

Re: OCCA All-Oregon Academic Team Scholar Speech, Salem Convention Center, 4-21-2011

“Hello, it’s great to be here. I think I can speak for all of us students that this recognition for the hard work that it took to get us here is greatly appreciated, so thank you to all who have helped make this award and event possible. My name is Tyler Pratt and it is with great pride that I have been asked to speak and represent Central Oregon Community College from my hometown of Bend, OR. It was a wide breadth of experiences from years of travel that led me unexpectedly to Community College, and my newfound skills, insights, and perspectives due to this higher education have empowered me far beyond my expectations. This said, I am humbled to share my story with you.

I was born and raised in the “once” small town of Bend, OR and am thankful to say I had a wonderful middle-class American childhood. Among my dreams were becoming a professional baseball player, an astronaut, and a millionaire. However, by High School, thanks in part to literature, music, and lots of time spent outdoors, my passions had shifted to human and environmental justice and I became increasingly aware of the many disparities of human reality existing in our world. My concern, along with a thirst for adventure and to experience life in its rawest form, led me to dream of travel.

Immediately following High School I sought out the developing world and went south of the border, knowing not what lie ahead and anxious for whatever lessons might teach me more about this human experience. I went immediately off the beaten path, forcing myself to leave my comfort zone to try new experiences and to connect intimately with the people I met. Whether assisting them planting their fields, building a house, or mending a fishing net, I jumped in to help however I could, regardless of how clumsy I felt at the new task. Eight years later, just before starting college for my first time at 26 years old, I had helped design and develop over a dozen organic agriculture demonstration sites, community water projects, and renewable energy systems throughout 17 countries throughout Africa, Asia, and Central America. Although I had few worldly possessions to show for my time, in my mind my life was as rich as any.

However, although I had experienced first-hand the power of will and manifestation in my travels, I had also long since seen the limitations of my abilities, for many of the challenges I had witnessed were far too complex for me to even begin to understand. I began to see that without developing a foundational understanding of WHY and HOW things work and relate the way they do, my ability to achieve my potential in helping others as well as making a living for myself would be hindered, and I started to explore how I would go about getting a degree. My initial thoughts were that to get an education worthy of my time, I would have to start directly at University. However, as my research continued the benefits of beginning at Community College became apparent. Somewhat reluctantly I decided to give it a try. What I found would change my life forever.

Now, well into my engineering degree, I have come to see things through a different lens. Thanks to the high quality instruction and the many personal relationships with my professors due to the small class size I have excelled greatly. I am presently completing my sophomore year at COCC and will transfer with a 4.0 into OIT’s Renewable Energy Engineering program this coming fall.

And while my knowledge in my field has grown substantially and I feel more empowered daily with every class that I take, I am also witnessing such a vast pool of information and ideas that I am continually humbled by the boundaries of my own understanding. In the words of my physics professor Dr. Bruce Emerson, “Rather than a linear process, expert learning is more like a complex web, connecting far flung concepts through myriad paths.”

With this in mind, I see an additional analogy. We live in this metaphorical web, and it is this web that supports us. Therefore, it is not the individual elements of our daily lives that matter most, but rather how we use them to connect with the other aspects of our world. Herein, I believe, lies the true secret of life.

The challenges facing humanity are many and are growing fast. Finding solutions will mean forever pushing at the boundaries of our creativity and capabilities, but as history has shown, this is doable. All of us here today have been given an amazing opportunity. In addition to improving our own lives through education, most of us are also

in a position of being able to use these skills to help others less fortunate now and into the future know a happy and peaceful life. Only with this sense of global unity will we reach our true potential.

In conclusion, when examining my life I see that I am blessed beyond belief. From my travels I witnessed first-hand many dichotomies of our world and my relative wealth became blatantly apparent. Now, community college has given me a priceless opportunity, equipping me far beyond what I could have imagined for the career of my dreams, and giving me in new insights into the many connections comprising this metaphorical web of life. But in pursuit of my personal goals I hope to remember to use my skills to give back, in whatever form that may be, and I hope that you will join with me, because I know the extent of your potential and what we could accomplish together would be truly astounding. Thank you.

Arthur Tyler Pratt

2011 All-Oregon Academic Team Award Winner, Central Oregon Community College