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[Kyrgyz] Рахмат, Rakhmat, **rakh-maht.**
[Russian] Спасибо, Spasibo, **spa-see-ba.**
[Chinese] xiè xiè (**shyay** falling, **shyay** falling).
Thank you.

<pause>

I want to thank President Andrew Wachtel and the American University of Central Asia faculty for inviting me to join all of you in your celebration today.

And I want to congratulate all of you graduates AND your family and friends who have supported you through your many years of education.

<pause>

As I understand is customary here, let me first tell you about my family history:

My father's parents arrived in the United States in 1904 from the Ukraine, fleeing the Czar's troops who were killing Jews.
My grandfather supported his family by working as a tailor and peddling vegetables in Chicago.
My father served in the US Navy in World War II, then trained as a musician and performed with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra as principal percussionist for over twenty years.

My mother's ancestors came to the United States primarily from the United Kingdom, bought land from William Penn around the year 1700 in what is now the State of Pennsylvania, and fought in the American War of Independence.
My grandmother earned a Master's degree from the University of Chicago roughly one hundred years ago and then worked as a school administrator.
And my mother earned her Master's degree in 1950 and worked as a librarian for 53 years in the United States and Austria.

<pause>

I emailed a short survey out to you seniors a few weeks ago, and I thank all of you who took the time to respond.

Many of you shared some of the big decisions you are facing, and it may not surprise you that your peers in the United States have the same questions: how to balance your own priorities with your parents priorites? Whether to continue on to graduate school...or find a job? Whether to stay near by...or move far away for more opportunities?

<pause>

So today I'm going to share with you my own story, and how I answered those questions.

<pause>

I was born in the City of Seattle in the upper left corner of the continental United States – 9,842 kilometers [6,116 miles] **away** and 54 years **ago** from **here** and **now**.

My parents were both busy working, and while we always had enough to eat, there wasn't any extra money for luxuries.

In his free time and after he retired, my father painted artistically, built furniture, made three guitars from scratch, and dabbled in electronics – building an oscilloscope and color TV from kits, and designing and building his own electronic music synthesizer.

My mother enjoyed cooking, canning, handicrafts, reading, and classical music.
She made sure that my fraternal twin brother and my two younger sisters and I knew how to embroider, knit, crochet, macramé, sew, cook, clean the house, and do laundry.

<pause>

Since school was not particularly challenging for me, I had a lot of free time to pursue my own interests.

And since cable TV, the Internet, computer games, and cell phones did not exist, I spent a lot of time reading.

<pause>

One of my favorite books when I was young was "Grimm's Fairy Tales".
This collection of fantasy stories was first published three hundred years ago in Germany, and I read it cover to cover many times.

The stories I enjoyed most were about three brothers, each setting out, one after the other from home to find his fortune.
Each brother had only his wits and the clothes on his back.
Each brother faced challenges and choices along the way.

Invariably, the two older brothers were tripped up by their own greed, arrogance, or vanity.

But when the third and youngest brother set out from home, he was kind, polite, humble, and generous.
He survived the challenges, impressed the King, married the princess, and lived happily ever after.

Though I was the second of four children, I surely wanted to follow the path of that youngest brother!

<pause>

I discovered the passion of my life early.
I loved building things.

By the age of six, I was building cars, airplanes, fortresses, and boats out of plastic Lego bricks.
By ten, I was assembling plastic model airplanes: mostly World War II fighters and bombers.
In my early teens – when NASA was still flying manned missions to the Moon – I built fifty model rockets – most of my own design – and entered them in local competitions.

<pause>

In middle school and high school, I took a lot of very practical, hands-on classes: wood shop, metal shop, home economics, typing, technical drafting, and offset press printing.

By the time I was fourteen I knew how to use a band saw, a table saw, a drill press, a planer, many hand tools, and both an arc welder and an acetylene torch.

When I was twelve I bent metal and welded myself a grappling hook – every young boy's dream!

<pause>

By the time I got to high school, many of my fellow students were starting to experiment with "sex, drugs, and rock and roll."
But I was pretty nerdy and a bit shy, so I stuck to school work, reading science fiction novels and the Scientific American magazine, and playing card games with my siblings and with other kids at school.

Science fiction in particular opened my mind to the possibilities of the future.

<pause>

One non-fiction book that had a profound affect on my approach to life was "Your Erroneous Zones" by Wayne Dyer. At the age of eight, I had been diagnosed with a stomach ulcer, and I remember Dr. Kaplan telling me "Ben, don't take life so seriously."

I read "Erroneous Zones" in high school, and Dr. Dyer stated a very simple philosophy: "You can learn from the past, and plan for the future, but you can only do in the present. So spend your time doing."

<pause>

In my third year of high school I took a computer programming course: FORTAN IV, punched cards, and green bar paper.

Seeking faster turn-around time, I opened my own computing account at the University of Washington.

Back then, computers were very large and very expensive – and impossibly slow compared to the smart phone in your pocket today.

I paid for my computing account by doing computer consulting for anyone who would hire me.

Most days after school, I would take the 30 minute bus ride to the UW computing center, work for several hours, and then take the 90 minute bus ride back home for dinner.
On weekends, I would spend 6-8 hours at the UW, plus the 3 hour bus commute.

<pause>

The UW had a slightly obscure mainframe computer made by Control Data Corporation, and I noticed two programs from Northwestern University: a statistical package called SPSS, and a chess-playing program called NUCHESS.

