

Isaac Musselwhite Acceptance Speech

Rummel Raider Legend Award

Good morning to the Raider Nation! My name is Phil Sprick and I'm a graduate of the Class of 1974. Today I have the distinct honor to accept the Raider Legend award on behalf of Isaac Musselwhite, who can't be with us today due to illness. Allow me to make a few remarks about Mr. Musselwhite, and then I will read his acceptance speech. Along the way, I expect to answer the question of the day, "Why Rummel?"

I was blessed with having Mr. Musselwhite for both Freshman and Senior year of English. I can't tell you I was a model student. When my ACT scores arrived in Senior year, Mr. Musselwhite happened to be in the vicinity. I think I scored a 32 in English and he said, "Oh my... it appears that the graders made a terrible mistake in scoring your examination!"

One discipline practiced by Mr. Musselwhite was that he had his students memorize quotes. Indulge me here, and I'll recite a couple of them just as he did when teaching them. By the way, Isaac had a bit of a British accent.

"Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more." That's from Macbeth, and it reminds us that life is fleeting and we're all mortals.

Here's another from the Scottish poet Robert Burns: "Oh, would some Power the giftie gie us, to see ourselves as others see us! It would from many a blunder free us. And foolish notion." That's from the poem "To a Louse, On Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet at Church." It reminds us that to a cootie bug, we're all equal prey, and no one is more important than another.

And there were dozens of others. So at the ripe old age of 15, I wondered why he had us memorize these quotes other than at the time, being able to quote Shakespeare made a positive impression with my prom dates. But here it is 46 years later, and I recognize that in his own way, he was arming us, the young Raiders in his class, for life. It's funny how even now, in the right situation, these quotes come to mind and give perspective on situations that happen in adult life. Mr. Musselwhite was teaching a life skill. I just didn't realize it at the time!

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Now on to Mr. Musselwhite's prepared remarks:

I'm sorry I cannot be with you on what is a very special occasion for me, but the Grim Reaper came a-knocking. I recently had a health setback, and I am doing everything possible to recover. For as the American poet Robert Frost said, "I have promises to keep, and miles to go before I sleep."

My humble beginning was on my grandfather's cotton farm in Possumneck, Mississippi. Yes, you heard it right: the neck of the woods I came from was Possumneck, a community of cotton farmers with a general store where farm families could buy shoes and food for the family and the farm animals. A place where a profusion of possums rambled the wilds of the countryside. Look on your map of Mississippi, and north of Jackson you will see the small town of West, population 402. Well, Possumneck is three miles east of West.

After graduation from high school, I was off to Millsaps College, then Mississippi State University. And at 21 years old, I became a member of the faculty of Natchez High School. After ten wonderful years in this magnificent city of the Old South with all its antebellum homes, I went to Peabody University in Tennessee for graduate school, and from there to

the French Quarter of New Orleans. It was here that I was blessed by an invitation from the Christian Brothers to join the faculty of Archbishop Rummel High School.

For 33 remarkable years, I was in the land of the Raiders. I never looked upon my years in Raider land as work. It was a sheer pleasure to arrive on campus early to put the commas and periods in place, correct the misspellings, prepare my literature lesson for the day, and await the arrival of my young Raiders.

One of my most charming and intelligent Raiders shares this very special occasion with me... [As a personal aside, when I first read the speech I thought he was talking about me. But then I read on...]

Let me continue: One of my most charming and intelligent Raiders shares this very special occasion with me... none other than U.S. Representative Steve Scalise. Steve came to my retirement party and presented me with a document signed by the governor of Louisiana thanking me for my years of service to education in Louisiana. The document is a prized possession.

The English poet William Wordsworth said, "The child is father of the man." What he meant is that experiences you have as a young person shape the way you view the world later in life. Wordsworth is correct, and I would submit that Archbishop Rummel is an ideal place for a young man in his formative years.

The dedicated faculty has always taken quite seriously the challenge of helping every young Raider grow academically, spiritually, and physically. The faculty's goal has always been to impart basic values that enrich students' lives and awaken consciences that will serve humanity.

Rummel's realization of these goals has distinguished it as an exemplary school and an ideal place for a young Raider who is preparing himself for life. One of my life's highlights is being named a Rummel Legend, and knowing my photo will hang on the wall in the Raider Room in such good company as that of other Raider Legends. It will be very special indeed to be hung alongside the photo of Brother John Fairfax.

I am quite fortunate to have reached 83 years of age and, while I have also traveled extensively in the past, I am enjoying much quieter golden years. For the last 13, I have been living out my life's dream in the hills of Guanajuato, Mexico. Because of the altitude, similar to Denver, Colorado, the temperature is rarely above 80 or below 50 degrees fahrenheit. For me, it's paradise!

I will close with this thought. When the long sleep does come, the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer has my epitaph ready: "And gladly would he learn, and gladly would he teach."

I want you all to know that every day, I thank God Almighty, I am a Raider. I am a very lucky man, and each of you are also fortunate to be called -- a Rummel Raider!

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So those are Mr. Musselwhite's own words. Here's one final thought I would like to leave with you Raiders today. Somewhere along the way in your academic education, there will be a teacher who makes a difference and gives you something for life, kind of like the gift Isaac gave me.

In fact, at this time, may I ask all the faculty and administration of the school to please stand?

Gentlemen Raiders, among these teachers and administrators are future Raider Legends. They're giving their hearts and minds... right now... to your education. They are coming to work every day with you in mind, to set you on a trajectory for success. Let's show our appreciation for each of them, today, with a round of applause.

Thank you, faculty and administrators.

Gentlemen, I'd like you to think about your experiences here at Archbishop Rummel. If there's a special teacher who has given you something meaningful... it could be a word of encouragement... or a bit of discipline when you deserved it... or the passion for a subject that ignites your curiosity... don't wait until they're retired to express your appreciation.

"Thank you." Those are two words that teachers don't often hear, but they're a special kind of compensation that validates their career choice and make their daily efforts worthwhile. Let them know how grateful you are before you leave high school.

Why Rummel? Simply because it provided me with the very best education and experience possible for a high school. As I look back on my life I, too, thank God Almighty that I was a Raider. And I thank God that my teacher and friend, Isaac Musselwhite, was also.

Good luck, Raiders, as you move forward with your lives.