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An Anniversary Commemorative
delivered by
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of
Christopher Newport College
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It is a pleasure to be with you today to celebrate the 25th birthday of Christopher Newport College, to recognize the names on the program of many people I knew from having grown up on the Peninsula, and to be speaking following Dr. Cunningham, who was president of the College when I graduated, and Dr. Pascall, who was president of The College of William and Mary the first time I graduated from that College. Like them, I have memories of Christopher Newport, but mine are from the perspective of a student. I'm proud to be here as the 1962 graduating class of Christopher Newport College of The Colleges of William and Mary.

I completed my first year of higher education at a large state university on the other side of the Appalachians. While the size of the student body, area of the campus, and number of course offerings at this university were impressive, getting through the crowds and across campus from geology lab to French 101 in ten minutes was a challenge I didn't often meet successfully. So when my father told me about the new little college in Newport News, I was happy to transfer. I came to Christopher Newport College. And my first memory of Christopher Newport is that I didn't get lost! Woody Allen has said that 80% of success is showing up. Well, at Christopher Newport, I showed up.

Of course, there is another sense in which students didn't get lost at Christopher Newport. Our faculty knew us by name. They knew who we were and what we were. There was a sense of closeness that first year which was related not only to the small size of the College but also to our common experience of starting something new together. In spite of our connection with The College of William and Mary, we had no traditions.

There was a freshness that is seen only in the early stages of an organization, before the bureaucratic machinery that both guides and binds larger organizations was in place. We dealt with faces that we recognized; we created procedures to handle situations rather than forcing situations to fit procedures.

Many of my memories are personal and perhaps trivial. While we know that memory is selective, I can't explain why I still have such a vivid picture of the pigeons that roosted above the portals to our buildings; of the botany lab microscopes, through which I could see little more than the reflection of my own eye; of Mr. Usry's pacing back and forth as he told stories that seemed too fascinating to truly be American history; of Dr. Maissen's incredulity as he sputtered, "Miss Wright, you are an enigma to me. You translate French beautifully, but you can't speak a word of it!" Dr. Maissen, I still can't speak a word of it.

One memory, though, is not trivial. It has, in fact, been very important to me and is particularly meaningful now that I am a faculty member and university administrator. At Christopher Newport I played! Now before you tell me that students today know all too well how to play, let me clarify that I am not talking about class cutting or rabble rousing. I'm talking about an approach to work, an approach that I've since come to describe as serious intent but playful mood.

The playful mood I experienced at Christopher Newport was sometimes just a gentle poking at ideas, as when Col. Green criticized a short story I had written, explaining that blooming crape myrtle and fragrant locust

blossoms, falling heavy red apples, and hurricanes did not, as I had believed, all occur together in August. At other times the play was wildly exuberant. Yes, the now legendary stories of Barry Wood's many in-class dramatizations of the Canterbury Tales are true. And he did jump from second story windows. (He says he can't do that any more, because your present buildings have no fire escapes.)

Why is this sense of play so important? I believe it is directly related to creativity, productivity, openness to experience, and energy available for achievement.

Contrary to what many think, work and play are not opposites. We know that the work of young children is their play--they learn through play. But something happens over the years. Work and play become split from one another. Toward our work, we must be very sober if not somber, while we dare not let play educate or instruct us. By the time many of our students reach graduate school, they are so intent on meeting the competition--for grades, jobs, salaries--that the introduction of fun into learning would appear to be merely a distraction from important goals. (Coincidentally--providentially--as I was preparing this talk, a friend gave me a button that says, "Another brilliant mind ruined by higher education." I believe that speaks to my topic.)

Have we forgotten that creativity involves an unusual receptivity to the lively, the unexpected, the absurd--all the things that make up humor? John Gardner, former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare and founder of Common Cause, writes about the "playfulness of persons of originality" and the childlike quality that permits all kinds of "combinations and recombinations

of experience." In A Passion for Excellence Peters and Austin tell about an executive who had been extraordinarily successful over the decades in nurturing new products and new product champions. He was not a genius, was not a brilliant planner, but he had other important qualities. A fellow executive said of him, "It didn't matter what had gone on. It didn't matter how bad the news of the day was. Whenever you walked into his office, the first thing he invariably asked was, 'Are you having fun? Are you up to something that's giving you kicks?'" So I remember that at Christopher Newport, we played; we had fun; our professors were up to something that was giving them and us kicks.

If there is one gift I would wish for the students of Christopher Newport on this celebration of the College's 25th birthday, I would wish you faculty who will risk playing--who will uninhibitedly express their humor, vitality, and zest, their gusto for their subject matter; who get a kick out of what they do; who will help you reconnect work and play so your minds and emotions will be free to produce and create and you will be not drained but energized by your work, both now as students and later in your jobs. Happy Birthday.