

## Mary's Story of a Grand Weekend - May 19, 2009

We have had a remarkable weekend—with the interlacing of personal and public history. You may have noticed that **Barack Obama** gave the commencement address at Notre Dame Sunday. Among the graduates was **Emerson Cofell-Dwyer**, 2nd son of **Jean Cofell and Pat Dwyer**, named after Emerson Hynes, who got his Masters from Notre Dame in May, 1939, 70 years ago. Gordon was one of the lucky 350 faculty members who got a ticket to the commencement. Jean, Pat, and their other sons Kieran and Liam were staying with us so 3 of them got into the commencement arena (the basketball stadium) and Pat and I watched from the remote televised sites.

As we drove into campus there was a thin sprinkling of right-to-lifers with signs vilifying Obama and Father Jenkins and a dozen graduates actually stayed away. But in a remarkable demonstration of moral courage and deep understanding of what it means to be committed to education, both Jenkins and Obama “turned the other cheek” as it were, to call for dialogue. I think of how both our parents (or I should say all our parents as the Dwyer’s and the Cofells were cut of the same cloth) would have stood and cheered as we did, as Jenkins in his powerful introduction quoted and expanded on Vatican 2: “Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think and act differently than we do in social, political, and even religious matters. In fact the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through such courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them.” Jeanne Cofell reported that as Jenkins began to speak, the woman in front of her pulled out a book to read, determined not to listen. But as he continued, the book fell into her lap and she began to hear another point of view. Let that be a sign!

When Obama spoke, he made references to the Catholic Worker movement and the spirit of faith driven social activism that brought Emerson Hynes to Notre Dame and bound him and Arleen together, along with their “movement” friends, the Humphreys, the ERLERS, Dwyers, Powers, as well the Collegeville crowd of O’Connells and Cofells. He spoke of how Ted Hesburgh, about to turn 92, and the late Cardinal Bernadin advocated that all of us heed the call to be both a beacon and a crossroads—to act from deeply thought thru convictions but always to dialogue—and to respect. I am not a big fan of commencements but this felt, 100 plus days in as proof that something important is beginning: I think Gordon and I were close to tears to know that we are now, finally, being lead by some one who is profoundly committed to the thought, the convictions and the moral center that we were taught from our earliest years is our vocation.

I was proud to see that on the same day, Trinity’s President Pat McGuire also called for that spirit in defense of Jenkins and Notre Dame’s honoring of Obama. This morning’s Chicago Tribune editorial rightly honored Jenkins as well as Obama.

On the family front, so many good things are continuing. Anita and Daniel have just been able to secure another year in Frankfurt—Anita is continuing with the agency she has been with; Daniel is investigating teaching jobs. We are very much looking forward to a visit from them—in exciting tandem with Tito and Mary Chavez—in late June. And a visit from Simone, Sarah and Nico will make this weekend genuinely memorable. Sebastien is going to DC with

the 5th graders from his school for the last week—hopefully in time to greet Kylah and John’s little one. We know Pat and Mary are on their way to London to see that crowd and Brigid will do a frequent fly as well.

Gordon and I are head over heels with summer school projects—he with Guided Inquiry workshops for elementary teachers and me with 2 classes: my old favorite Concepts of Inquiry in Early Childhood, and a Science and Social Studies Methods Class that I am going to use quilts to model how these two subjects can (and should) be integrated across the curriculum. The paper my friend Rebeca and I delivered in New Zealand has just been published in a book so that is exciting. Another publication is in the pipeline as well. *[Ed’s note: Mary’s modesty prevents her from mentioning it, but she would surely send you a copy of her NZ paper if you only ask - you will need all 5 of your fingers to do the hands-on shepherds’ counting task]*

Take care—let this time of challenge continue to bring positive change to fruition!

Love Mary H-B

### **Gordon’s addition**

We had been threatened all week with 35,000 anti-abortion protestors being bused in from Chicago, with a vulgar airplane-flown sign hovering most days over the campus, and their insisting that 1200 (40%) of the graduates would be staying away from the ceremonies:

and so, it was wonderful to see, as we arrived in bright and warm sunshine that the campus was “surrounded thinly” with barely 100 protestors with their ugly baby signs; and only 12 of our 2600 graduating seniors saw fit to join them. Although the network news all gave equal time to the 3 brief protests during Obama’s speech, the interruptions were minimal, and the students and parents around the protestors drowned each out by shouting “we are Notre Dame” and helped the security guards escort them away.

About 30 protestors were later arrested for trespassing on to campus, and their fines later imposed by the local magistrate will help to allay the security costs of the University. Not only an economic benefit to the community, but a realization for all sensible thinking local citizens that such extremists are a danger to civilized living.

Just as the Taliban are the ignorant extremists of the Moslem religions, so are these people the ignorant extremists of the Christian religions: both ignoring the fundamental precepts of love thy neighbor as thyself, and above all, respecting the standard mores of a social society.

Talking with other faculty in the large anteroom waiting for the procession to begin, it was interesting to find that the general consensus was that Obama is too much of a centrist, and we would have been out of both Iraq and Afghanistan by now; but we agreed that he is undoubtedly a much better politician, as was shown later of course by his wonderful speech about “reaching for dialog” - a concept he uses to approach every problem - a true believer in consensus..

Teaching at a liberal Catholic University means that I also have to keep under careful wraps my Darwinian/scientific sense of how the Universe began, continues, and will end: but I did like the

recent commentary, now found as an advertisement on our buses: “In the beginning, man created God”; and to go further in this vein, man created many gods, but now we seem to be down to one, and getting much closer to the truth!

At the ceremony, most of us 300 or so faculty were seated behind the platform dais, which meant that we had mainly a back-view of Barack and the other dignitaries. One very large, balding ND-gowned dignitary sat in the row behind Barack, and was unknown to all of us. Liam Cofell-Dwyer, the smart 14 year-old brother of the graduating Emerson probably had the right answer - he suggested “bodyguard” - he certainly rarely smiled and minimally clapped his applause (and now I see a tell-tale wire at the back of his neck). I suppose the same fellow wore an Arizona State graduation gown last week, and will be dressed as a marine at next week’s ceremony - perhaps he is a marine!

I could go on for a while, but as Mary said: we did have a wonderful weekend with some wonderful guests, and we also met many members of the Fox family, the family of Emerson’s girlfriend, at the Chinese restaurant (thank you Pat) and then at our house afterwards. Like Emerson and Arleen, they also met at Notre Dame (probably at the grotto!) - when he was an ND undergraduate, and she was across the road at Saint Mary’s College.

Please check out Liam Cofell-Dwyer’s pictures - I may have added a few of my own to the file - being behind Obama was not a great place for photos - but it was interesting to be able to read his text on the monitor before he pronounced it - a bit of a lesson in public oration.

The previous weekend was the graduation day for the Erikson Institute - so here is Mary dressed in her Ph.D. Wisconsin robes explaining the grail story to Saint Joseph in our front hall “Joseph, you don’t need a degree, just look after that child!”.[He was unmoved, not even doffing his purple hat].

