Předmluva

Toto číslo je věnováno projevu amerického novináře Coreye Flintoffa, který přednesl dne 12. května 2002 u příležitosti promoce studentů University of Alaska ve Fairbanksu a udělení titulu Dr. h. c.

Corey Flintoff je představen krátce v textu a domnívám se, že jeho projev je zajímavý i pro českého čtenáře.

(Poznamenejme rovněž, že Otto Geist, kterého zmiňuje, je jedna z osob zapletených do složitých osudů Eskymo Welzla.)

Projev vychází s laskavým svolením autora.

Jaroslav Nešetřil

Esteemed journalist, producer and broadcaster

Corey Flintoff

Born and raised in Fairbanks, prominent and nationally recognized radio newscaster and host Corey Flintoff has made a careful study of people, their cultures and environments a part of his life's work. His painstaking and sensitive research has earned him the respect of colleagues and listeners first in Alaska, and then around the world.

Corey Flintoff began his career in journalism in Bethel, Alaska, as the reporter, editor and producer of bilingual radio and television news programming in English and Yup'ik. A keen observer and interested member of the community in which he lived, he also wrote and produced a number of television documentaries that explored different facets of Yup'ik life, including *Eyes of the Spirit* and *They Never Asked Our Fathers*. The creation and symbolism of traditional Yup'ik masks was carefuly detailed in *Eyes of the Spirit*, while *They Never Asked Our Fathers* sought insight from historic photos and Yup'ik elders into the impact of federal oversight of Nunivak islanders. Both pieces examining aspects of the Alaskan experience now form part of the film collections of the Smithsonian Institution and the Museum of the American Indian.

His understanding of Alaskan issues played a critical role in his comprehensive coverage of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, for which he was awarded a Corporation for Public Broadcasting Silver Award in 1989 while serving as the executive producer and program host for the Alaska Public Radio Network.

Corey Flintoff has continued to rise to national prominence since joining the Washington, D.C., national and foreign desks of National Public Radio in 1990, where he has since served as newscaster, reporter and program host. He has extended his commitment to the ideals of journalistic integrity and the importance of a free press to classrooms and radio stations reaching from Alaska to Rhode Island and Finland to Mongolia.

University of Alaska Fairbanks Commencement Address 2002

By Corey Flintoff

It's a great privilege to speak at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. My earliest life was linked to this institution, and part of my family history is here. My father was born not far from this campus, in a tent on a mining claim up along Goldstream Creek. He aspired to study at this university, but except for a short course on soil sampling, he was never able to manage it. I imagine he'd be pleased to know I'm speaking here, and especially to learn that I'm being presented with an honorary degree. Being a Fairbanksan to the core, or course, he'd be a lot more impressed if it were a degree from the School of Mines.

I'm also proud to say that I am a godson of Otto Geist. I spent the first year of my life in his house in Lemeta, the cabin with the fossil-bone fence. My father and mother, Al and Marjory Flintoff, shared that house with Otto in 1945 and '46.

Otto extended his hospitality to a lot of interesting people in those days - explorers and scientists and adventurers, most of them on their way to and from the North Slope or the Bering Strait. Even after we'd moved into a house of our own, Otto continued to bring his friends over. Being a confirmed bachelor, Otto's hospitality consisted mostly of breaking the seal on a bottle of whiskey and opening another box of cigars. But these adventurers eventually had to eat, and my mother could usually be sweet- talked into providing them with dinner.

I don't remember much of the after-dinner conversation, except that it ranged from Alaska to just about every other part of the world where adventure was to be had. Many of Otto's friends were of the old order of swashbuckling adventurers who aren't so much admired any more: big-game hunters and professional collectors, like Roy Chapman Andrews, one of his pals from the Explorer's Club in New York. Roy Chapman Andrews was the man who discovered the first dinosaur eggs in the south Gobi desert in the 1920s. He's thought by some people to be the prototype for Indiana Jones.

When I was 13, I went with Otto on one of his last expeditions, to the Ikpikpuk River on the North Slope. By that time he was a crusty old guy, dark and leathery, with a beak on him like a raven and hands that were gnarled into claws by frostbite and arthritis. He wore a plaid shirt that smelled of sweat and cigars and Army-surplus DDT. I was the assistant cook and chief bottle washer on a trip that gathered everything from pressed flowers to mammoth tusks to human skulls. I couldn't have asked for a more thrilling adventure, or one better suited to my age and experience, because it was orchestrated by a grand old man who'd been a spiritual 13- year-old for about 60 years. I've never gotten over that experience. In a way, I've never stopped looking for experiences that would give me the same sense of living life to the fullest. My most recent attempt was just last year, when my family and I spent six months teaching in Mongolia.

When people start bragging themselves up like this, it means they're about to pontificate, and I'm no exception. I just wanted to establish my credentials as an adventurous person first.

