

YOGI DELIVERS AGAIN

By David Carson, St. Louis Post-Dispatch
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Deadlines being what they are for this Sunday column, this essayist missed a momentous occasion recently. On May 19, 2007, Yogi Berra accepted an honorary degree from St. Louis University and delivered the commencement speech for 1,900 graduates and 10,000 in attendance at Scottrade Center .

It's hard to imagine a more promising lingual event. Berra is to vocal communication what Don Cherry is to the fashion industry. Yogi doesn't so much command the English language as he corkscrews it. It is part of what makes the baseball Hall of Famer and pride of the Hill one of America 's endearing figures.

While the oratory went unrecognized in this space last week, I was fortunate enough to secure a copy of the discourse and felt compelled to share it with those who did not attend. So here is, in its entirety, Yogi's dissertation:

"Thank you all for being here tonight. I know this is a busy time of year, and if you weren't here, you could probably be somewhere else. I especially want to thank the administration at St. Louis University for making this day necessary. It is an honor to receive this honorary degree.

"It is wonderful to be here in St. Louis and to visit the old neighborhood. I haven't been back since the last time I was here. Everything looks the same, only different. Of course, things in the past are never as they used to be.

"Before I speak, I have something I'd like to say. As you may know, I never went to college, or high school for that matter. To be honest, I'm not much of a public speaker, so I will try to keep this short as long as I can.

"As I look out upon all of the young people here tonight, there are a number of words of wisdom I might depart. But I think the most irrelevant piece of advice I can pass along is this:

"The most important things in life are the things that are least important."

"I could have gone a number of directions in my life. Growing up on the Hill, I could have opened a restaurant or a bakery. But the more time I spent in places like that, the less time I wanted to spend there. I knew that if I wanted to play baseball, I was going to have to play baseball. My childhood friend, Joe Garagiola, also became a big-league ballplayer, as did my son, Dale. I think you'll find the similarities in our careers are quite different.

"You're probably wondering, how does a kid from the Hill become a New York Yankee and get in the Hall of Fame. Well, let me tell you something, if it was easy nobody would do it. Nothing is impossible until you make it possible."

"Of course, times were different. To be honest, I was born at an early age. Things are much more confiscated now. It seems like a nickel ain't worth a dime anymore. But let me tell you, if the world was perfect, it wouldn't be. Even Napoleon had his Watergate."

"You'll make some wrong mistakes along the way, but only the wrong

survive. Never put off until tomorrow what you can't do today. Denial isn't just a river in Europe

"Strive for success and remember, you won't get what you want unless you want what you get. Some will choose a different path. If they don't want to come along, you can't stop them. Remember, none are so kind as those who will not see."

"Keep the faith and follow the Commandments: Do not covet thy neighbor's wife, unless she has nothing else to wear. Treat others before you treat yourself. As Franklin Eleanor Roosevelt once said, 'The only thing you have to fear is beer itself'."

"Hold on to your integrity, ladies and gentlemen. It's the one thing you really need to have; if you don't have it, that's why you need it. Work hard to reach your goals, and if you can't reach them, use a ladder. There may come a day when you get hurt and have to miss work. Don't worry, it won't hurt to miss work.

"Over the years, I have realized that baseball is really just a menopause for life. We all have limitations, but we also know limitation is the greatest form of flattery. Beauty is in the eyes of Jim Holder.

"Half the lies you hear won't be true, and half the things you say, you won't ever say.

"As parents you'll want to give your children all the things you didn't have. But don't buy them an encyclopedia, make them walk to school like you did. Teach them to have respect for others, especially the police. They are not here to create disorder, they are here to preserve it.

Throughout my career, I found good things always came in pairs of three. There will be times when you are an overwhelming underdog. Give 100 percent to everything you do, and when that's not enough, give everything you have left. 'Winning isn't everything, but it's better than rheumatism.' I think Guy Lombardo said that.

Finally, dear graduates and friends, cherish this moment; it is a memory you will never forget. You have your entire future ahead of you. "Good luck and Bob's speed."