

***M a k i n g L i f e ' s
B i g C h o i c e s***

L I N D A C H A L L I S G I L L

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Career and Family: Finding a Satisfying Balance

Linda Challis Gill

Opening Remarks

It is wonderful to see so many of you here this morning. Jack and I are happy to speak to you today because it is exciting being around the “movers and shakers” of the future.

- How many of you will attend college next year?
- Are any of you the first in your family to go to college?
- How many of you are seniors, junior, and sophomores?
- How many of you will pursue science, engineering, medicine, and computer science? How about teaching, business, or law?

You all have chosen the challenging road or you would not be here. I like that.

A. Linda Challis Gill Background

Let me tell you a little about my background!

1. When I was growing up in Kentucky, education was considered a waste for a woman! More importance was placed on marriage and raising a family. I was the first woman in my mother's family to attend college. Jobs that were generally available for women were teaching, nursing, and office support.
2. My mother placed second in her high school class in a tobacco-farming community in Kentucky and, as a result, earned a full-ride, college scholarship.

Unfortunately, her family needed financial assistance, and she had to decline the offers and go to work. When I decided to go to college, after receiving a scholarship, my mother said, “You go to college for me, since I did not get my chance.” Believe me, there was no way I would have not graduated from college! I lived the dream of my mother.

B. Why College is Important

There are numerous reasons today that make college important.

1. College education gives a person the option of choosing from a much bigger variety of careers.
2. Your quality of life with a good education is enhanced with exposure to arts, history, literature, music, science, medicine, business and languages.

3. Achieving self-support is a confidence builder. No matter what happens in your future, you have acquired the skills and discipline to obtain and keep a job.

Excerpts from USA Today 9.21.10

For the typical student attending a 4 year university, the financial investment in college begins to pay off at about the age of 33 years old.

Compared with a high school graduate, the typical 4 year college graduate who enrolled in a public university at 18 has earned enough by then to compensate for being out of the work force for 4 years and for borrowing enough to pay tuition and fees without grant aid.

Time Magazine May 2014 quoted a study by the San Francisco Federal Reserve Bank that the average difference in total lifetime earnings in the US between college graduates and people with only a high school education amounts to:

\$831,000

4. College inspires the knowledge of a bigger world out there! Because I had to work my way through college, I could not afford to travel, so I became a flight attendant after college graduation. I saw the world and, in addition, travel gave me an education in people and other cultures that I would never have experienced.

5. During the nine years I worked as a flight attendant, I returned to graduate school. My goal was to obtain a masters degree in counseling. When I married Jack at age 28, my biological clock was ticking, and we made a decision to have children. I was a stepmother of two children by my husband's first marriage. That was not easy. There is no training to be a step-parent. I, also, was not confident I could be a good parent. My experience of having an unhappy, unstable home with an alcoholic mother, made me resolve to create a happy one with my family. It would be the most valuable gift I could give my husband, my step children and any future children we might have. It is a goal that continues today with our grandchildren.

Three years after our marriage, we experienced the joy of the birth of identical twin boys.

C. Parenting, Raising Twins

1. Our twins were born prematurely, and I decided to quit work for several reasons even though, financially, it was tough for us.
2. Even though our older kids did not live with us, I felt it very important to include them in our nuclear family.

As a result, all four of our kids are very close.

3. When our twins entered school, I had many avenues of volunteer work available to me that used my education and life skills.

I became:

- **Soccer coach** (I still cannot call “off-sides”),
- **Baseball manager** (I now know what a double play is),
- **PTA president** of the elementary and high school,
- **Head of drug and alcohol abuse** and **traffic safety** for the school district, and
- **Community liaison** on the **Truancy board**.

4. Along the way, I gained a life-long interest in hospital volunteering which has lasted for over 40 years! The past 20 years I have worked at Methodist Hospital in Houston in the Michael DeBakey Cardiovascular Surgery waiting room—high stress and high drama! So, even though I did not have a typical career, you can see that my life is full and rich, and I enjoyed watching all four of our kids grow up.

