

Theme: "***The Tie That Binds Continues***"

## **Greetings:**

- Honor to Mayor Bobb;
- To the MC for tonight: Mr. Lonnie Armstead;
- Giving honor to our former Teachers and Administrators;
- To all the Graduates of Campti-Creston High School and your Guests;
- Special recognition to my classmates, the Fabulous **Class of 1969**;
- And to all who are assembled here tonight.

Good Evening!

## **Opening Comments:**

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here tonight and to be in the midst of longtime friends and graduates of Campti-Creston High School. I am also humbled by the occasion to speak to you, knowing that there are many others who could stand here and speak at this School Reunion.

## **Theme:**

By our presence here tonight, we declare that School Reunions are important to us.

A School Reunion is a time when we get together with others who share our genes, our backgrounds, and our history.

Of course, each of us has different hobbies, different walks of life, and different personalities. Yet behind those differences, there is something that causes each one of us to return "home".

There is something that makes Reunions like this a fun affair.

A Reunion is where we share stories and get up to date on all that is happening in the Campti-Creston Family.

To put it simply, it's a time to touch base.

It's a time and place where "***The Tie That Binds Continues***".

As I reflect on tonight's theme, I'm reminded that the tie that binds us are the things that hold us together;

- Those things that we have in common;
- Those things that attaches to or latches us to something much greater than ourselves.

The tie that binds:

- Strengthens us
- Sustains us, and
- Challenges us.

The tie that binds:

- Encourages us
- Disciplines us, and
- Reminds us.

It reminds us that:

- It was here where we shared our goals and talked about our dreams.
- It was here where we shared in each other's joys and sorrows—the birth of children and the loss of loved ones.
- It was here where we walked to school together, or rode the school bus together.
- It was here where we played in each other's yards, and ate in each other's homes.
- It was here where we encouraged each other to step beyond our limitations and to reach beyond our grasp.

Earlier this week, I asked you in a survey: When looking back over the years, what ties or connections are you most proud of? I got such comments as:

- ***The values that I received growing up in Campti.***
- ***Connections with classmates whom I feel are just as close as family.***
- ***Nurturing and caring teachers that made us feel connected in mind, body and spirit, always.***

- ***I am proud of the fact that I grew up in the South and experienced the cotton field, Campti School, and the family life in the country. Makes me appreciate a few things in this life.***
- ***I remember the clubs that I was involved in that really impacted my life.***

I also asked: What (if anything) was a defining moment for you growing up in the Campti community? You said:

- ***The strong sense of community, and involvement of people-churches of all denominations to be instrumental in the lives of the young people of the community.***
- ***Growing up in the community, I cannot ever remember feeling I was in an unsafe, uncaring, and unloving place.***
- ***I see the way life is now for children and I wish they could experience some of the things we had as children.***
- ***Says one graduate: A defining moment in my life was when I came back home from Southern University and Mr. W A. Joseph gave me the opportunity to work at my Alma Mater.***

Yes, ***The Tie That Binds Continues*** and has many memories.

The ***Tie That Binds*** reminds us to remember those who are **not** here with us tonight for whatever reason. For **not** everyone can attend School Reunions:

- Some may live too far away;
- Others couldn't adjust their schedules to get away,
- Some have transitioned to a new life,
- While, others have circumstances beyond their control.

So, for those of us who **are** here, let us take a few minutes to travel down memory lane and remember some of the things we have in common.

## **Teachers and Administrators:**

First, let us remember our former Teachers and Administrators who influenced our lives—those persons who had a significant impact on our very existence.

**[Earlier this afternoon, I spoke with Mr. Herbert Baptiste. He asked that I convey to you his deep regrets for not being able to accept tonight's invitation due to health reasons. He further stated that of the North Louisiana Alumni Associations that recognize former Teachers and Administrators, CCAA does more, consistently.]**

- Teachers and administrators who were not only coaches and cheerleaders for athletic activities, but coaches and cheerleaders for higher education as well.
- Teachers and administrators who taught us to not only have fitness of the body, but also fitness of the mind.
- Teachers and administrators, who allowed us to walk in the footprints of others, yet encouraged us to leave our own imprints.

