



**Katrina S. Rogers, President
Retirement Remarks
January 9th, 2025**

With all the accolades I've heard the last few days, I sometimes wonder why I am retiring from the Presidency, my favorite job so far in my long and happy career!

And you may be wondering also.

A long time ago, a friend told me about their theory of the arc of leadership. They said, "you should never leave when you are so tired and burned out that you can't wait to go. Leave when you feel a little wistful that you are going. Leave when another light shines for you." That is my arc—the right time to go; I still love my role AND I can see more things on the horizon.

As I have been public about it, most of you know that the last few years have been difficult. I am not unusual—we all have challenges and victories, joys and sorrows but since I have the microphone, I want to tell you mine.

One of these difficulties was being a caregiver. My late husband, W. A. Bill Cherry, passed away after a long illness of Lewy Body Dementia brought on by exposure to Agent Orange—I have written about this elsewhere—being just one more in a long line of people destroyed by war and violence. I want to acknowledge Bill now because I wouldn't be standing here today without his belief in me. I wouldn't have made it through my doctorate much less become a university president.

I am so happy that my brother, Mark, is here with me tonight. He understands better than anyone our humble start, our luck in having good parents, and my place in the family as the only girl and youngest child. Through our phone conversations, Mark is a loving presence in my life. He too knows that life can suddenly change—in a moment.

I was Bill's caregiver, contending with my own breast cancer, when my two sisters (in laws) passed away a month apart, tragically, suddenly. Then, unconnected to these events, my oldest brother, John, committed suicide a month later.

In a further tragedy, about a year later, and four days before Bill passed, our 21-year-old grandson was killed in a motorcycle accident.

That was a lot to take in and made me think about my life in terms of meaning and purpose and whether there was something more for me to do.

I must digress for a moment. When I first arrived at Fielding, I hated the word "process," and I was skeptical of self-reflection and lifelong learning. I had just spent 10 years in the front line of conversation advocacy, working on policy and environmental change. I wanted a change and was intrigued by Fielding but also a little intimidated—perhaps some of you felt the same way. Intrigued by this little spot of humanity that asked hard, big questions and cared about self, others, and the world, and intimidated by the diverse range of people I met.

A faculty colleague I met at that time, Judy Stevens-Long—soon to become a great friend—taught me that most experiences are on a developmental trajectory, and I understand now that that is true for me. Kjell Rudestam, assigned by HR to be my "buddy," was quick-witted, smart, and wise. It seemed to me that I had arrived at a place where I could explore in ways that I could not at other, more traditional universities and organizations. Charles McClintock, Dean of the School of HOD at the time, hired me. He was a brilliant psychologist and a humanist, and I learned about academic leadership and strategy from him. As he liked to say, "there is nothing better than a good conceptual framework."

Back to the main story. I took all the collective wisdom of my colleagues, including many of you in this room—some of whom I have acknowledged already—and set out on a path of discovery. From the mind map we used in our new student orientations to Charles' conceptual framework, I used every tool available to me to evaluate my life. As I rounded the corner of 60 years old, I drew, I wrote, I read, I dictated, I cried, I felt, I thought. I asked others. Ultimately, your story is your own.

Here is what I discovered:

Higher education demands all parts of us. This is not a job; it is not a calling. It is an imperative. I finally understand the saying, “To be educated is to become fully human.” It is the only avenue for humanity’s progress. Dedicate yourself to that.

Curiosity is more rewarding than certainty.

Being in relationships with others can be hard, but they reflect the humanity in all of us. Hold on to that in bad times, and don’t take it for granted in good times.

For me, the final truth came down to the essence of who I am: a teacher, a learner, and a writer with aspirations to be a scholar and to teach and write in a way that makes a difference for others. It’s simple; it’s modest; it’s who I am.

And Fielding is the place to be. We, who are on the inside, see our flaws but I hope we also see our beauty. We are all beautiful pieces in this human story.

There are good people in this world who rise, and Fielding is a place where such people are nurtured. You are nurtured; I am too.

As I move into the role of Immediate Past President, I am excited to support Fielding’s new President, John Bennett, who will assume the role as Interim beginning on February 1st. I am thrilled that I will be returning to my faculty colleagues and my students, after a short sabbatical, and to work with alum. I am overcome with abundance.

Most of all, I am holding the hand of my beloved fiancé, Paul, who came into my life unexpectedly and whom I cherish beyond measure.

Thank you all for your love and support and, most importantly, for your love and commitment to Fielding—to our vision that education matters and that in a world full of conflict and hardness, we shine our light for all to see.