

**Barbara Bush, “Choices and Change,” Commencement Address at Wellesley College, June 1, 1990**  
(abridged)

. . . In the world that awaits you beyond the shores of Lake Waban, no one can say what your true colors will be. But this I know: You have a first class education from a first class school. And so you need not, probably cannot, live a “paint-by numbers” life. Decisions are not irrevocable. Choices do come back. As you set off from Wellesley, I hope that many of you will consider making three very special choices.

The first is to believe in something larger than yourself . . . to get involved in some of the big ideas of your time. I chose literacy because I honestly believe that if more people could read, write and comprehend, we would be that much closer to solving so many of the problems plaguing our society.

Early on I made another choice which I hope you will make as well. Whether you are talking about education, career or service, you are talking about life . . . and life must have joy. It’s supposed to be fun.

One of the reasons I made the most important decision of my life . . . to marry George Bush . . . is because he made me laugh. It’s true, sometimes we’ve laughed through our tears . . . but that shared laughter has been one of our strongest bonds. Find the joy in life, because as Ferris Bueller said on his day off . . . “Life moves pretty fast. Ya don’t stop and look around once in a while, ya gonna miss it!”

The third choice that must not be missed is to cherish your human connections: your relationships with friends and family. For several years, you’ve had impressed upon you the importance to your career of dedication and hard work. This is true, but as important as your obligations as a doctor, lawyer or business leader will be, you are a human being first and those human connections—with spouses, with children, with friends—are the most important investments you will ever make.

At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a friend, a child or a parent . . .

Maybe we should adjust faster, maybe slower, but whatever the era . . . whatever the times, one thing will never change: fathers and mothers, if you have children they must come first. Your success as a family . . . our success as a society depends not on what happens at the White House, but on what happens inside your house.

For over 50 years, it was said that the winner of Wellesley’s Annual Hoop Race would be the first to get married. Now they say the winner will be the first to become a C.E.O. Both of these stereotypes show too little tolerance . . . So I offer you today a new legend: the winner of the Hoop Race will be the first to realize her dream . . . not society’s dream . . . her own personal dream. And who knows? Somewhere out in this audience may even be someone who will one day follow my footsteps, and preside over the White House as the President’s spouse. I wish him well!

*Read the full speech online at the Los Angeles Times: [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-06-02/news/mn-320\\_1\\_true-colors](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-06-02/news/mn-320_1_true-colors).*