

ORIGINAL

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3
4 REMARKS OF HON. JANET RENO,
5 ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
6

7
8
9 Thursday, September 14, 1995

10 1:30 p.m.
11

12
13 Fort Caroline Elementary School
14 Jacksonville, Florida
15

1 Thank you so much. You have made me feel so
2 welcome today.

3 I come from Washington because I have heard
4 about what you are doing in the school. I have
5 come to learn because I think people in Washington
6 can learn from people around the country, from
7 students who ask wonderful questions and have
8 wonderful ideas.

9 So I am very excited to be here, and I hope to
10 learn a lot today.

11 I am so happy to be here, Miss Langley. Thank
12 you.

13 She told me when I came in, she said, "I want
14 to spread the word about Victory Over Violence,
15 feelings, program, attitude, throughout the whole
16 nation. And I'm going back to Washington to start
17 telling people all about it.

18 I went to elementary school in Miami, went to
19 high school, went to college and through law
20 school. And I never dreamed I would go to
21 Washington as Attorney General. No one really
22 expected me to, and it happened very suddenly. And
23 I have had a chance to think about how I got
24 there.

25 This is one of the most important times in

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1 your life, because what you learn here, if you
2 learn to read thoroughly, fast, if you learn to
3 write clearly so you can persuade people, if you
4 learn to state your thoughts in a clear manner, if
5 you learn computers and arithmetic so that you are
6 not afraid of it, you are going to be able to do so
7 much when you grow up.

8 One of the lessons that is most important to
9 me was learned when I was about your age. We lived
10 in a little wooden house in Miami in the southwest
11 section.

12 There were four children in the family, and we
13 didn't have enough money to hire somebody to build
14 a bigger house and we were outgrowing ours.

15 One day my mother said, "I'm going to build a
16 house."

17 And we said to her, "What do you know about
18 building a house?"

19 And she said, "I'm going to learn."

20 And she went to the brick mason and to the
21 electrician and the plumber and she asked questions
22 how to build a house.

23 And she came home and she dug the foundation
24 with her own hands with a pick and shovel, she laid
25 the block, she put in the wiring and the plumbing.

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1 And my father helped her with the heavy work when
2 he came home from work at night.

3 She and I lived in that house until she died
4 just before I went to Washington in 1993.

5 And every time I came down that driveway at
6 night with a knotty, difficult problem or wondering
7 how I was going to solve something or how I would
8 work through something, that house was always a
9 symbol to me that you could do anything you really
10 wanted to if you put your mind to it and if it was
11 the right thing to do.

12 That house taught me another lesson a little
13 bit later. When Hurricane Andrew hit the county,
14 it hit our property. About three o'clock in the
15 morning as the winds just howled, my mother woke
16 up, put her hands in her lap, sat there totally
17 unafraid.

18 She knew how she had built that house. She
19 knew she had put good materials into it, that she
20 hadn't cut corners, that she had built it the right
21 way.

22 And that is what I have tried to do all my
23 life based on what she taught me, try to do it the
24 right way.

25 One of the reasons, as I said, I like to come

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1 to schools is that I find students ask me better
2 questions than anybody, including newspaper
3 reporters. You also have better ideas.

4 So what I would like you to do is ask me
5 questions about what it is like to be Attorney
6 General, how I got here or what you think I should
7 be -- tell me what you think I should be doing as
8 Attorney General.

9 I haven't traveled around the world yet, but
10 interestingly enough I go from Jacksonville this
11 afternoon to Mexico, and I will be meeting with the
12 President of Mexico and the Attorney General of
13 Mexico to talk about mutual problems, such as drug
14 trafficking and how we deal with each other's
15 initiatives, but I haven't been around the world
16 yet.

17 The question is how did I get my job. I
18 graduated from high school, went four years to
19 college, then three years to law school. I then
20 started practicing law.

21 In 1978 the Governor of Florida appointed me
22 the State Attorney for Dade County. This is the
23 Fourth Judicial Circuit, and Mr. Shorstein -- where
24 did he go? Mr. Shorstein is the State Attorney in
25 -Jacksonville area. I was the State Attorney in

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1 Miami for 15 years.

2 And then when President Clinton was elected,
3 he asked somebody else to be Attorney General, but
4 that didn't work out. And so suddenly one night I
5 got a call saying I was coming to Washington the
6 next day to meet the President to see whether he
7 wanted me to be Attorney General. And he asked me
8 to serve and I have served since.

9 The question is what is it like to be Attorney
10 General. As Attorney General, I have
11 responsibility for the FBI, the DEA, the Marshal
12 Service, all the Bureau of Prisons. I am
13 responsible for some 100,000 prisoners in the
14 federal prison system.

15 I am responsible for the Immigration and
16 Nationalization Service, for all the U.S. attorneys
17 and for most of the government lawyers.

18 That is a tremendous responsibility, and I
19 have 95,000 people working in the department, so it
20 is an extraordinary challenge.

