

REMARKS BY BILL DICKINSON ON PAGE AND ELOISE PICKARD SMITH SCHOLARSHIP AT
PIONEER CLASSES' REUNION – APRIL 18, 1999

I'd like to speak with you briefly about why I am making a \$100,000 lifetime commitment to create the Page and Eloise Pickard Smith Memorial Scholarship for UCSC students who've been foster kids, wards of the court, or orphans. And I'd like to invite you to help it grow. The first part can be summed up succinctly: Cowell's founding provost and his wife were awesome. Amidst the flow of unreliable memory, they abide as a vivid embodiment of the daring experiment that blossomed here – in Cowell, Stevenson, and Crown – during those wondrous pioneering years.

What we remember lives.

It's hard to believe that the last time I was on this stage, twenty-three years ago, Page was younger than most of us are now. It was College Night. He sat over there. The radical Harvard theologian, Harvey Cox, with whom I would study liberation theology two decades later, sat next to him. And I sat next to Harvey, whose *Secular City* was then a best seller and whose beard had yet to even hint at gray.

Page asked me to sit next to Harvey because he knew of my interest in contemporary theological ideas and respected me enough to seat me next to an emerging seminal thinker. This may not strike you as all that special. After all, like so many mentors then resident in our three colleges, Page and Eloise knew and respected many of us with an uncommon and blessed specificity.

Which goes to the heart of why I did find Page's inviting me to sit up here truly special: growing up, as I did, in foster homes and an orphanage, I was unaccustomed to receiving that sort of respectful attention. And it was through countless respectful moments like this that I learned, in the easy intimacy of my college, that my life mattered.

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In December 1965, mere months after arriving here, I got my notice to appear for my military physical. I was preparing to go to jail rather than go in the Army. In lieu of the father I never had, Page sat with me for a long while trying to talk me out of it. We talked about Reinhold Niebuhr's balance of power theory of history, about Page's mentor, Rosenstock-Huessy, and the fact that if I went to jail I would miss the feisty German moralist's lectures on the bionomics of speech!

Page spoke movingly and convincingly about why it mattered to him that I was at Cowell, about what might be possible in my life if I did not take the step that I contemplated. He lured me back from the brink. Not through the power of his ideas: I didn't agree with his position on Vietnam at the time. No, it wasn't the ideas that did the trick; it was the power of his concern, the way he showed up for me, the fact that he bothered to take the time. Nobody had ever taken me that seriously!

And then there's Eloise, the spunky, scrappy soul mate who gave Page so much of his reason for living. Knowing that I had nowhere to go for Thanksgiving one year, they turned the Provost's house over to me while they went up to their place on Pine Flat Road. Eloise told me to make myself at home, inviting me to help myself to her well-stocked fridge. Nobody whom I respected had ever entrusted me with a fine home in this way.

The walls of books in Page's study awed me. The colorful abundance of Eloise's paintings fed my imagination and delighted my heart. The lacquered bread sculptures with which she had decked out the dining room during her "Found Art" phase bemused me.

So little, and yet so much: vivid snapshots of what the good life can look like.

My post-UCSC life has been good, in no small measure because I got to pass this way. It's payback time. I'd like to help others who've been forced to embark on their life journeys with one hand tied behind their back find their way to the realization that their lives matter, help them discover their own snapshots of the good life.

The vast majority of foster kids never see such snapshots, never even graduate from high school. Ready or not, they are dumped out of the system at age eighteen. There are more than 40 UCSC students who currently fit the eligible categories for the Smith Scholarship. They have strong survival skills or they wouldn't have gotten this far. What was true for me – and for many in this room tonight – is true for them as well: there's a very good chance that they will discover here the gifts that lie dormant within all human beings.

Our classmate Joe Goldberg once wrote of Page and Eloise that "they taught 'class' to a whole generation." I think Joe was talking about those noble virtues with which they seemed so at ease. I'd put it a bit differently. No matter who you were, no matter what your background, they behaved as though you had nobility in you. And they made it abundantly clear that they and the college community stood ready to draw it out.

And so it seems to me, after all these years, that Ansel Adams was not all that wide of the mark when he dubbed this place in its infancy "The Athens of the West."

What we remember lives.

When the Pioneer classes gathered in 1985, remembering how we had benefited from our time here, we created a fund that has now grown to \$477,000. It alone now makes possible things that mattered to us when we were students. I will write to you soon to ask you to contribute again, this time to the Smith Scholarship, or to volunteer to mentor one of these students. And whether you went to Cowell, Stevenson, or Crown I hope you'll consider giving to something that salutes far more than one wonderful man and his equally wonderful wife. In the end, it memorializes a vulnerable yet awesome vision of what a college can be.

Thank you for listening.