

“Be the Author of Your Life” Graduation Speech by T. A. Barron

—It’s an honor to be here. Great day! Great school. And...great class!

—I am proud of you—humbled by you.

—Now, usually—Writing keeps me humble. (Almost as much as being around my kids.)

- “Still alive” letter
- “Not very smart after all” letter

—Then: Describe *Heartlight*, and letter from N.C. woman: “Thank you for giving me the right word”

—When you choose the right words you get spontaneous combustion, you generate heat and light.

But—Not always easy to choose the right words:

Example from Yogi Bera

And yet – the right words can do it all:

- Aldo Leopold: “The wind has gone with the geese. And so would I, were I the wind.”
- Winston Churchill: “Never, never, never, never, never give up.”

—There are so many, many more: But I will give you just one more. The words of a brave 12-year-old girl—Anne Frank.

In the midst of horror of WWII; hiding like frightened animals; scrounging for food; fearful day and night of capture, torture, slavery, worse, she wrote: “I still believe...the world is a wonderful place.”

—Now, there is bright light! True heroism. Not celebrity. A hero finds strength, wisdom inside.

—The right words – can be like a sudden clearing after a storm. A shaft of light in the darkened forest. A spark—that leads to spontaneous flame.

—So choose your words well! Say important things! And say them—with passion, wisdom, humility, and courage. Then your fire will warm our hands, and light our way.

—And now ... I'll go a step further: Say something not just with your words, but with your life. *Be the author of your own life. Through the choices we make, we write our stories. So make your story the best one you possibly can.*

- That means: Don't just repeat the latest fad; or what you see in advertisements.
- In fact: Don't just be a consumer ... Be a creator.
- That way you are not just a cork, bobbing down the stream of life. Grab your own paddle—*choose your own direction.*
- And: Above all—*don't be a victim.*
- (I was just reading about)—Wilma Rudolph—stricken with polio as a young child. Doctors said: Never walk. 9th kid out of a family of 12. Very poor—mother worked hard; poverty. Born in the deep south, racism still the norm. She had every reason to call herself a victim. And yet: she pushed herself, sometimes to exhaustion, tried to walk—and finally, she did. One day she threw away the braces on her legs. But she didn't stop there! She ran; faster—and began to win races. And in the 1960 Olympics—she won gold medal in the 100 meter dash: Wilma Rudolph, the kid with polio, had become the fastest woman in the world.

When asked afterward about how she did it, she answered simply: “My doctor told me I'd never walk again. My mama told me I would. ...I chose to believe Mama.”

- And so: Be the author of your own life.
And make your story something that matters!
Change the quality of the day.

—And: While you're at it, take some time to listen to those geese...For despite all its troubles, the world is still...a wonderful place.