



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Rick Rigsby: The Wisdom of a Third Grade Dropout

Guest(s): Rick Rigsby

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute, supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Hello, and thank you for listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We have a very special and encouraging message to share with you today delivered by Dr. Rick Rigsby. Dr. Rigsby is a best-selling author, evangelist, public speaker, and the president and CEO of Rick Rigsby Communications. He previously spent two decades as a college professor at Texas A&M University, where he also served as character coach and chaplain for the Aggie's football team.

Dr. Rigsby's audiences have included Fortune 500 companies, service organizations, universities, and schools, Christian platforms, and pro sports organizations. Some of Rick's speeches have gone viral on the internet, encouraging people across the globe. In fact, the inspirational presentation that you'll hear today has been listened to or viewed over 300 million times. You'll see why here in just a moment.

Dr. Rigsby is a former award-winning journalist and a regular contributor on national television and radio programs. He and his family reside in Texas. Now, what you're about to hear is the graduation commencement address that Dr. Rick Rigsby gave at Cal Maritime Academy in 2017. We are thrilled to be sharing it with you here. So here now is Dr. Rick Rigsby on today's edition of Family Talk.

Rick Rigsby: I come from a predominantly black family, I don't know if y'all can tell that or not, and I happen to be an ordained minister. Now that's a lethal combination when it comes to time. Give big daddy some chicken wings, I'll talk to you all day long. Yes, sir. I will be very brief and on point. I promise you that.

Cadets, y'all are graduating from one of the greatest institutions in the world. There is no education like a Maritime education, and for all of you in the audience, the curricula is rigorous, tough, demanding, compelling, forcing you to be your best and to give your best. The sacrifice young people that you went through, most of us will never, ever know. But here's my message, to whom much is given, much is required.

You have been blessed and invested in by this great faculty. You won't ever receive the kind of knowledge that you've received during your time here. But I wish that you would couple that knowledge with something else, wisdom. Wisdom from a mother. Wisdom from a father, a grandmother, a grandfather, an uncle, an aunt, a friend, a favorite professor. Wisdom from somewhere.

That combination will keep you centered regardless of the turbulence of the sea. That combination will keep you well-grounded regardless of the ups and downs of life. That combination will cause you to make an impact to grow your influence. It was John Maxwell who said, "Leadership is influence. Nothing more. Nothing less." Your ability to influence people within the sphere of your periphery will determine the impact that you make.

Well, Cal Maritime graduates make an impact. They make an impact all over the world. Making an impact. It's not about making a nice impression, it's about making an impact. It's about doing your best. I learned how to make an impact from the wisest person I ever met in my life. A third grade dropout. Wisest and dropout in the same sentence is rather oxymoronic, like jumbo shrimp. I used to say like country music, but I've lived in Texas so long, I love country music now. I hunt. I fish. I have cowboy boots and cowboy... Y'all, I'm a black neck redneck, do you hear what I'm saying to you? No longer oxymoronic for me to say country music.

And it's not oxymoronic for me to say third grade and dropout. That third grade dropout, the wisest person I ever met in my life, who taught me to combine knowledge and wisdom to make an impact, was my father. My daddy grew up in the Piney Woods of East Texas, little town called Huntsville, Texas. After World War II was over, my father decided to be the only one in his family to migrate west. And in the 1950s, he found his way to the San Francisco Bay area. Fell in love with a forklift driver. My mother was a bad mamma jama, let me tell you right now, baby. My mother was a forklift driver over the Benicia Arsenal, where she would provide the services to support the war efforts during World War II.

In the 50s, my mother and father get married and they migrate to this area. My father gets a job as a cook, a simple cook. Wisest man I ever met in my life, just a simple cook at some school called California Maritime Academy. Come on with you come on. You have no idea how thrilled I am to be here, because y'all are my family. I can't wait to take a picture with you. I grew up on this campus. I was born and reared here. Lived at 1141 Louisiana Street, Vallejo, California, 94590.

My daddy used to work in something called the galley, the mess hall. Now it's the dining center and it's a nice one. My father, wisest man I ever met in my life, left school in the third grade to help out on the family farm, but just because he left school doesn't mean his education stopped. Mark Twain once said, "I've never allowed my schooling to get in the way of my education."