5. Because my husband has been successful, we decided to create a family foundation for philanthropy in education. Currently, we support dozens of college scholarships every year through our Foundation and Horatio Alger Association. Most of them are 4 year renewable scholarships paid directly to the scholar's university. We emphasize skills, not handouts. The end result for those we help is self pride.

We support many other educational programs like Teach for America, entrepreneurial training through Rice University's Rice Alliance, and its Ignite Program, and at Indiana University's Kelley School of Business Velocity Program. We also have created Centers of Excellence: The Gill Heart Institute at the University of Kentucky and The Gill Center for Biomolecular Sciences at Indiana University. We want to share our good fortune and give back to the educational system that empowered us.

Education is the great enabler.

The more education you continue to pursue,
the better life choices you will be able to make.

6. All four of our children actively contribute to our Foundation activities and submit new funding proposals. Our foundation has made our children more aware and appreciative of the

opportunities that education provides. Our family's commitment is giving back!

This brings me to something important that I want you to think about.

D. Power of Kindness

We have a constitutional right to freedom of speech, enabling us to be unkind, thoughtless, and disrespectful,

but that is NOT right!

Anger, confrontation, verbal, and physical abuse are on the rise in our schools, work places, and homes. The media often seems to focus on negative interactions perhaps because positive interactions may not be as shocking or marketable.

Let me give you my reasons of how powerful kindness can be: People in your life who give you a “hard time” are usually having a hard time themselves. They think to make you feel badly, it will make them feel better... nothing could be further from the truth. To face someone whose only goal is to make you feel better is disarming. Hostility will not work when kindness is sincere and your main objective is to make that person’s hostility dissipate.

This is especially effective in the waiting room of the DeBakey Cardiovascular Surgery Unit when I volunteer at Houston’s Methodist Hospital. I know the fear, pain, and helplessness the families of our patients having open heart surgery feel. Their loved one could die, either on the operating table or recovering in the ICU and it may be the last time they will ever see them again. My job as a volunteer is to diffuse that fear... kindness always works. Now it may take longer for some

people, but it is only a matter of time until you win them over to the **kind side**.

Try it! It is unbelievably powerful! You may experience from the person you want to help awkwardness, silence, perhaps distrust, but the biggest reward is seeing their hostility and anger disappear in the face of your persistent kindness. The results can be amazing and unexpected. Don't misuse it because it won't work if your actions are not honest and from the heart. Kindness will become addictive. You will want to do it more. Remember, people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will **never** forget how you made them **feel**. Making people feel important results from kindness.

Manners: In the National best seller, *The Last Lecture*, author, Randy Pausch, laments the "Lost Art of Thank You Notes". He

writes that showing gratitude is one of the simplest yet most powerful things humans can do for each other. Hand written thank you notes are rare today, so when they are received they are **remembered**. I drilled thank you notes into our twins. One of them, Tyler, said when he became a college student, “You need not ever remind me again. I know the **power** of the thank you note.”

You never know what magic might happen when a thank you note arrives in someone’s mailbox.

E. Advice to Students

Now, on another topic... the question has been raised to me, “If you had it to do over again, would you make the same choices in your life?”

Absolutely, I would make the same choices! I like the kids that my husband, Jack, and I have raised, and I am forever grateful that his hard work enabled me to stay at home.

- Our oldest son, **Dr. Jeff Gill**, is a tenured Professor of Political Science, Biostatistics and Surgery at Washington University, St. Louis, and its Medical School. He has two PhD's, one in Political Science and one in Statistics and an MBA.
- Our daughter, **Jennifer**, has been a venture capitalist and is now advising and investing in startups in the “Internet of Things”. She has two electrical engineering degrees, from Stanford and the University of Texas, Austin, and a Stanford MBA. She is a founder of a women’s organization called Watermark. Google it girls! It is a professional organization founded to empower women in their pursuit of their goals and career objectives by providing contacts and

relationships for them. When I am asked why she was not a part of her father's venture capital firm, I simply answer, "**He couldn't afford her!**"

- Our twin sons, **Jason** and **Tyler**, completed their MBAs in 2001 and concentrate on startup companies – does that sound like sons of an entrepreneur?
- Three of our four kids are married, and we have eight grandchildren.