We did not fully recognize nor value all the information and life lessons that our teachers taught us at that time--lessons that were not just about grade point averages, diplomas, and awards.

Of course there are many former Teachers and Administrators I **could** name, but for **me**, I must mention two of them:

- Mr. John Leroy—for his support and his stern discipline;
- and Mrs. Grace Baptiste—for her many nuggets of wisdom.

Growing up in and around Campti, I'd always worked. I'd been doing some form of work since I was six years old.

- You see, I always wanted to have my own money.
- I felt that my money spent better than anyone else's money.
- But it was Mr. John Leroy who gave me my first \$100 bill. When I received an offer to go to Dallas and interview with a public accounting firm, it was Mr. John Leroy who said to me **"Boy Go and take this"!**
- Over the years, I've often heard that voice speaking to me as I attended graduations and gave similar bills to college students upon their graduating or embarking upon their professional careers.

Equally remembered is Ms. Grace Baptiste. Perhaps, one of the most memorable occasions for me was several years ago when several of my classmates and me had a chance to visit her at her home and just simply had **grown-folk** conversations.

## Decisions/Campti High:

The *Tie That Binds* also reminds us of the times when we made huge decisions that shaped our lives. I would be remiss if I did not mention the huge decision I made in 1967, when at the age 16, I decided to enroll at Campti High School—the first African American male to do so.

**Freedom of Choice** was the name for a number of plans developed in the United States in 1965-1970. **Freedom of Choice** was aimed at the integration of schools in states that had a segregated educational system. Those students who were 16 years old at that time didn't need their parents' signature of approval to enroll in the high school of his or her choice. Since, I was being raised by my Grandparents, I didn't need either one of their signatures to transfer high schools.

Now, my Grandfather was my hero—my champion; however, I did not tell my Grandfather about my decision to change schools until the week before school started. A bit risky for sure! But I knew that my Grandfather feared for my safety and knew that he would try to talk me out of it.

But I'd made my decision and I stuck with it. So, in the Fall of 1967, I transferred to Campti High School.

- It had nothing to do with defiance.
- It had nothing to do with making any kind of statement.
- It was simply a choice made—something I'd decided to do.

Those last two (2) years of my high school life—my Junior and Senior years—were a mixture of highs and lows. But they were highs and lows that shaped me in many ways.

- In 1967, there were Sandra Wilson, Rose Adams and me, who transferred to Campti High School. Two females and one male.
- The next year-1968—came Betty Coutee, Joe Coutee, and Crawford Waldrup.

Since I haven't really talked much about those years with any of the others who attended Campti High, I will only speak from my recollections and experiences as the only Black guy in an all-White high school.

Frankly, I was torn between two Cultures—two different worlds.

- My new White school mates thought that I was being paid to attend their school.
- Some of my Black school mates questioned my decision to go to Campti High in the first place.
- Of course, there were some harsh comments that came from several directions and that I won't go into here tonight, but no comments I heard made me regret my decision to transfer schools, or discouraged me from focusing on getting an education.
- Sure, there were times at Campti High when I'd raise my hand in class to answer a question, but the teacher would not call upon me.
- Sure, there were times when Coach Morgan would call ahead and check with other coaches to see if it was okay if I played on the basketball team that night, and yes, there were some games when I didn't play.
- Sure there was the time on Graduation Night when the Principal, Mr. Snell came to me before the ceremony and told me that Northwestern had not forgotten me, but in order to keep the ceremony short, he would not be presenting my scholarship to me on stage that night. Of course, the ceremony was ***only 45 minutes long*** to begin with.
- ***But***, I wore my honor cords and I stood up when all the honor graduates were asked to stand.
- That year, only Class Officers spoke at Graduation, and since I was ***not*** a Class Officer, I did not speak, even though I had the **highest GPA**.

But like I said before, some decisions we make indeed shape our lives. And I mention those things that happened not out of bitterness, but as some things that helped to shape my thinking. So, today, when I find myself being "**the only**" in some situation or "**the only**" in some meeting room in Corporate America, I tell myself that if I could withstand what I did at the age of 16 in 1967, **surely** I can withstand the hurdles, roadblocks, speed bumps, curves, and detours I may encounter as an adult.