My father taught himself how to read. Taught himself how to write. Decided in the midst of Jim Crowism, as America was breathing the last gasp of the Civil

War, my father decided he was going to stand and be a man. Not a black man. Not a brown man. Not a white man. But a man. He literally challenged himself to be the best that he could all the days of his life.

I want to share something with you. The wisest man I ever met in my life never made it past the third grade, impacted tremendously me and my brother growing up right here in Vallejo. This was our family. This Academy was our backyard. Going on that training ship and getting lost, sneaking into the pool, going to all the different places for nearly 30 years. This was home. And I want to tell you, I know what it takes to get where you are. And I need you to listen to me very carefully. I have four degrees. My brother is a judge. We're not the smartest ones in our family. It's a third grade dropout daddy. A third grade dropout daddy who was quoting Michelangelo when he was a cook at Cal Maritime. Saying to us, "Boys, I won't have a problem if you aim high and miss, but I'm going to have a real issue if you aim low and hit." A country mother quoting Henry Ford saying, "If you think you can, or if you think you can't, you're right."

You see it takes knowledge and wisdom combined to grow your influence so that you'll make an impact. You'll be a shipmate that others can count on. I learned that from a third grade drop... Simple lessons. Lessons like these. "Son, don't judge people. Son, I've worked at Cal maritime. I've been all over the world. I've seen good and bad in every shade. Don't judge people. The tendency of a person is to walk away from somebody that's different from them. You stay there and you get to know them. Never judge." Then he dropped Jonathan Swift on me, who said, "Vision is the ability to see the invisible." Don't judge.

Another lesson from this third grade dropout. "Son, you'd rather be an hour early than a minute late." We never knew what time it was at my house because the clocks were always ahead. We were on Cal Maritime. Come on somebody. Watch this. My father had the breakfast and lunch shift here at the academy. He had to be at work at 5:00. We lived on Louisiana Street, 15 minutes away. My mother said for nearly 30 years my father left the house at 3:45 in the morning. One day she asked him, "Why, daddy?" He said, "Maybe one of my boys will catch me in the act of excellence."

I want to share two things with you. Aristotle said, "You are what you repeatedly do. Therefore excellence ought to be a habit. Not an act." Don't ever forget that. The other thing I want to share with you is Harvard Business Review, September 2004. The article is titled "Deep Smarts." Here's the thesis. "Lecturing, what our universities are based upon, is the worst kind of teaching method." Usually. Present company excluded. "That if you want to get the intended message across, model the behavior."

My daddy, a third grade dropout, a cook, was modeling excellence for his boys, combining academic knowledge and old school wisdom. That's what makes an impact. An impact. As you go all over the world, you're not interested in making a nice impression, you want to make an impact.

Lesson number three, be kind to people. He always told us, "Kind deeds are never lost." I get to do a lot of NFL chapels. You see some amazing things with those national football league players. You see guys that can bench press 200, 300 pounds, 20 times. You see folks that are huge, that can run like a deer. You see folks from a flat footed position jump 40 inches, 40 inch vertical leap. I even saw a white guy do it once. But the point... You know what stops me in my tracks? When I see one of those rich folks show kindness. It literally stops the world.

George Washington Carver said, "When common people do common things in uncommon ways, they command the attention of the world." I just described your grandmother. "I know you're tough. I know you're seaworthy. But always remember to be kind. Always. Don't ever forget that. Never embarrass mama." If mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy. If daddy ain't happy, don't nobody care. But you know, I'm trying to tell you.

Next lesson, lesson from a cook over there in the galley. "Son, make sure your servant's towel is bigger than your ego." I want to remind you cadets of something as you graduates, ego is the anesthesia that deadens the pain of stupidity. Y'all might have a relative in mind you want to send that to. Let me say it again. Ego is the anesthesia that deadens the pain of stupidity. Pride is the burden of a foolish person. You'll never be a great shipmate, you'll never be a great executive, you'll never be a great teammate, if it's all about you. You'll never be a great supervisor or councilperson if it's all about you. You'll never be a great staff member if it's all about you. Rather make sure that servant's towel is always big.

