

# Why Every Woman Should Read Barbara Bush's 1990 Commencement Speech

The death of any famous person inevitably brings his or her accomplishments back into the light for one last hurrah.

Former first lady Barbara Bush is no exception to this rule. And judging from the articles following her death on April 17, 2018, one of Bush's most remembered accomplishments is the commencement speech she gave to graduates of Wellesley College in June of 1990.

According to *The Washington Post*, Bush was quite the [controversial commencement speaker](#). She was second choice, as the first had declined the invite. Additionally, her failure to complete college and pursue a career as wife and mother did not sit well with the feminist-minded women at Wellesley, who viewed such accomplishments as insignificant, archaic, and rather patriarchal.

But her speech blew graduates away... even as it praised actions that went against the ideology of the feminists in the audience that day. A choice portion of [her speech](#) is below:

*"You have a first class education from a first class school. And so you need not, probably cannot, live a 'paint-by-numbers' life. Decisions are not irrevocable. Choices do come back. And as you set off from Wellesley, I hope that many of you will consider making three very special choices.*

*The first is to believe in something larger than yourself, to get involved in some of the big ideas of our time. I chose literacy because I honestly believe that if more people could read, write, and comprehend, we would be that much closer to solving so many of the problems that plague our nation and*

our society.

And early on I made another choice, which I hope you'll make as well. Whether you are talking about education, career, or service, you're talking about life – and life really must have joy. It's supposed to be fun.

One of the reasons I made the most important decision of my life, to marry George Bush, is because he made me laugh. It's true, sometimes we've laughed through our tears, but that shared laughter has been one of our strongest bonds. Find the joy in life, because as Ferris Bueller said on his day off, 'Life moves pretty fast; and you don't stop and look around once in a while, you're going to miss it.'

...

The third choice that must not be missed is to cherish your human connections: your relationships with family and friends. For several years, you've had impressed upon you the importance to your career of dedication and hard work. And, of course, that's true. But as important as your obligations as a doctor, a lawyer, a business leader will be, you are a human being first. And those human connections – with spouses, with children, with friends – are the most important investments you will ever make.

**At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a child, a friend, or a parent.**

...

Now maybe we should adjust faster; maybe we should adjust slower. But whatever the era twenty – whatever the era, whatever the times, one thing will never change: **fathers and mothers, if you have children, they must come first. You must read to your children, and you must hug your children, and**

***you must love your children. Your success as a family, our success as a society, depends not on what happens in the White House, but on what happens inside your house."***

Is it time to return to the wisdom Barbara Bush presented at Wellesley so many years ago? Does society need to recognize that it's actually damaging – not helping – women by telling them they can and should “do it all”?

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