

RI Authors Give Advice to Graduating College Seniors

Throughout May and June, robed college graduates listened to commencement speeches delivered by well-known lawmakers, judges, television personalities, actors and chief executive officers of businesses. Many of the orators advised the young adults on how to create a more rewarding personal and professional life in their later years.

Members of the Association of Rhode Island Authors (ARIA) also have insightful advice on aging gracefully in a challenging and changing world to give to the Class of 2018, and some of what the authors would have said if they had been invited to speak follows.

Hopefully, readers will benefit from the commencement tips and find time to take a look at the authors' books.

The ABCs of Aging Gracefully

Norman Desmarais, 71, professor emeritus at Providence College, lives in Lincoln and is an active re-enactor and a former librarian. He is the author of *The Guide to the American Revolutionary War in Canada and New England*, *The Guide to the American Revolutionary War in New York* and *The Guide to the American Revolutionary War in New Jersey*. These books intend to provide comprehensive coverage of the confrontations of the American War of Independence and to serve as a guide to the sites. For book details, go to revolutionaryimprints.net.

Commencement tips: "It's nice to be important, but more important to be nice. Remember that the people you pass climbing the ladder of success will be the same people you meet on the way down. They will often be the people you will need to be successful."

Rick Billings, 59, a retired firefighter and emergency management technician lives in Barrington. He authored and illustrated two children's books, *The Tragic Tale of Mr. Moofs*, a story about the changing relationship between a stuffed toy and a boy's older sister and more recently, *Melba Blue*, a light introduction for children on the works of Edgar Allen Poe and William Shakespeare. For book details, go to reddogart.com.

Commencement tips: "What are you waiting for? This is my mantra. I became a firefighter at age 35. I wrote, illustrated and self-published my first book 19 years later. Today, I cycle between 40 and 80 miles each week. I travel. I laugh. I love. Embrace family, nature, health, spirituality, peace, creativity and the purity of the new. What are you waiting for?"

Patricia Hinkley, 73, a former holistic counselor and journey practitioner in private practice, lives in Wakefield. She authored *Chasing Sleep/Lonely Tussles in the Dark*, a book that explores the issues and challenges surrounding sleep deprivation and how to overcome them by changing attitudes and behaviors, and "Claiming Space/Finding Stillness that Inspires Action," a book that invites you to step back from the busy world to uncover the peaceful intelligence, genuine happiness and capabilities within. For book details, go to patriciahinkley.com.

Commencement tips: "Find what you love and do it. Learn about your world and become a part of positive change. Respect and peacefully negotiate with people who differ from you. Know history, government and civics. Involve yourself to make a better world. Trust your heart's wisdom when deciding what is right. Speak up for it."

Hank Ellis, 69, formerly employed by the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, lives in Exeter. He authored *The Promise: A Perilous Journey*, a book appealing to all ages and a must-read for those who love the magic of a childhood adventure. For book details, go to Amazon.

Commencement tips: "Know what is important to you: happiness or wealth. You can have both, but it can be more difficult. Be open to change, roll with the punches and don't punch back. Always be kind. Be brave and stretch yourself. The greatest advice I can give is to give of yourself. Serve others in all you do. I guarantee amazing results."

Barbara Ann Whitman, 62, a family support specialist, lives in Johnston. She authored *Have Mercy*, a book about the effects foster care can have on a child. For book details, go to facebook.com/BarbaraAnnWhitmanAuthor.

Commencement tips: "Before you can be kind to others, you must first be kind to yourself. If you want to be honest, start with the person in the mirror. The same principle applies to being authentic, loyal and loving. Being selfless is overrated. Indulge and invest in knowing yourself. Only then will you be ready to share your gifts with the world."

Etta Zasloff, 70, lives in Hope Valley. She published an alphabet book for all ages on her 70th birthday, *Beginning with Xs and Os: The Evolution of Alphabet*. It's a child's first chapter book! Personified letters change, rearrange and interchange in rhyming stories of origin. For book details, go to ettazasloff.com

Commencement tips: "Live, really live. Look out the window more than in the mirror or at your phone. Explore the world. Engage with people beyond your immediate circle. Pursue your passion with education, experience and practice to mastery. Have the courage to forge your own path and leave a trail for others to follow. Always think of those who follow."