Education is very important in our family, and Jack and I tried very hard to show its value. Our twins were very popular jocks in high school. The "peer group" like most high schools, had a big influence.

Our twins **were** the "peer group". This was a responsibility they truly did not want or appreciate at the time. As their parents, Jack and I often said,

**“Do not let high school be the crowning
achievement of your lives”.**

I had to repeat that a lot with our twins as they were very popular with the girls. “Guess who gets the girls later,” I would say. “It’s the guys who had their noses in the books, went to great colleges, got top job offers and made big money. They not only get the girls, they get YOUR girl!” Unfortunately, that did not work with our twins as they still got the girls, but they know **nerds rule** now! When our twin sons announced they were going to graduate school for MBAs after five years of working, they told me I could finally get off their backs! Even though I never said anything, they countered with “Mom your whole body said graduate school.” I guess I have a hard time being subtle!

Get all the education you can.

Let me give you two examples.

Our oldest son, Jeff (26 years old at the time), decided to return to college for an MBA at Georgetown College in Washington DC. He decided to sell the prized Porsche he bought with his earnings from his IBM computer software job to help defray the costs of graduate school. His twin brothers, 14 years old at the time, thought that was the dumbest thing he could ever do...how can you sell your dream machine to go back to school? Jeff's reply: "When I receive my MBA, I can buy all the Porsches I want!" **Point made!**

Our emphasis on education was actually tested when one of our twins, between his 1st and 2nd year of his MBA, performed exceptionally well at his summer internship job. The company

not only offered him a full time job, but a large sign on bonus and a big stock option for him **not** to return to graduate school. He called us very excited and I held my breath and asked what he answered. “Mom, I thanked them for their confidence in me and told them if I did not finish my MBA, my Mother would kill me.” I replied, “Perfect answer, son!” By the way, the company went belly up three years later!

***Companies come and go,
but education lasts a lifetime.***

I’m so proud to say that among our four kids, together they have 11 degrees, 4 of which are MBA’s, resulting in 30 years of college. We are very proud that **they walked our talk.**

Here is some advice I frequently give to students today:

One of the questions asked by students was where to access information about colleges. Today, virtual tours are available on the internet.

Check out these sites:

- [Campustours.com](http://www.campustours.com)
- <http://www.youvisit.com>

They charge for each college you view providing a real look at a school's personality. These will not replace a campus visit but will enable you to eliminate those that seem redundant when compared with other schools you are considering.

1. **Choose your jobs carefully!** Early jobs will help you realize what you do not like and set goals for the dream jobs to which you will aspire.

My husband has a take on that. When our twin sons were 12

yrs. old, they came to him for more allowance money. He felt they should have the same thing he had, “Get out there and get a job and see what it is like to work for a living!” We were very proud they got a paper route using their bicycles and got up at 5:30 am seven days a week. Good experience. They found out that they do not want to deliver papers as a career.

My husband has had six different careers:

- Scientist
- Entrepreneur
- Company Founder
- Senior Executive-Businessman
- Venture capitalist for 26 years
- He is now currently teaching at Harvard, Indiana University, and University of Kentucky Medical Schools, MIT Engineering, Rice Business School, and MD Anderson Cancer Center.

- He is also on several non-profit boards: Project HOPE, The Presidents' Circle of the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, the Horatio Alger Association, and the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.
- You, too, will change jobs and career paths as you grow with experience.

2. Failure:

Don't be afraid of failure... you will learn more lessons from failure than success.