On President Cropper's bookshelf, he has every book from Plato's *Republic* to *Lessons in Leadership* by Coach Wooden. John Wooden coached basketball at UCLA for a living, but his calling was to impact people. And with all those national championships, guess what he was found doing in the middle of the week? Going into the cupboard, grabbing a broom and sweeping his own gym floor. You want to make an impact, find your broom. Every day of your life, you find your broom. You grow your influence that way. That way you're attracting people so that you can impact them.

Final lesson, "Son, if you're going to do a job, do it right." I don't have to tell y'all that, Cal Maritime. And I know grammatically that's not correct, it ought be do it well, but I like that old school ghetto kind of do it the right way.

I'm thinking about a little boy in Los Angeles, all he wants to do is play little league baseball. His mother can't even afford to buy him a glove. And he eventually plays little league and he's really good. And he's so good he gets a scholarship to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. And he's so good he gets drafted by the San Diego Padres. And he's so good he helps the St. Louis Cardinal's win a World Series.

12 years ago, when Ozzie Smith walked into the Hall of Fame, he said during his induction speech, and in part I quote word for word, he said, "I've always been told how average I can be. Always been criticized about being average. But I want to tell you something, I stand here before you, before all of these people, not listening to those words, but telling myself every single day to shoot for the stars. To be the best that I can be. Good enough isn't good enough if it can be better. And better isn't good enough if it can be best." That's the California Maritime way. Good enough isn't good enough if it can be better. Better isn't good enough if it can be best.

Let me close with a very personal story that I think will bring all this into focus. Wisdom will come to you in the unlikeliest of sources. A lot of times through failure. When you hit rock bottom remember this, while you're struggling, rock bottom can also be a great foundation on which to build and on which to grow. I'm not worried that you'll be successful, I'm worried that you won't fail from time to time. The person that gets up off the canvas and keeps growing, that's the person that will continue to grow their influence.

Back in the 70s, to help me make this point, let me introduce you to someone. I met the finest woman I'd ever met in my life. Back in my day we would've called her a brick house. I was going to that great academic institution in the north, Chico State. Y'all don't know what I'm talking about. Probably studying really hard. Let me just put it to you like this, I haven't always been a preacher, if you understand what I'm saying.

This woman was the finest woman I'd ever seen in my life. There was just one little problem, back then ladies didn't like big old lineman. *The Blind Side* hadn't come out yet. They liked quarterbacks and running backs. Any former quarterbacks or running backs here? Raise your hands. A couple of you. Punks.

Anyway, we're at this dance and I find out her name is Trina Williams from Lompoc, California. And we're all dancing, and we're just excited. And I decide in the middle of dancing with her that I would ask her for a phone number. Trina was the only woman in college who gave me her real telephone number.

The next day we walked to Baskin-Robbins ice cream parlor. My friends couldn't believe it. This has been 40 years ago and my friends still can't believe it. We go on a second date and a third date and a fourth date. We drive from Chico to Vallejo so that she can meet my parents. My father meets her, my daddy, my hero. He meets her, pulls me to the side and says, "Is she psycho?"

But anyway, we go together for year, two years, three years, four years. By now Trina's a senior in college. I'm still a freshman, but I'm working some things out. I'm so glad I graduated in four terms. Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan. So now it's time to propose, so I talked to her girlfriends, and it's California, it's in the 70s, so, "It has to be outside, have to have a candle, and you have to have some chocolate." Listen, I'm from the hood, I had a bottle of Boones farm wine, that's what I had.

She said, yes. That was the key. I married the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen in my... Y'all ever been to a wedding and even before the wedding starts, you hear this, "How in the world?" And it was coming from my side of the family.

We get married. We have a few children. Our lives are great. One day, Trina finds a lump in her left breast. Breast cancer. Six years after that diagnosis, me and my two little boys walked up to mommy's casket. And for two years, my heart didn't beat. If it wasn't for my faith in God, I wouldn't be standing here today. If it wasn't for those two little boys, there would've been no reason for which to go on. I was completely lost.