Intrigued, I applied to the engineering school at Northwestern, was accepted, and in September of 1978 I found myself on my first-ever airplane flight, traveling 2,768 kilometers [1,720 miles] to Chicago to start my freshman year.

I knew I liked computers, and I already knew people were willing to pay me to work with computers.
So majoring in computer science was an obvious choice.

<pause>

My very generous financial aid package from Northwestern required me to take out student loans and work during the summers and the school year to pay for my expenses.

During the summers I had a number of different unglamorous jobs: keypunch operator at a department store, file clerk in a law office, and stockroom clerk in a repair shop for high-volume photo printers.

Those jobs didn't pay very much, but I learned a lot about the real world, and about what kinds of work I enjoyed.

<pause>

With my CDC mainframe experience, I easily landed a job at the Northwestern computing center.

For ten hours a week, I sat at a World War II-vintage metal desk in the hallway, helping undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty members with their computing problems.

During my four undergraduate years, I spent over 1,400 hours sitting at that hallway desk, spotting simple syntax mistakes, reading reference manuals for obscure mathematics libraries, telling callers how to configure their 110 baud modems, and giving debugging tips.

I learned a great deal about people and how they interact with software.

<pause>

Before college, I had never participated in any kind of organized athletics.
But people tell you to take risks in college, so I "walked on" to the men's track team.

The 400 meter sprint became my event, and while I wasn't fast enough to beat runners at other schools, I developed a great deal of mental toughness and resolve.

<pause>

I was very busy my senior year: running track 15-to-20 hours per week, working at the computing center 10 hours per week, finishing up my applied math and computer science degrees, and looking for a job after graduation.

But I still had time enough for love.

I bumped into Lisa at a party during new student week.
She was a freshman, and it was her third day on campus.
It was too loud at the party to talk, so we found a quiet place to sit down, and all of a sudden a thought floated down to me: "I could marry this girl!"

We quickly became inseparable, which naturally made my post-graduation planning a bit more complicated.

<pause>

We decided to get married, I took a job at IBM in Poughkeepsie, NY – 3,839 kilometers [2,386 miles] from my Seattle home – and Lisa transferred to a college nearby.

We drove down to Chicago with two school friends, got married by a judge, and drove back up to Evanston.

My dorm mates threw us a small surprise wedding reception, but it was mid-term exam time, so Lisa and I went back to our separate dorm rooms afterwards to study.

What a way to spend our wedding night!

<pause>

We drove out to New York in June, 1982, and I started working at IBM.

Back then, it was the largest computer company in the world – 364,000 employees.

But after a few weeks at work, I realized that IBM was not the right place for me.
It had a very slow-moving, bureaucratic, risk-averse culture.

I wanted to build software and make a difference in the world, but my managers kept telling me to slow down and not work so hard.

Lisa wasn't happy at her new college, either.
So, not quite a year after arriving in New York, Lisa and I drove back to Evanston.

<pause>

I was working full-time at the Northwestern computing center to support us, and Lisa and I were both taking classes.

The IBM PC was starting to show up on campus, and in early 1984, Apple launched the first Macintosh.

Lisa and I bought a Mac, and I still remember the excitement of finally owning my own personal computer.

After a beta test copy of MacWrite crashed while I was writing my Master's thesis, I drove to a local computer store and bought a copy of Microsoft Word for Macintosh. It worked like a champ, and I finished my thesis.

<pause>

Based upon my experience with IBM and the Macintosh, I decided that mainframe computers and minicomputers were dead, and that the future of computing belonged to microcomputers.

In 1985, Microsoft was a ten-year old, 800-person, still privately-held company.
I flew out to Seattle that February for an interview, and I got a job offer at the end of the day, including options to buy shares in the company.
I didn't have a clue what stock options were, but I liked the company and the people.

So Lisa I completed our Computer Science degrees that June, and drove across the country to work for Microsoft.

That October, we helped Bill Gates celebrate his 30th birthday at the Skate King in Bellevue, and Microsoft Windows version 1.0 shipped the following month.

<pause>

During my fourteen years at Microsoft, I worked on OS/2, MS-DOS, Windows, Java, and MSN.
Some of these projects were not commercially successful, but I learned a lot from each one.

My biggest impact at Microsoft was starting the Internet Explorer team in October, 1994, and leading it through the release of IE 3.0 in August, 1996.

I grew the team to 67 software developers and program managers, and I developed my management philosophy: set a clear goal, get the right people in the right jobs, push down responsibility and authority as deeply as possible, coach, and represent the customer.

For seventeen of the twenty-two months that I lead the IE team, I worked between 80 and 100 hours per week.

IE 3.0 won all the major product reviews, and our browser share zoomed from near zero to 30 percent in the twelve months after release.

During my time working on IE, our third child was born, we built a new house, and I still had time to keep up with the Wall Street Journal and The Economist.

And my wife Lisa called me her "mythical husband".

<pause>

By the time I left Microsoft in 1999, I had helped the company grow to over 30,000 people and become – for a moment in time – the most valuable company in the world.

<pause>

I was very fortunate that my parents loved reading and learning and doing.
They gave me the freedom to explore my interests.
And they didn't worry about their nerdy son spending all his time building model rockets, reading science fiction, and playing with computers.

They allowed me to leave home to seek my fortune, and I was very lucky to meet and marry my Princess Lisa and prosper at Microsoft.

<pause>

I hope each of you is able to find something you're good at, work very hard at it, and find the love of your life.

Thank you for inviting me to spend this afternoon with you, and I once again offer my congratulations to the Class of 2014.

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