“It doesn't matter if you try and try again and fail.

It does matter if you try and fail, and fail to try again.”

3. Find yourself mentors who will enable you to grow in skills and experience. Early on, you may pattern yourself after parents, family, and close

friends. Later teachers guide you in a variety of educational choices. In the work place, pick **winners**. Pick someone you **admire**. Mentors find that hard to turn down. It's very flattering.

Unfortunately, the media often glorifies sports figures and entertainment stars... the percentage of those who find success in these areas is incredibly small and short lived.

Don't get trapped in unrealistic expectations. For example:

Are there any football players here?

In previous speeches I talked about the sad statistics of NFL players health after leaving the sport. It is too late for them, but not for you!

It is simply not possible to play football without getting hit in the head. New findings suggest head injuries are the result of the number of hits received. A study by Purdue University found in a single season, players received from 200 to nearly 1,900 hits to the

head... impact forces range from 20 - 100 G's... one recorded 300 G's! Concussion rates in high school are 78% higher than in college football.

Helmets do not protect your brain – they protect fracturing your skull. A hit moves the brain inside the skull – damaging it! It is no surprise that in 2013, eight high school players died.

Girls concussions seem to be concentrated on boys. A 2011 study found girls had twice the concussion rates of boys. A header in soccer is around 20 G's. In basketball a 2013 study found girls with 11.5% concussion injuries to boys 7.2%.

Reasons for this could be smaller head size of girls (26% less mass in head and neck) and / or because their neck muscles are less developed than boys and not as good at absorbing shock of impact.

4. Health Issues. With all the hard work, stress,

deadlines and college prep, don't forget to take care of your health. There are far more pressures and choices for you today than Jack and I had when we were in school.

Fortunately, there has been education and research to enable you to make informed decisions about your life.

For example, we know today that:

- a) On average, smokers die about 10 years younger than non-smokers. This year in 2015, a half a million people will die from smoking related diseases. 5.6 million of today's youth will die, prematurely, in adulthood.

- b) Dr. John Mendelsohn, retired President of MD Anderson Cancer Center quoted, "One third (1/3) of all cancers would be eliminated if smoking was eliminated."

Secondhand smoke increases a person's risk of developing heart disease by 25 to 30 percent and lung cancer by 25 to 30 percent. I have never smoked, but I was raised by a chain smoking mother... my chances of developing lung cancer and heart disease are very possible.

Don't be deceived by smokeless tobacco. People who chew tobacco for many years are 50 times more likely to get oral cancer, gum disease and lose their teeth. The risk of other cancers, heart disease and ulcerative colitis is 50 to 70% higher among chewers. Sadly, only about half of the people with diagnosed mouth or throat cancer survive more than five years.

c) **Diabetes** is one of the most common chronic diseases in school age children. Because 10 to 15 percent of children and teens are overweight today, double the number two decades ago, the percentage of Type 2

diabetes has increased from less than 5 percent before 1994 to 30 to 50 percent today. Children who get obesity-related diabetes face a much higher risk of kidney failure and death by **MIDDLE AGE** than people who develop diabetes as adults. These children also face increased risk of heart disease, stroke and blindness. Diet and exercise is crucial to lower their risk.

Just recently, a study revealing more than 41 Million women in North America who are obese (a Body Mass Index / BMI of 30 or higher), have a 40% greater risk of developing bowel, post menopausal breast, gall bladder, wound, kidney, pancreatic and esophageal cancer than healthy weight women.

d) **Let's talk about sex:** Sex can not only produce pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, but with

the added risk of AIDS, **it can kill you! You must protect yourself and your partner!**

There is a vaccine against a cervical cancer virus called HPV (Human Papillomavirus). June 20, 2013 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the vaccine, Gardasil, has cut infections in teen girls by half! This is recommended for males and females. More than 90% of all oral cancers are HPV related. Each year about 7,200 American men are diagnosed with HPV related oral cancer, vs. 1,800 cases in women. By 2020 HPV related oral cancers in men will eclipse cervical cancer. The problem is because premalignant lesions are deep within the tonsils, in the base of the tongue, they are not detected. By the time that they are detected, stage 3 or 4 cancer has evolved.

