



**Transcript: Dr. William T. Newnham Order of Seneca address  
Tuesday, May 13, 2008, Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner**

Well, what does one say? This honour has been so kind and so warm, and I greatly appreciate it.

One prominent Canadian politician, in a situation quite similar to this, said: "I'd be less than human if I said I didn't enjoy all this. I'd be less than truthful if I said I believed it all."

This was certainly not a one man show. And if you have difficulty with that, ask Roy McCutcheon. Roy came in the second year, and things started to really move, and ask him how hard he had to work. For example, the Minkler Auditorium, Phase Two, Phase Three, the Sports Centre and later at King. And he wasn't alone either.

Steve Quinlan came in along the line to help straighten out the financial situation. And there were many others, too many to name.

This whole ceremony is made meaningful for me because the light of my life, my lovely wife Marein, is here. We were blessed with four children. They're not children now but they are all here, their life companions are with them, and my sister—I don't have any brothers, but I have one wonderful sister—and she is here from Windsor. Unfortunately, her husband was not able to come due to health reasons.

The year 2008 is a tremendous one for us. Early on, I celebrated my 85<sup>th</sup> birthday. My wife, who is of indeterminate age, had her birthday soon after, and she is not far behind me. In the fall, we will celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, and tonight, the finest college in the entire country has given me its highest honour and left me almost speechless.

We're on historic territory. Four hundred and fifty years ago—and if Marv Southcott's here, he told me I started my speech in the Willow Theatre, my first speech to students, 400 years ago! Four hundred and fifty years ago, the French had a fort operating, Fort Rouillé, at the foot of Bathurst Street, and 'les coureurs des bois,' used it as a pushing-off place for their journeys into the interior. Legend tells that, in the early morning, the tranquility was broken by the lead canoeist in the first canoe shouting, "Into the murky, maritime, morning mist,

au large!" which, freely translated, means, "To the horizon," which indicated their focus on accomplishment rather than on the discomforts they were going to go through.

I'd like to tell you about a meeting I had in 1971. I thought it 'politick' to invite the Senior Chief of the Senecans to come to my office for a chat.

Isabelle Jones brought him in, and his name was Chief Gray Cloud. We talked about the Fort and Gray Cloud would put in interesting little homilies such as, "When a Senecan points his moccasins at the horizon, it recedes."

He brought some artefacts. One was the talking stick. The talking stick was four feet long, two inches wide, and it was used at powwows around the camp fire, usually. And the person with the talking stick had the floor. The talking stick, on one side, was covered with intricate, charming carvings, each of which depicted an interesting, significant event in the life of the tribe. I turned the stick over, and two-thirds of one side was covered with carvings, the other third was blank.

"Chief Gray Cloud," I said. "Isn't it unfortunate that your excellent carver was not able to finish his work?"

"Mr. President, you don't understand. That space is blank for a reason. Who of us would say that the great events of the tribe will not take place in the future?"

Who Indeed?

All too soon that charming man stood, and he said, "Mr. President: The future beckons." With a smile, "au large," and he was gone.

Tonight, I think it is fitting that my award, which I appreciate so much, and the honouring of six of our own—six outstanding young people—takes place at the same time.

To have these six people "au large" their way when they left our long houses to noted success; did they not point their moccasins toward the future, toward the horizon and watch the horizon recede? And did they not perform extremely well when they left the College to the extent that they would be worthy of having their carvings on our mythical talking stick?

And in honouring them, are we not really honouring the thousands of Seneca students who have gone from the long house with their acquired skills and understandings mastered, to make their way in the work of work they have chosen, be it in the air, on land, on the seas and oceans of the world and in those seas and oceans?

The history of this remarkable college is fast becoming an awe-inspiring epic. What a privilege it is to be able to help in the development of that history, and the opportunity is open to all of us in various ways.

Mr. President: I would like to assure you that my family and I are deeply aware of the significance of this award, and we are very appreciative of it coming to me.

What a privilege it is to be a Senecan. And if Chief Gray Cloud were still alive, I know that he would be delighted to stand beside me on this platform and turn to your current president and say the words he said to me so long ago: "Mr. President, the future beckons," and with a smile, "Au large."