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Letter from the Chancellor

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Letter from the Chancellor

June 25, 2008 | Jerry Falwell Jr.

Summer has begun and the Liberty University campus is relatively quiet. Over 19,000 attended commencement exercises on May 10, and more than 4,700 graduates received degrees. The graduation crowd witnessed history, not only because of the record number of graduates and record attendance, but because it was also the first LU commencement address to be delivered by a speaker wearing cowboy boots.

Accomplished television and film actor and martial arts expert Chuck Norris talked about how God has been instrumental in his family life and his career. He also told the graduates that they could not go wrong if they would allow God to direct their steps.

It was a spectacular end to a wonderful school year, my first as chancellor. God's continued blessings after my father's passing convinced us all once again that Liberty University is God's school and His hand remains on the university. We are constantly reminded of the awesome responsibility that we have to this great institution and to the founding generation.

One poignant reminder of lessons learned from those who came before occurred to me recently when it was announced that Sen. Edward M. Kennedy has a malignant brain tumor. Philosophically and politically, Kennedy and my father were diametrically opposed, but that did not prevent their friendship. My father invited Kennedy to speak at Liberty University on Oct. 3, 1983. I was in my third year at Liberty and remember the event well.

We were impressed with Kennedy as he and his family ate dinner at our family's home. He was warm and personable and reminded me of Dad in many ways. When he spoke to Liberty University students, he was well received and, even though the students did not agree with much of what he said, they were polite and kind. He stayed in touch with my father after he left Lynchburg.

The next year, I applied for admission to the law school at the University of Virginia, where Kennedy had attended. He volunteered to write a letter of recommendation for me. I am sure the faculty was surprised to see a Kennedy recommending a Falwell, but I guess it helped because I was admitted. Later, when I was a student at the University of Virginia Law School, Kennedy invited our entire family to have dinner at his home in McLean, Va.

On another occasion, when my father was in south Florida, Kennedy asked him to come and pray with his mother who was nearly 100 years old and in failing health. Dad was honored to oblige the request and visit with Rose Kennedy.

Over the years our family encountered the senator less frequently, but I was struck by one particular act of kindness on his part just a few years ago. In 2005, when my father was hospitalized with severe pulmonary edema, one of the first letters he received was from Kennedy. The letter was heartfelt and encouraging, wishing my father a quick recovery. I am

sure that if my father were alive today, he would be the first to send a similar letter of well wishes to Kennedy.

I hope that our generation can learn from the relationship between my father and Senator Kennedy. Both of these men understood that they could disagree without being disagreeable. They were both lightning rods for their respective causes, but they treated each other with civility and respect.