This is **very important!** You should research this and consult your doctor. Don't hesitate!

e) **Drinking and/or smoking marijuana** can impair decision making when driving a vehicle. One joint of marijuana can impair judgement for 24 hours! This cannot only result in fines and jail time, but become a lethal weapon and leave scars for those you hurt and life-long guilt for you.

f) **Let's talk about drugs.**

Marijuana

Smoking one joint of cannabis (marijuana) is equivalent to 20 cigarettes in terms of lung cancer risk. Cannabis smoke contains 5 times more carbon monoxide than tobacco and twice the level of carcinogens.

Marijuana today is far stronger today than years ago. One marijuana cigarette in the 1960's contained approximately 10 mg of THC... today it is approximately 150 mgs. A single dose of THC may take up to 30 days to leave the body. There is substantial evidence that heavy adolescent (under 16) cannabis use increases 2 – 4 fold the risk for schizophrenia and related psychotic disorders.

In the hour after you smoke a joint, the danger of heart attacks rise 5 fold. A recent study by the National Academy of Sciences that tracked over one thousand people, from birth to age 38 who started smoking marijuana in their teens, has now added another disturbing result from teen marijuana use.

The developing teenage brain is especially vulnerable to

drug use. The participants in the study who used marijuana heavily from high school years through age 38, scored 8 points lower on IQ tests than when they were tested at 13 years of age.

IQ scores are usually very stable.

Cocaine

Cocaine constricts blood vessels, dilates pupils and increases body temperature, heart rate and blood pressure.

Most seriously, people who use cocaine can suffer heart attacks or strokes, which may cause sudden death.

Cocaine related deaths are often a result of the heart stopping (cardiac arrest), followed by no breathing.

Cocaine is more dangerous when combined with other drugs or alcohol.

Heroin

Heroin is on the rise because it's cheaper and easier to obtain than prescription drugs like Oxycontin and Vicodin.

How does it affect the brain? Heroin is an opioid drug that is synthesized from morphine. When it enters the brain, it converts back to morphine. One of the receptors is in the brain stem affecting automatic processes critical for life, such as blood pressure and respiration.

Heroin abuse is associated with a number of serious health problems including, fatal overdose, spontaneous abortion, infectious diseases like hepatitis and HIV, and pulmonary complications such as pneumonia. Chronic users may develop collapsed veins, infection of the heart lining and heart valves (where I volunteer, my surgeons see

this), abscesses, constipation and gastrointestinal cramping, and liver or kidney disease.

I hope I've scared you to death.

Why is this not on the front page of our newspapers? Please get the word out to all of your friends who use marijuana, cocaine or heroin, of the unseen dangers of usage.

Drugs and recreational drugs will make you less than you can be. You will not be the same person you could have been. It compromises intelligent decisions... decisions that can affect your future. It also compromises who your friends will be.

Remember the saying, "You are known by the company you keep."

As a parent I had the informational "drug talk" with our twins when they were 12... don't wait until 12 today... 9 or 10 at the

latest. Because of having an alcoholic parent, I was overly sensitized to the effect alcohol and drugs could have on a family.

Being the Head of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Education in our school district I did research and wrote articles on the physical and mental effects of drugs to educate parents. I, conveniently, left the articles all over house for our twins to see... I had a hidden agenda!

I began my drug talk in an informational manner. “Have you looked at the articles I have written about drugs? Let’s discuss them.”

Their answer;

“We know all the facts Mom.”

My answer; “So glad you do. As your parent it is my duty to protect your health and well being at all costs. You are the

most important people in your Dad's life and my life. We love you very much and want you to be the best you can be. If you use drugs, I will know... I know you so well.

