insisting on that diploma, because, as B. B. King put it, "The beautiful thing about learning is that nobody can take that away from you." And learning is really in the broadest sense what I want to talk about today, because your education, of course, isn't ending here. In many ways, it's only just begun.

The world has so many lessons to teach you. I consider the world, this Earth, to be like a school and our life the classrooms. And sometimes here in this Planet Earth school the lessons often come dressed up as detours or roadblocks. And sometimes as full-blown crises. And the secret I've learned to getting ahead is being open to the lessons, lessons from the grandest university of all, that is, the universe itself.

Oprah Winfrey's speech at Stanford

It's being able to walk through life eager and open to self-improvement and that which is going to best help you evolve, 'cause that's really why we're here, to evolve as human beings. To grow into more of ourselves, always moving to the next level of understanding, the next level of compassion and growth.

I think about one of the greatest compliments I've ever received: I interviewed with a reporter when I was first starting out in Chicago. And then many years later, I saw the same reporter. And she said to me, "You know what? You really haven't changed. You've just become more of yourself."

And that is really what we're all trying to do, become more of ourselves. And I believe that there's a lesson in almost everything that you do and every experience, and getting the lesson is how you move forward. It's how you enrich your spirit. And, trust me, I know that inner wisdom is more precious than wealth. The more you spend it, the more you gain.

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