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FOUNDERS DAY, NOVEMBER 11, 1964

A BRIEF TRIBUTE

BY: M. W. RUSSELL

I speak today without claim of being completely unbiased. Western is my alma mater. After being engaged in a variety of scientific and technical pursuits across the country during the past fourteen years, I have only recently returned to Western. Therefore, I approach this occasion from two distinctly different vantage points, one from within and the other from the outside.

During my twelve years away from Western it was my good fortune to meet many outstanding personalities in this country. Some years ago it came as a pleasant realization that there were certain individuals on the Western faculty, some recently retired, who were just as great and in some ways greater than any men or women I have ever known. Humility is a characteristic of most truly great people. Generally speaking those individuals of whom I refer couldn't care less about how the world rates them. To many, they rate alongside the first founders of Western.

I did not meet or know the early founders of this institution. When one considers the times in which they lived, the lack of financial support, and the apathy of the general public toward education, their accomplishments can be nothing other than truly remarkable.

To characterize the traditions of Western and properly relate them to its founders would require several lectures concerning the extremely interesting history of Western. In order to briefly provide the setting of the beginning of Western as a state school, I should like to quote a statement made by Dr. Gordon Wilson, Sr. who arrived on the scene in 1908 as a student, and later became the head of the English Department, a position he held until his retire-

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During my twelve years away from Western it was my good fortune to meet at least a few of the leading personalities in this country. Some years ago it came as a pleasant realization that there were certain individuals on the Western faculty, some recently retired, who were just as great and in some ways greater than any men or women I have ever known. Humility is a characteristic of most truly great people. Generally speaking those individuals of whom I refer couldn't care less about how the world rates them. To many, they rate alongside the first founders of Western.

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retirement. He stated it in this way:

> "To a younger person or an outsider it is hard to visualize Kentucky as it was in the early days of this college. The alma mater of most people, provided they stayed in school long enough, was a little one-roomed country school, taught by a teacher who had had no word of high school and no course that was slanted toward teaching. There were a few high schools in some of the larger cities and towns, but probably not more than half a dozen in Western Kentucky. Ready money was practically unknown to a very large part of the citizens. The farmer was really poverty stricken so far as having any money is concerned. Only an occasional person could furnish his children with what amounted to a high school education. Into this strange world came Western and its twin college, Eastern, in 1906. From the first day, our college stressed the importance of education, the value of the remotest little community, the worst-favored child, the humblest teacher."

The horse and buggy days probably seem very remote to you who have known the atomic age and the space age from childhood. Although I am less than half the age of Dr. Wilson, and not too many years older than you, my early memories in Webster County are of a little green school wagon pulled by two mules, or four during the rainy season when the dirt roads were so muddy that the wagon wheels mired almost up to the hubs. I remember quite well when the very first road was paved in Webster County. Education was still a controversial subject in small Kentucky communities during the thirties. We heard arguments pro and con about book learning and book sense, the consensus generally being that it was wasted effort to go beyond high school unless one wished to become a medical doctor, a lawyer, or a teacher.

With these facts in mind perhaps one can more readily see why sound educational evangelism was sorely needed. I believe that it is safe to say that President Cherry and his colleagues along

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with the second wave of founders such as the truly great teachers Western has known up to the present have succeeded more than most, even in the face of somewhat formidable odds.

To me, the word "style" more than any other in the English language, characterizes the individuals we have come to know as the founders of Western. I do not mean by this stylish or well dressed. I mean the composite of thought and action and purposeful effort which enabled them to accomplish many of their goals of higher education against such great odds. What were some of these goals? First and foremost in the mind of President Cherry seemed to be that objective of providing an educational opportunity at reasonable cost for everyone; of creating an environment of opportunity for greatness for anyone, regardless of background or humble beginnings.