Let me tell you,

I will become your worst nightmare.

I will search your rooms, pick you up from school, and become glued to your sides. I will not allow you to fry your brain. I risk losing your love, but that is worth it to protect your healthy minds and bodies.

I am your parent not your friend.

There are only 2 things that are not negotiable in this family; health and safety. When you leave me at 18 to go off into the world, then you will know I am your best friend.

g) There may be some of you in my audience who have families with difficulties. You must find healthy role models elsewhere. Ask teachers, clergy and school counselors for guidance.

h) Are there any motorcycle riders here?

I volunteer in DeBakey's cardiovascular surgery

Suite where we perform transplants. Motorcycle victims become a high percentage of heart lung donors. In fact, hospitals call motorcycles, "**donor cycles**"!

In 2013, with approx. 8.5 million motorcycles on the road, there were 88,000 motorcyclists injured and 4,668 were killed. Motorcyclists were over 26 times more likely than passenger car occupants to die in a motor vehicle traffic crash and 5 times more likely to be injured. I don't care how good a motorcyclist you are; there is no contest

between a motorcycle and a car. Car drivers often don't even see you!

First of all, I am not making your decisions for you!

I am arming you with information to make your own intelligent decisions for your health, safety and future career choices.

Remember, you are the best of the best.

Don't throw it away with unhealthy choices!

5. The Old Testament, the Torah, and the Koran all say,

**“To those whom a great deal has been given,
a lot is expected.”**

6. That's why in our family:

We emphasize the importance of education.

a) We taught our children to be kind, considerate, and thoughtful.

b) We taught them to be secure, self-confident, hard working, and self-reliant.

c) We taught them our values, the importance of giving back, and helping others. I used to say to our twins: "It is not important for you to be CEO's or millionaires. It IS important for you to give back and make society a better place. If you don't do that, you will disappoint your mother, and you DON'T want to disappoint your mother!"

d) We taught them to be respectful to all races, religions, and cultures.

e) We hope they teach the same to their children!

7. I would like to quote Michael Josephson of the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Los Angeles, California.

WHAT WILL MATTER

by Michael Josephson



WHAT WILL MATTER

by Michael Josephson

Ready or not, some day it will all come to an end.

There will be no more sunrises, no minutes, hours or days.

All the things you collected, whether treasured or forgotten,

will pass to someone else.

Your wealth, fame and temporal power will shrivel to irrelevance.

It will not matter what you owned or what you were owed.

Your grudges, resentments, frustrations and

jealousies will finally disappear.

So too, your hopes, ambitions, plans and to-do lists will expire.

The wins and losses that once seemed so important

will fade away.

It won't matter where you came from or what side of the tracks you lived on

at the end.

It won't matter whether you were beautiful or brilliant.

Even your gender and skin color will be irrelevant.

So what will matter?

How will the value of your days be measured?

What will matter is not what you bought but what you built,

Not what you got but what you gave.

What will matter is not your success but your significance.

What will matter is not what you learned but what you taught.

What will matter is every act of integrity, compassion, courage or sacrifice that enriched, empowered or encouraged others to emulate your example.

What will matter is not your competence but your character.

What will matter is not how many people you knew, but how many will feel a lasting loss when you're gone.

What will matter is not your memories but the memories of those who loved you.

What will matter is how long you will be remembered, by whom and for what.

Living a life that matters doesn't happen by accident.

It's not a matter of circumstances but of choice.

Choose to live a life that matters.



So, in closing

Use your success to help others who do not have your gifts. Help them see the way to achieve their goals. Everyone wins. Along the way, do some volunteer work... coach a team... tutor kids in school... work at a hospital...!

It's a pleasure for Jack and me to come and see you wonderful students who have been chosen to attend. It makes me feel the United States of America will be in very capable hands in the future. Your hands!

Go for it — live your dream!

Thank you