

Illinois Math and Science Academy

From the Selected Works of Stephanie Pace Marshall, Ph.D.

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Remarks Given at the First Convocation of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

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A very special good evening to you,
our charter class and welcome to our
community and your new home.

As I sat here looking at each of
you, I couldn't help but feel both a
tremendous sense of relief and
responsibility.

Relief that you are finally here,
and the Illinois Mathematics and
Science Academy is now a reality,
and responsibility, to ensure that
you have an academic experience that
develops your skills, stretches your
creativity and imagination and

allows you to discover talents that
you never dreamed of.

It is a sincere pleasure for me to
now introduce you, to our faculty, -
your teachers, counselors, and
administrators.

Would you please all stand.

Members of the faculty of the
Illinois Mathematics and Science
Academy, it is a pleasure for me to
present to you, our charter class of
IMSA pioneers, the class of 1989.

Faculty stands and applauds.

You may be seated.

It is now also a pleasure for me to
introduce our faculty.

I will introduce our administrative staff; Mr. Meyer, Associate Director for Outreach and Acting Principal, will introduce our faculty and Mrs. Cathy Veal, Dean of Students Services will introduce our residential counseling staff.

Members of the Class of 1989, it is a pleasure to present the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy staff.

Would you please join me in acknowledging them.

It is now both a privilege and a pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker this evening.

Dr. Leon Lederman is the Director of the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory. He is also Vice President of the Board of Trustees of the Academy its principal architect. Were it not for Dr. Lederman and Dr. Walter Massey's initial efforts three years ago, we may not be standing here tonight. In addition to his profound and intense involvement with the Academy, Dr. Lederman is a world renowned physicist.

In addition to being Director of Fermilab Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia. Dr. Lederman is also currently on an extended leave of absence as a professor of physics

from Columbia University. He has been a student and faculty member of Columbia for the past thirty years. Since the fifties, Dr. Lederman has made several scientific discoveries in the study of subatomic particles. Some of those significant discoveries have led to numerous awards including the National Medal of Science, and the Wolf Prize in Physics.

As head of Fermilab, he led that facility as it made the now world renowned experiment with their collider detector. Fermi is the first facility to have the capability of actually tracking specific subatomic particles

Dr. Lederman was also a founding member of the High Energy Physics Association Panel.

Thank you Dr. Lederman.

Dr. Lederman has presented us with insights about the universe and the opportunities you face in understanding our planet and beyond.

He presented you with a challenge to question, to explore and to dream.

I want to extend an invitation.

You may have read on our construction sign by the dormitories that the words

"A Pioneering Educational Community"

were printed.

My invitation to you as our charter class is to join with us in this pioneering effort and to become IMSA pioneers in the truest sense.

Webster defined the word pioneer in two ways:

1. One who ventures into unknown and unclaimed territories to settle
2. Any one who is an innovator in any field

By virtue of coming to the Academy, you have ventured into unknown territory and hence are a pioneer. However, the image of a true pioneer goes beyond location. It embodies a spirit of experimentation, risk-taking, and innovation, and an attitude of diligence, responsibility, hard work and service. You bring innumerable personal talents and skills to the Academy, but your attitude will be the key to your success; Because whether you believe you can, or you believe you can't, you are right.

You come to us, having been winners-whether its been in academics, music, debate, or even soccer. I

hope you have learned along the way however, that winning or having the will to win are not the real marks of an achiever. It is not the will to win, but the willingness to prepare yourself to win that will make the real difference and that's the hard part - that's the spirit of being a pioneer and a pioneer learner.

This spirit of risk taking and hard work was illustrated for me most clearly in the story of John Ammat:

John Ammat was the manger of Canada's first expedition to climb Mt. Everest, the world's tallest peak. He is one of the few mountain climbers who has succeeded in reaching the summit of Mt. Everest. That peak, at 29,028 feet, is by far the greatest challenge to mountain climbers everywhere.

The history of that peak is not very kind to those who try to scale its heights. The survival ratio is only

about 2 to 1, half the people who try to climb never return.

John Ammat, and the small number of survivors from his team, succeeded in reaching Mt. Everest several years ago.

I had the opportunity to hear him speak this year and according to him: "What was significant about the ascent, was not actually reaching the top, but what the team had to go through to get there."

John Ammat's story was one of commitment--digging deep within himself to find the resources necessary to accomplish his goal.

It was a story of innovation, adaptation to change, positive attitude, willingness to be flexible, untiring optimism, and the desire to hang on when others had let go.

Several members of the audience asked Mr. Ammat why he wanted to climb Mt. Everest. "We had to take

the chance." he said,, "that went with seizing the opportunity; to live the life we wanted to live, and to be the people we wanted to be, -- we had to take the chance."

You have an opportunity to be what you want and need to be in this Academy.

Many of you have been in schools where you have felt out of step. The class was too slow, the material was too simple, the teachers and students didn't seem to understand you and you didn't feel like you really fit.

It will be different here - In some ways it will be more comfortable because we understand your needs - This school was created for students like you; but in other ways it will be more difficult. The material may be harder, the pace may be faster and expectations will probably be higher than what you have been accustomed to. It may not be as

easy to do as well here as the schools from which you came.

This is a special school for special students and it requires that you act in special ways.

We expect you to live up to the Academy's image of excellence and innovativeness and we will support you in that endeavor.

You will be successful here because you want to be and we want you to be and we will help you.

Beyond the academic, however, the Academy will also be your home... and we will ensure that it is a safe place for you to be what you are; it will be like what Garrison Kellor calls in his book, Lake Wobegon Days, his story Storm Home

After sixth grade, I left Sunnyvale and rode the bus into town, to Lake Wobegon High, where Mr. Detman was principal, a man who looked as if wild dogs were after him and a giant icicle hung over his head. Worry

ate at Mr. Detman. He yelled at us when we ran downstairs, believing we would fall and break our necks and die on the landing. He imagined pupils choking on food and wouldn't allow meat in the lunchroom unless it was ground up.

He had his own winter fear - that a blizzard would sweep in and school buses would be marooned on the roads and children would perish, so, in October, he announced that each pupil who lived in the country would be assigned a Storm Home in town. If a blizzard struck during school, we'd go to our Storm Home.

Mine was the Kloeckls', an old couple who lived in a little green cottage by the lake. She kept a rock garden on the lake side, with terraces of alyssum, pansies, petunias, moss roses, ... and marigolds. It was a magical garden, it looked like the home of the kindly old couple that the children lost in the forest suddenly come

upon in a clearing and know they are lucky to be in a story with a happy ending.

No blizzard came during school hours that year, all the snowstorms were convenient evening or weekend ones, and I never got to stay with the Kloeckls, but they were often in my thoughts and they grew large in my imagination. My Storm Home.

Blizzards aren't the only storms and not the worst by any means. If the worst should come, I could go to the Kloeckls and knock on their door.

"Hello," I'd say. "I'm your storm child."

"Oh, I know," she'd say. "I was wondering when you'd come. Oh, it's good to see you. How would you like a hot chocolate and an oatmeal cookie?"

"We're so glad to have you. I can't tell you. Carl! Come down and see who's here!"

"It's the storm child and he's safe."

The faculty, residential counselors, and support staff are very glad you are here.

We've had lots of fun preparing for you to come, but the Academy has been empty without you.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the entire faculty and staff, we welcome you to the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy as our first charter class of pioneers.