The conventional thing to say at an occasion like this is that you're all about to leave the cloistered halls of academia and embark on the great adventure of life. Unfortunately, that's often the exact opposite of what really happens to be people when they graduate from the University. Too often, young people leave the intellectual and spiritual and physical adventures of college life and enter the mundane world of making a living and conforming to the lives of their not-very-interesting peers. The great adventure of life turns out to be something you watch on the Discovery Channel after work.

Over the past 50 years or so, our culture has done some very interesting things with the concepts of adventure and experience. On the one hand, adventure and experience have been sanitized, commercialized and virtualized into safe and profitable games and rides at theme parks by Disney and Universal Studios. It's possible to raise your adrenalin levels and enjoy a quite satisfying feeling of recklessness by taking a "family adventure" ride at Disney World. The only hardship is waiting on line in those human cattle chutes and the only real danger is that some kid will have left his gum on your seat. A lot of Americans today regard themselves as living adventurous lives if they get the family to one of these fancified amusement parks a couple times a year. Video games do the same thing for some people. They raise your adrenalin and give you a sense of risk without even the danger of driving to a theme park on the freeway.

The other end of the adventure spectrum in our culture - one with real physical challenges and real dangers - is just as pernicious in its way. It's the world of extreme sports. Brave souls bungee jump and hang glide and sky dive in an effort to make the sensation of adventure real.

The trouble with extreme sports is that they compress the moments of excitement into very small, efficient packages that have no other goal than the sensation itself. It's an adventure-like experience that's been stripped down to fit into our busy lifestyles. It's possible to leave an unproductive job in the city and spend your weekend on a dirt bike or in a parachute harness, but the adventure doesn't take you very far as a person. Ultimately, an extreme sport is just another hobby.

So what is adventure, and why should we look for it? I'll grant you, it's not the True Men's magazine adventure that I grew up around. Otto Geist and Roy Chapman Andrews are less admired today because they were holdovers from the colonial era, they thought in terms of dominating nature and plundering history. They were recklessly acquisitive, and they treated scientific problems much as Alexander the Great is said to have treated the Gordian knot. If it was hard to untie, it was easy to cut.

Our notions about the adventurous life have evolved, but adventure still involves risk, it still involves difficulty, it still involves staying power. Adrenalin and excitement are byproducts of the adventurous life; they're not its goals. The adventurous life is not a workweek of drudgery punctuated by weekends of capsulated excitement. You achieve the adventurous life when your work and your life are intertwined, and when your work and your life have goals that really matter.

Sometimes life thrusts adventure on us. Last fall it brought the terrible calamity of September 11th. Who knew that thousands of people would be killed on a beautiful fall day in New York? Or that thousands more people would become heroes because the occasion demanded it of them? Who knew that Americans would emerge stronger, and more united, and much more keenly aware of what really mattered in their lives?

One of the catch phrases that seemed to define America over the past 20 years was the saying: "He who dies with the most toys wins." It was a grasping, hyper-competitive creed that was all about acquiring goods. Let's hope that the post-9-eleven era will be one in which doing takes precedence over getting. That, after all, is much more the American way. Americans, by and large, don't boast about what their ancestors had. They boast about what their ancestors did.

Do we carry the burden of our ancestors' unfulfilled dreams? Are we obliged to try to accomplish the things they didn't do? Yes, to some extent we are. If my father couldn't get the university education he wished for, then it's up to me to try. Our ideas about the nature of the task change from generation to generation, but the task is still there. That's the real adventure.

It's adventurous to devote your career to grappling with problems, whether they're physical or intellectual, scientific or social. It's adventurous to keep yourself in situations where your learning curve is always steep, where it always matters whether you succeed or fail. It's adventurous to devote yourself to ideals, to reforms, to protections, to improvements - to the advancement of human knowledge.

You can live an adventurous life as a teacher, or an entrepreneur, as a social worker or a scientist, as a lawyer or a journalist, or any of the other pursuits that you'll embark on when you leave this university. The point is, that you be passionate about what you're doing.

That's the real legacy of the adventurers who helped to found and build this University. Otto Geist came to this institution because he was passionate about illuminating Alaska's pre-history. Hundreds of people like him have attended this university and gone on to make their marks in life, because they had passion.

In closing, let me observe one thing that's very much in favor of your success in the realm real adventure, the realm of passion-driven endeavors. The fact that you chose to attend the University of Alaska Fairbanks already says you have a sense of adventure (and probably a sense of humor, too). You wouldn't be in this state if you were willing to settle for a safe and commonplace experience. You wouldn't be on this campus if you weren't willing to challenge yourself, to exert yourself, to reach farther than you thought you could go. My hope and my wish for you is that you'll continue to challenge yourselves throughout your careers, and that you'll reap the rewards of an adventurous life.

Thank you.