But before continuing, lets consider this word style which I have chosen to replace the more worn out terms of dedication, devotion, service, etc. Style in the sense that I mean it here may be considered as a distinctive or characteristic mode of presentation, construction, or execution in any art or human endeavor. Then there is style in living, and learning to live; in achieving and accomplishment, in the pursuit of happiness. As we observe the happenings around us, we recognize style in almost everything that occurs from the concert hall to the style of Huntley-Brinkley to the style of Danny Kaye. From the style of Edie Adams to the style of Gomer Pyle. Then there's the style of a good quarterback, etc. All are successful, mind you.

As evidence of our recognition of its importance, we have common

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phrases such as "that cramps my style" and "it's out of style." Style in its finest sense, is largely an acquirement of the educated mind. In terms of power to achieve useful goals, style is the most important acquirement of education.

Whitehead has stated that style is the ultimate morality of mind. The very best style of thought and action always seems to be derived from true sincerity and a practical compassion for one's fellow man.

Many different styles of action or behavior may be employed to achieve the same goal, but it always must be intimately related to the environment one encounters. Style separates the professional from the amateur.

Did our founders exhibit styles of thought and action appropriate to the times and to the needs of their times? The answer is a resounding yes! Style they had! They were, in a sense, idealists with idealistic goals which they never fully achieved yet they made steady progress toward their goals by remaining practical minded in their daily work and contact with students. A few of the traditions at Western which have grown out of its early history are: First, the opportunity to obtain a sound education if the individual applies himself. Second, genuine friendliness. Third, genuine and sincere interest in individual students including assisting the student to discover his identity and choose a suitable profession. I think this last one explains in part the intensely loyal alumni of Western, i.e. because so many were guided and helped by members of the faculty and administration in making wise decisions regarding the choice of a career.

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If you think some of this is a bit outmoded for the present day, let me call your attention to a lecture I attended this summer concerning recent developments in undergraduate education at Harvard given by Dr. David Riesman, who is one of their very top men. He discussed attempts to assist the undergraduate to discover himself and to determine the best profession for him to choose. He emphasized that many students made their decisions too hastily and too often chose the wrong career. He thinks that the first two or three years of undergraduate study should constitute a period of exploration for the student. He thought more personal contact was good. Western has had such goings on for many years.

Yes, there is something more to college than teachers and students. There is something more to education than mere acquisiton of knowledge. There is something more on this limestone hill than is revealed by the reflection of visible light.

The idealistic goals of the past have not all been reached and may never be fully attained. But today, we are proceeding forward on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, cognizant of and grateful for the heritage that is ours and yours; aware of the great adventures, of the great problems and of the great opportunities of the future; aware of the need for constructive changes in our styles of thought and action to make them appropriate to our own times and to the future.

I wish that it were possible for me to convey to you this morning what we at Western see in the vast scope of opportunities for you, the new dimensions in citizenship, etc. It is vitally important that you don't muff your opportunity by becoming discouraged too

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soon by temporary setbacks.

We pay tribute to the founders of Western today by gladly accepting the awesome responsibility of helping you to acquire the education and the style of thought and action with which to meet the exciting days ahead, as mankind opens a new frontier among the stars. Since it is near the centennial birthday of Western's principal founder, I shall close by presenting a paragraph from his writings. Dr. H. H. Cherry said and I quote:

> "It is our duty to sanctify this great hill by hard study; by expressing its harmony, its order, its articulation, its saneness, and its stateliness in our lives; by seeing to it that its nobility is not marred by a single mark or desecrated in any other way; by making the beautiful sunrises and sunsets which we shall witness from this hill, the rising of a soul in a world of promise and opportunity and the setting of a soul admidst the splendors of a life well lived; and by making this beautiful physical panorama that we shall witness from this hill-top and fro classroom windows a spiritual panorama to be transmuted into life, and, finally, through a patriotic use of things spiritual and things material, unlock the door that confines an imprisoned self and allow a new and greater citizen to step forth -- a blessing to man, a servant of God."