

Convocation Address by Don Warren

NCNM – June 25, 2011

Response to Introduction:

President Schleich, Members of the Board of Governors, Faculty and Staff of NCNM, Class of 2011, and the support system of the class of 2011 . . . spouses, partners, parents and friends, it is a real honor to be invited to take part in this convocation.

It does not seem that long ago that I was sitting where you are . . . waiting to get my diploma from NCNM. When I look back at what has happened in the last 27 years . . . I am most thankful for the opportunities that have been given me and have never once regretted a career change that radically changed my life and that of my family.

Alvin Toffler, sociologist and futurist best known for his book Future Shock wrote another book in 1980 titled the Third Wave where he looked at three major developmental shifts that changed the way society perceived itself and functioned. I'd like to borrow the wave concept and apply it to our profession.

The first Wave I would call the Pioneer Stage . . . those passionate men and women who had a vision for a medical profession very different from the prevailing practice of medicine. So different in fact that they were ridiculed, marginalized and in some case even jailed for their approach to health and healing. Many joined the ranks in the early 1900's, inspired and led by people like Benedict and Louisa Lust. Unfortunately, although starting with much energy, this wave almost disappeared in the 60's. Fortunately the founders of NCNM were determined to not let this nascent profession die a pre-mature death and NCNM became the standard bearer that allowed a second wave to follow.

The Second Wave I would term the Formational stage. Your president has written much about professional formation . . . the various steps required for a profession to become recognized as a separate profession . . . including the development of educational institutions and agencies, formalizing the education process and regulation of the profession through accreditation and licensure.

Although it has only been 27 years since I graduated from NCNM . . . I have seen much of the Second Wave take place. I'd like to take you on a little journey that illustrates some of the changes that have taken place in education during this second wave.

It was 1975 . . . 36 years ago that I serendipitously (actually I believe providentially) discovered the field of naturopathic medicine. It took months of searching to find the one and only school where you could be trained to be a naturopathic physician . . . the National College of Naturopathic Medicine . . . which at that time was in Seattle. I decided to fly to Seattle to check this medical school out. I was given an address and was told to just drop in when in town to meet with the registrar. When I arrived at the address . . . I found a house in a residential setting belonging to a Naturopathic practice. I went in to find out where I had gone wrong . . . but the receptionist was quick to say . . .oh no . . . this is the right place . . . the registrar is just seeing patients and will see you in a few minutes. Later I realized this doctor was volunteering his time . . .acting as Registrar for the college.

After visiting with him . . . I was directed to the actual college. I drove further into the city and was once again dismayed to find one small two story building standing alone in a block that had been totally razed. I went in the front door to a waiting room that was empty . . . it had several treatment rooms on both sides and

facing the waiting room was a receptionist/dispensary area with no one behind the desk. I waited . . . hoping someone would appear.

Finally a tall graying gentleman probably in his 70's came down the stairs from . . . what I found out later was the one and only class room. He asked if he could help. When I told him I was interested in learning more about the school, he said he would arrange to have one of the student doctors talk to me when they were through seeing patients.

Although it was a huge reality check to discover that what I thought was a real medical school was actually more like a one room school house . . . which was graduating only a handful of naturopathic doctors each year . . . something in the demeanor, appearance and kindness of the older gentleman . . . probably one of the doctors volunteering their time to teach, made me feel that there was something here that I wanted to pursue.

By the time I started at NCNM in '79, the school had moved to the old Postal building in downtown Portland. Here at least we had four classrooms. What an amazing transformation has taken place at NCNM in the last thirty five years. What an impressive campus and clinic you now have.

I believe that we are entering a new phase . . . a third wave that is just as exciting and as challenging as the previous two waves. This Third Wave could be called the Integration Phase. Never before has there been a greater potential for naturopathic medicine to be integrated into the health care system . . . but it comes with both risks and great promise. You, the class of 2011 and those who follow you will have the privilege of determining what our profession will look like thirty years from now.

If I could have my wish. . . the integration would be more than simply being accepted into the health care system per se . . . but it would be that our profession would have a revolutionizing impact on an ailing medical system that is unsustainable. This integration and influence would not only be based on the scientific advancement of our profession which provides evidence for what we do . . . but it would be because we have held true to the values, principles and philosophy of our profession . . . it would be because we have refused to capitulate, water down or lose the essence of who we are. . . because it is our uniqueness that I believe will allow us to make the biggest difference. We must continue to look for areas in the evolution of scientific knowledge and research that helps explain what our forefathers and foremothers knew from experience, but we must also not be afraid to hold on to concepts that are a part of the historic profession that do not yet have an adequate scientific explanation . . . such as the vis, vital force and the use of energetic medicines such as homeopathy. Such concepts and practices are foundational to who we are as naturopathic physicians.

Involvement in the Foundations Project has been an incredible privilege as we on the senior editor team have met with and discussed with the leaders of our profession. For the first time a comprehensive textbook delineating the foundations of our profession is being created. Once again NCNM has been at the forefront and has been a key partner in the process.

I have one last story. My wife Barb is a gardener. (And I would like to pause here a moment and give credit where credit is due . . . when we moved to Oregon Barb and I had 4 kids ages 5-12. I'm sure those of you with families can relate. Barb . . . thanks for hanging in with me through what has been an incredible journey. I know payback time is coming!) Back to the story . . . we live on an organic farm and raise a lot of our own food. Our gardens are rich with organic materials and

grow amazing vegetables. This spring was extremely wet and it was late when we were able to start tilling the garden (my job). Last fall we decided to take a small corner of the garden to place an old Franklin stove. In preparation for putting down a brick hearth, I laid down landscape cloth and then several inches of stone dust. This was to prevent anything growing in that corner. I didn't get around to laying the bricks last fall . . .and when I looked at this corner just a few weeks ago. . . much to my dismay I had Scotch thistle plants 6 and 8 inches tall growing through the landscape cloth and the stone dust . . . nothing else growing . . . just the Scotch thistle. As I tried to pull them out they resisted. It took a shovel to dig them out and what I found was this incredibly deep tap root. Talk about vital force . . . that plant was not going to let anything hinder it from becoming a full, robust plantbut where did it get its strength and energy to emerge into the daylight through what I thought were impenetrable obstacles . . . I believe that the deep tap root was the key . . .and I believe that being deeply connected to our roots as a profession will be the key to our success in the future. As a profession we have had overcome huge odds . . . and more lie ahead . . . but it is in our roots. .. that go way beyond Benedict and Lousia Lust that we have our strength and capacity to fully grow and make our unique contribution to health care of our nations during this third wave of Integration.

Congratulations . . . and go out there and make a difference . . . both in your practices and by serving your profession. The future for our profession looks bright . . . I commend to you . . . our future . . . hold true to what makes us unique and I can guarantee you will make a difference.