Harris N. ("Hershey") Rosen, 85, ran a Pawtucket-based candy company for 40 years before retiring. He lives in Providence, and he authored *My Family Record Book*, providing easy tips on organizing personal information, financial plans and final wishes for seniors, caregivers and estate executors. For book details, go to myfamilyrecordbook.com.

Commencement tips: "Achievement is 90% perspiration and 10% inspiration. So in life, find your purpose in something you enjoy and don't be afraid to aim high. Look around for help and value your network of friends you made in college. Persist in realizing your goal, knowing that it's OK to fail (you will) but not to quit. You'll get there; I promise."

BJ Knapp, 44, a former college radio station disc jockey, lives in Coventry. She authored *Beside the Music*. Imagine if a washed-up '80s metal band moved in to your house. It happens to Brenda and Tim in this book. Can Brenda be one man's wife and another man's muse? For book details, go to bjknapp.com.

Commencement tips: "Never forget how to laugh at yourself, how to be silly and how to make others

laugh. Laughter is great for your abs, for your soul and for your relationships. And it's not all about you. Don't turn every situation around so it's about you. Most of the time it's about someone else, and it's up to you to be supportive of that person. They will do the same for you when it really is all about you."

Alison O'Donnell, 52, a freelance editor, proofreader and ghostwriter, lives in Pawtucket. She authored *Stupid Cupid~ A Survivor's Guide to Online Dating*. The book has a sarcastic slant toward online dating, chronicling 100 really bad dates followed by a moral learned experience from each experience. For book details, go to facebook.com/AuthorAlisonODonnell.

Commencement tips: "Do not fear your own power! There are people who will try to beat you down; rise above it. There are people who will use their power to beat you down. Go around it. Then, mentally thank them for the life lesson. There are people who will support you. Show gratitude. Your success will have been earned. Embrace it."

Michael A. Battey, 65, a podiatrist, lives in East Greenwich. He authored *The Parent Trap, Vol. 1*, the first of a two-volume collection of humorous and insightful observations on contemporary teen parenting. For book details, go to parenttrapcolumns.com.

Commencement tips: "There is a power to kindness. There is no act you can choose that will be more powerful. It is stronger than the most reasoned logic. It can vanquish the sharpest wit. Deceptive at times and preternaturally puzzling, it is your best ally. It elevates discussions and makes you a better person. It is defining, and it is memorable."

A. Jacob, 50, a government claims auditor for CVS, lives in Central Falls. She authored *Grimaulkin*, a book about a young wizard who was sent to prison for summoning demons. Now he's out trying to be a better man, but others want to use his knowledge and abilities - against his parole. For book details, go to paperangelpress.com/pages/books/grimaulkin.php.

Commencement tips: "I published my first book at 48, but I've been writing since I was 15. Why did I wait so long? Because I was afraid. Afraid of what my family would say about me, of how the book would be received. Here's my advice: Don't wait. Life is too short. Buy the darn shoes you love."

Phyllis Calvey, 68, an educator and story teller who lives in Bellingham, Mass. Her latest book, *The Butterfly Club*, presents real people's stories of how God can, and does, use signs to communicate His presence to those in need. For book details, go to butterflyclubbook.com.

Commencement Tips: "The odds were probably a thousand to one to be published, and yet I quit my job to be a writer. My dad said, "You could be the one. How much does a book sell for these days? \$6.95? When you sell a million, that's..." But all I heard was the word "when", it immediately seemed to change the odds!"

For more information about the ARIA, [click here](#).

Herb Weiss, LRI'12, is a Pawtucket writer covering aging, health care and medical issues. To purchase "Taking Charge: Collected Stories on Aging Boldly," a collection of 79 of his weekly commentaries, go to herbweiss.com. He is a member of ARIA.