So, I encourage you to:

- Dare to be different sometimes.
- Dare to step outside of your comfort zone.
- Dare to embrace the differences in others.
- Dare to be a Trailblazer—go where no one else has gone and blaze your own trail.

## **Youth:**

Graduates and friends, as we find our own successes in life, we must not forget our young people of today. We must not forget that there are still scores of young people who never hear words of encouragement, who never dream of attending Reunions like this, and who still say “I Can’t”.

Our young people are the lifeblood of our continued existence. They’re the innovators—they’re the constructive agitators for change. They must be prepared to step forward and continue the rich legacy they have inherited from those of us who preceded them.

Let’s continue to remind our young people that it’s important to know their purpose in life. For, ***until purpose is discovered, existence has no meaning.***

- Tell them how important it is for them to know what they’re working toward, what direction they must take, and what they must sacrifice to get it.
- Tell them to prepare for struggles, failures, and closed doors.
- Tell them to not be caught looking so long and so regretfully at the closed door, that they fail to see the one that has opened for them.
- Tell them to prepare to hear criticisms and to experience disappointments.

***Don’t be dismayed or surprised,  
If what you do is criticized.  
Mistakes are made, I’ll not deny,  
But only made by those who try.***

Let them know that if you have a tenacious burning desire in the pit of your stomach, it becomes very difficult for anyone or anything to discourage you.

## Legacy:

Graduates and friends, let us ask ourselves:

- What should our agenda be for the next 5, 10, or 20 years?
- What part will each of us play in perpetuating the rich legacy that we inherited?
- What legacy will we leave behind?

To actively think about our life's existence and contributions is one of the most important jobs that any of us has to do. We must allow some time to think deeply about our life, our purpose, the examples we set, and the messages our life represents.

If we were to read each other's bios or simply talk among ourselves, we would find that many of us are actively involved in the church. That signifies that we know from whence our knowledge, our skills, and our strength come. That signifies that God has been, is, and forever will be, a vital part of our lives. We know that God has designed each of us for a unique purpose, and that "**purpose**" has given precision to our lives.

In the words of Dr. Myles Munroe: "***In the absence of purpose, time has no meaning, energy has no reason, and life has no precision.***"

The way we live our lives has an effect on how we are remembered. Once we decide on our own legacy, it impresses upon us the necessity for:

- Clearly-defined goals,
- Fulfillment of our responsibilities,
- Honoring our intentions, and
- Following through on both promises and commitments.

Graduates and Friends, our lives and examples will continue in some way to participate in the lives of others when we are gone. We must decide what that participation will be.

So, let us look at our lives as gifts to future generations. Let our characters, our values, and the examples of lives well-lived be our family heirlooms to future generations.

When we focus on our legacy, we begin to go day-by-day seeing the world as our classroom, and paying very strict attention to both contribution and associated behavior.



And finally, let each of us set an inspiring example that future generations will be proud of, and more importantly, want to protect and emulate.

### **Man in the Glass:**

Let each of us remember that life itself is like a mirror—it reflects back to us what we present to it. Consider the poem: “The Man in the Glass.”

*When you get what you want in your struggle for self,  
And the world makes you king for a day,  
Just go to the mirror and look at yourself,  
And see what that man has to say.*

*For it isn't your father or mother or wife,  
Whose judgment upon you must pass.  
The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life,  
Is the one staring back from the glass.*

*You may be like Jack Horner and chisel a plum,  
And think you're a wonderful guy,  
But the man in the glass says you're only a bum,  
If you can't look him straight in the eye.*

***He's the one to please—never mind all the rest,  
For he's with you clear to the end.  
And you've passed your most difficult test,  
If the man in the glass is your friend.***

***You may fool the whole world down the pathway of years,  
And get pats on your back as you pass,  
But your final reward will be heartaches and tears,  
If you've cheated the man in the glass.***

You don't want to cheat that man in the glass because if you do, you're cheating who—yourself.

I thank you for inviting me here to speak! I'm mighty glad I came!