

Mrs. Ford's Remarks
Central High School Commencement
Monday, June 7, 1976
Grand Rapids, Michigan

It's an honor to be back at Central---even though it makes me feel old. I can't believe it's been 40 years since my class received their diplomas.

Of course, my last high school graduation wasn't in 1936. It was only last year, when my daughter graduated high school. In fact, in my family, we've had six high school graduations. And I know that while each graduation is unique, parents and graduates share similar emotions on this very special day.

For graduates, today marks an end to a very special time in your lives. It also marks a great beginning. It may be scary to think of the friends, teachers, and experiences you'll be leaving behind, but it should be exciting and satisfying to be free to pursue your special dreams.

Today, I know every mother in this audience has thought about the first day you trundled off to school. I know the same mixture of high hopes and just a little pain are in their hearts right now.

And like the day you first went to school, there is little we can do but promise our support and encourage you to continue to develop and grow. Trust and believe in yourself and your fellowman---that's the best advice we can give.

What makes America special is that each individual makes his own dreams and lives in an environment where they can come true. Of course life has frustrations, and the best laid plans do often go awry. But life also has challenges and opportunities and I have found the true excitement and challenge of life is to expect the unexpected.

When I watched my children graduate, I prayed for each of them to have the imagination to dream, the strength to accept challenges, and the courage to overcome defeats. I also asked that they be blessed with laughter, the love of friends and the joy of living. And, most importantly, that they live up to the best in themselves. As I watch you graduate, I find myself reciting the same mother's prayer.

I don't believe those cynics who think this is a bad time for America. We've got our problems, but we've also got the courage to find solutions. We're preserving individual liberty and opportunity, and we're hopeful that you'll mature without experiencing the horror of war. But there's an awful lot that needs to be done by this bicentennial graduating class. Please use the liberty and opportunity America provides to make the world a better place.

Thank you.