That was rock bottom. You know what sustained me? The wisdom of a third grade dropout. The wisdom of a simple cook from California Maritime Academy. We're at the casket in College Station, Texas. I'd never seen my dad cry. Big strong man. There are several alumni that remember Rigs that are here. We've been sharing stories all weekend. But this time I saw my dad cry. That was his daughter. Trina was his daughter, not his daughter-in-law. And I'm right behind my father, about to see her for the last time on this earth, and my father shared three words with me that changed my life right there at the casket. It would be the last lesson he would ever teach me. He said, "Son, just stand."

President Cropper, Captain Bolton, Rear Admiral DeQuattro, I don't think there's anything more profound that I can share with these cadets than these words. You keep standing. No matter how rough the sea, you keep standing. And I'm not talking about just water. You keep standing. No matter what, you don't give up. I learned that lesson from a third grade dropout who was a cook at Cal Maritime, who said, "Boy, you keep standing no matter what."

I stood and a miracle took place. A couple years later, my heart started to beat again. I was talking in a group about like this when all of a sudden I spot the finest woman I've ever met in my life. Again. First thing Janet did after we got married was she adopted those little boys, fulfilling Trina's last wish that her babies not go through life without a mommy. And then we decided to do something really bright, we thought, 16, 17 years ago, and that was have more children. It's worked out lovely. And I'm honored to tell you that we had more boys. I have four boys from 34 years old all the way down to my daddy's youngest grandson, who's here with me this weekend, Joshua Rigsby, sitting on the front row right there.

I close with this is. I close with this, and this will make the point more salient than any of my previous words. Let me take you back to two days before Trina died, no hair because of chemotherapy, cadets. A tummy pooched out because of a liver no longer working. She weighed about 75 pounds. I'm in the kitchen so I can keep an eye on her in the family room. She's surrounded by pillows. Our then youngest son, Andrew, walks up with a shirt that he wants mommy to fold, and this is what I hear from Trina, "Andrew, mama, not always gonna be there to help you." She was saying goodbye. And I was so moved, I waited for Andrew

to leave and I walked over and I sat next to her on the couch, and as clearly as I'm talking to you today, these were some of her last words to me. She looked me in the eye and she said, "It doesn't matter to me any longer how long I live. What matters to me most is how I live."

Cadets, I've come here with honor, with bells on, to ask y'all one question, a question that I was asked all my life by a third grade dropout. How you living? How you living? Every day, ask yourself that question, how you living? Here's what a cook in the dining center would suggest you to live, this way. That you would not judge. That you would show up early. That you'd be kind. That you'd make sure that that servant's towel is huge and used. That if you're going to do something, you do it the right way. That cook would tell you this, that it's never wrong to do the right thing. That how you do anything is how you do everything. And in that way, you will grow your influence to make an impact. In that way you will honor all those who have gone before, you who have invested in you, from teachers to grandparents to mom and dad. And when you combine that academic knowledge with that wisdom, oh my goodness, you will change the world.

So, to the class of 2017, it is with great honor that I say, all your life, look in those unlikeliest places for wisdom. Enhance your life every day by seeking that wisdom and asking yourself every night, how am I living? May God richly bless y'all. Thank you for having me here.

Roger Marsh:

An incredibly encouraging and engaging presentation featuring Dr. Rick Rigsby on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

What you just heard was Dr. Rigsby's commencement speech to the 2017 graduating class of Cal Maritime in Vallejo, California. If you missed any of today's program, or if you'd like to learn more about Dr. Rick Rigsby, visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Or please call us at (877) 732-6825. Again, our number is (877) 732-6825.

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As always, thank you so much for listening. We pray that you've been blessed by our ministry and that every program draws you closer to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I'm Roger Marsh, and from everyone here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we invite you to join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson family Institute.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Hi everyone, Dr. Tim Clinton here. When you think about your family and where they'll be when you're no longer living, are you worried? Are you confident? You hopeful? What kind of a legacy are you leaving for your children and their children right now?

Here at Family Talk, we're committed to helping you understand the legacy that you're leaving your family. Join us today at drjamesdobson.org. You're going to find helpful insights, tips, and advice from Dr. Dobson himself. And remember, your legacy matters.