

Cause for Celebration

Remarks of President Myles Brand
Indiana University
At the Celebration of a Life Ceremony
For University Chancellor Herman B Wells
The IU Auditorium
Bloomington, Indiana
April 5, 2000

Not often in our lives do we have the good fortune to know men or women of such vision and vitality, of such integrity and intelligence that they are able to transform the lives of generations. Herman Wells was such a man. Tonight we come together to celebrate his life and to remember with joy, with humility, and with a sense of great good fortune, what his life has meant to us.

The era of IU's greatest flowering first took root in the heart of Herman Wells, and it blossomed from there. In March of 1938, when the IU trustees offered the presidency to their young business school dean, they reminded him that he followed in the footsteps of giants, such as David Starr Jordan and William Lowe Bryan - men who had distinguished themselves as among the greatest educational leaders in the country. At the time, Herman was the youngest university president in the nation. Despite his youth, he went on to create his own legends. By 1962, when he ended his 25-year presidency, he had turned a small Midwestern college into a major research university of international stature.

Herman served as IU's president during the golden era of higher education, when post-war investment in research transformed the nation's public universities into great engines promoting economic growth and national security. Recognizing that the success of any university depends on the excellence of its faculty, Herman began hiring scholars and researchers of international renown. These included prize-winning scientists and internationally acclaimed artists and scholars. He established a world-class music school and created facilities to house the arts. He championed the cause of educational opportunity for all, regardless of race or gender, and he laid the groundwork for our current multi-campus system. At the height of the McCarthy era, President Wells' staunch defense of intellectual freedom and support for Alfred Kinsey's research established a precedent that drew the attention of the entire country.

Herman believed public higher education was one of the greatest instruments of democracy. In internationalizing Indiana University, he helped us do our part to spread the spirit of democracy around the world. Now IU alumni from every corner of the globe have carried that message back to their own communities.

His vision and the loving attention he lavished on IU have imbued the university with a life force that continues to revitalize it. But his enormous vision for the university never got in the way of personalizing the educational experience for generations of IU students, many of whom still treasure memories of chatting with him as he strolled across campus. Herman Wells built a world-class educational institution, but he did so by maintaining the family atmosphere of the

small Hoosier town where he grew up.

To keep his name in the memory of future generations of IU students, I would like to announce the reservation of a naming opportunity that will designate our main library the Wells Library. I say that I want to *reserve* this opportunity because, as chairman of the University Naming Committee, Dr. Wells determined that no building or site should be named for a person until five years after that person's death. Of course, we cannot honor the chancellor's memory without also honoring his rules. So we will have to be patient and wait for the formal naming. I can think of no more fitting tribute than to name the library, which is the heart and soul of the university, after this champion of knowledge and discovery.

Herman Wells followed in the footsteps of giants, but so have those who came after him. He will long be remembered one of the most important educators in the twentieth century.

Everyone has wonderful stories to tell about their relationship with Dr. Wells. Indeed, the story of the university and the story of Chancellor Wells' life are so completely intertwined that it is impossible to tell one story without also telling the other.

Let me share with you my own story about my first meeting with Chancellor Wells. It occurred shortly after my wife Peg and I arrived on the IU campus. I was excited but also a little apprehensive to be meeting one of my great heroes, one of the legends of American higher education. I had admired Herman Wells' vision and accomplishments for a very long time.

We'd been told that the chancellor was fond of sweets, and so we brought a homemade pie. He happily accepted the pie and spent the rest of our visit making sure we were comfortable in Bryan House. Not once did he speak of his accomplishments or suggest he was anything but a humble servant of the university and the state of Indiana.

Since then, my original impressions have been confirmed. Chancellor Wells did indeed like sweets. He was a committed, unassuming ambassador for the university who valued hard work and academic excellence, who had respect for everyone, and who never tired of telling the university's story. That first meeting was followed by many others in which Herman gave me his unfailingly wise counsel and his friendship.

I would visit with Chancellor Wells regularly in his office, or when he was not well, at his house on campus across from the library. Most every day, he would work in Owen Hall, answering his voluminous correspondence. He continued, even at the age of 97, to advance the cause of IU. Despite his diminished hearing and his confinement to a wheelchair, Herman knew practically everything that was happening on campus. During our meetings, he would ask many questions, and if prompted, would offer his advice. I always found his comments personally supportive and insightful.

As I think about Herman's passing, I am reminded of the words T.E. Lawrence wrote of his dear friend Thomas Hardy after the novelist's death: "He was the most honorable stopping place we've ever found, and we shall miss him more and more."

In the pain of grief, we look for words of comfort to explain death, because death takes from us

those we love, those on whose wisdom and affection we depend. If we look to the philosophers and poets, we understand death as a natural part of life. Buddha sees death as a release. Plato sees it as either the best sleep of one's life or a chance to commune with the gods, and Sir Francis Bacon sees it as a passage to another world. As we feel the loss of Chancellor Wells' physical presence in our midst, it is important for us to remember that death ends a life, but it does not end a relationship.

Herman Wells' spirit is a rich treasure embedded deep in the foundations of this university. It is a treasure that we and generations to come will mine devotedly, that we will draw strength and guidance from daily. Yet we who are gathered here tonight have the advantage over those who will come after us. For it is we who have felt the warmth of this man's heart, the joy of his smile, the generosity of his soul, the clarity of his judgment, and the weight of his ambition for the university we all love so well. In this, we have been supremely fortunate. And that good fortune, is, by *all* accounts, and from *any* perspective, cause for celebration.

C Myles Brand, President of Indiana University
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