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Giants and Fishermen

Thank you to all involved in my nomination and eventual selection the 2017 Distinguished Teacher of the Year. In addition, I would like to whole-heartedly congratulate all of the faculty members and students who are being recognized here today for their accomplishments.

I am but a simple forensic pathologist who loves to teach.

To be recognized for one of my passions is something for which I can in no way truly express my gratitude to the students of the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine. To quote the late, great Lou Gehrig... "I **am** the luckiest man on the face of the Earth."

I was lucky enough to be born to- and raised by two of the most dedicated parents one could ever know. My mother is a retired middle- and high school English, History, Sociology, Psychology and Law teacher and my father is a retired college biology professor. It just so happens that my gifted sister is also a teacher...so you might say that being an educator is a foregone conclusion in my family.

My late paternal grandfather was a US Steel worker and also a man who exemplified the old saw "**Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, but teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime.**" One should appreciate that these words are not meaningless, they are a statement encapsulating a philosophy that cuts through millions of years of human evolution back to our hominid forebears. One of the things that set them apart from competitors of the day was their ability to teach and learn new behaviors and skills,

which, in turn, provided learners with an adaptive “toolkit” with which to work. This enabled the learner to instantly gain the proceeds of a lifetime- or generation-worth of trial and error as well as to provide the learner a framework from which to construct a “reference set” of skills that they would modify to fit their own life experiences...**what a gift**...to stand on the shoulders of giants and be able to experience the successes of that providence.

I stand here before you proudly on the shoulders of many, many giants such as my grandfather Martin, my parents Dennis and Constance, on the shoulders of their students such as Gary Silverman who took the time to bequeath his time and experience to me, on the shoulders of undergraduate mentor giants such as Nick Cavoti and Shelly Williams, my doctoral mentor Ted Taraschi, post-docs Ian Goodyer and Christian Hamann, on the shoulders of my physician-educator mentor Cheryl Hanau, on the shoulders of my residency mentors Mark Wick and Mark Stoler and on the shoulders of my forensic pathology mentors Marcella Fierro, Elizabeth Balraj, Joe Felo, Steve Cina, Michael Bell and Craig Mallak.

From a personal point of view, I also stand before you as a product of a 28 year love affair (we met in August of 1989 my dear) with my dauntless wife, Miriam, as well as on the shoulders of my sublime daughter Dennison, both of whom inspire me, reinforce my humility and evoke my constant awe of their humanity.

It has always been my belief that great teachers (be they academic, coaches, colleagues or life partners) must also be voracious learners, having to constantly re-calibrate their lessons and themselves to ensure that they maintain efficacy for their charges. This constant recalibration and openness to feedback, if done well, demands tremendous self-actualization and a willingness to step outside the “shackles of convention” and “temples of ego” in order to reach across that conceptual “crevasse” to bring our learners over safely.

As stated, I am a forensic pathologist and we investigate death and are charged with adjudication of cause- and manner of death for our decedents...our patients. What many of you may not appreciate is that we are also the consummate consultants--to the health care establishment, the local, state and federal government, to first responders, law enforcement and to the justice system. In most cases, when we are attending death scenes, performing autopsies, finishing casework and testifying in court, we are TEACHING. But...that was not even enough for me. I spent a great deal of the little free time I had going out into the community, to police academies and hospital conferences in order to educate all who would listen about what we do, how we do it and how death investigation fits into modern society. "Why" you may ask? Well, during my fellowship interview, Dr. Marcella Fierro looked me square in the eye and tapped the desk with her finger as she spoke, "I am not training meat cutters, I'm training you so you can take **the word out...**" which has been my primary mission directive for the past decade.

So, I also want to recognize that FAU has changed my life...more specifically, it has redefined my purpose and, in turn, has given me new life. Drs Joseph Ouslander, Deborah Louda, Michelle Lizotte Waniewski and Bill Paull called me for an interview, you and others I'm sure, fought for me and, in August 2014, I joined the faculty of the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine...**the "kid" has keys to the candy store.**

I am now part of a fantastic faculty, completely supported by a thoughtful, engaged and sensitive administration, and am surrounded by medical and graduate students who constantly remind me of the academic physician ideal to which I have aspired for so long. I thank all of the faculty, staff and student body of the College of Medicine for all that you have done for me, for the lessons you all have graciously taught and for the promise of the continued joy of being a formative part of the educational process here at FAU.

So, for all here today attending this honors convocation, and in honor of Fred Rogers (everyone's neighbor), I would ask that you take a moment to reflect on your mentors, your parents, coaches,

teachers and colleagues...all of the giants upon whose shoulders you now tread for your myriad successes... "I'll watch the time".

In closing, to all those mentors out there, to all the giants still walking the Earth, for all your hard work, for your nurturing, for the painfully harsh criticism we needed, for the experiential "tuition" you paid so we did not have to, for never giving up on us and for never letting us quit, for teaching us that the more we sweat in peace the less we bleed in war, for teaching us that when we are hating life the most is when we are learning the most and ***for never losing sight of the mission...*** I thank you... ***for teaching us to fish.***