21 But the way I approach it is I try to make the
22 best decision I can after trying to fully inform
23 myself of the arguments either way about what we
24 should do.

25 I hear from the lawyers or from the law

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1 enforcement agents that I have to talk with about
2 the problem and then I make the best decision I
3 can.

4 I tell everybody in the department that I want
5 to address each issue that we confront with one
6 overriding question: What is the right thing to
7 do?

8 Now doing the right thing is sometimes easier
9 than figuring out what the right thing is, but we
10 will talk and talk until I really feel comfortable
11 that I am going in the right direction.

12 But it is a wonderful opportunity to serve
13 this nation. I never dreamed I would have this
14 role, and it is wonderful to be able to speak out
15 to ensure that dangerous offenders are prosecuted,
16 that they are convicted, that they are sentenced
17 for the appropriate sentence and yet that programs
18 are encouraged and promoted, such as this, that
19 keep people out of trouble so they never get into
20 trouble in the first place.

21 I made a promise to myself when I came home
22 from law school many years ago that I would never
23 do anything that I didn't really enjoy doing, that
24 life was too short and that I should pursue things
25 that I liked to do.

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1 Some days the challenges are very great. I
2 had to deal with the issue of Waco, and that was a
3 very, very difficult time.

4 But I have really enjoyed the opportunity to
5 serve the American people, the challenges, the
6 complexity of the issues, the variety of issues is
7 wonderful. And to try to make government real to
8 people, to try to explain the law in ways that
9 people can understand is a wonderful, wonderful
10 challenge.

11 Well, I like to come home to Florida. For one
12 thing, when that plane landed and I saw the pine
13 trees, I began to feel right at home.

14 I love to sail, and I love to camp and to
15 canoe and to hike. And I can't wait to go scuba
16 diving.

17 No. I don't think I will be President some
18 day, because one of the things that I have tried to
19 do is think about what I'm doing now and not think
20 about the future but try to do the best job I can.
21 And then if directions take -- faith takes me in
22 any one particular direction, I deal with it then,
23 but I don't anticipate that I will be.

24 When I was in college? When I was a child?
25 - Oh, yes, I wanted to be a rancher. I wanted to be

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1 a marine biologist because I had already started
2 skin diving and I was fascinated by marine life.

3 I wanted to be a foreign service diplomat. I
4 wanted to be a nuclear physicist, but all along I
5 wanted to be a lawyer.

6 And I wanted to be a lawyer because I didn't
7 want people telling me what to do or bossing other
8 people around unfairly. And I thought if I were a
9 lawyer I could try to do something about it.

10 So I have had a lot of interests.

11 One of things people ask me is what are you
12 going to do after you are Attorney General? I have
13 often wanted to work with people with developmental
14 disabilities and to learn more about the science to
15 improve their lives and give them a greater
16 opportunity to participate as fully in our
17 society. So I keep looking for new and different
18 things.

19 I was the State Attorney for the Eleventh
20 Judicial Circuit. Mr. Shorstein is the State
21 Attorney for the Fourth. I was the State Attorney
22 for the Eleventh Judicial Circuit, which is Miami
23 State Attorney, and I was after that from 1978
24 until I went to Washington in 1993.

25 I get up at about 5:30 in the morning, and one

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1 of the first things I try to do, and I don't do it
2 as often as I like, is walk. I explore Washington.

3 I live downtown, and it is wonderful to be
4 able to walk to the Lincoln Memorial or past the
5 White House early in the morning.

6 I get to work 7:35, and I review all my
7 correspondence. And there will be memorandum and
8 letters and calls for action. There may be a
9 problem in the prison system. We may have to
10 decide what to do in a particular case.

11 I may prepare for a testimony before
12 Congress. I may prepare for a speech. At 8:30 I
13 have a staff meeting with staff representatives of
14 the whole department.

15 And then at 9:00 o'clock I have a staff
16 meeting with my key deputies, about five in
17 number. Then during the course of the day, I will
18 meet with people to begin doing, as I indicated
19 earlier, try to fully inform myself about the
20 decisions that I am going to have to make.

21 Yesterday was a somewhat different day. The
22 President went to a school, a middle school, to
23 speak out against drugs. And I flew with him in
24 Marine 1, which is the President's helicopter, up
25 to a place near Baltimore.

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1 He and I both spoke, and we talked with the
2 young people, with police officers, and others who
3 were concerned about the problem of violence in
4 that school.

5 And than I came back and subsequently met with
6 community groups that were interested in civil
7 rights enforcement.

8 So each day is different, and that is one of
9 the reasons that the job is so fascinating.

10 That would be wonderful to me.

11 And you have learned that fighting is not the
12 way to solve the problem? What is the way to solve
13 the problem? Talk it out?

14 What happens when you have to deal with the
15 situation of -- let's see. I believe it was
16 Matthew and Mark. One of the things that hit me,
17 they started off right away saying they were
18 friends. What happens when you have people that
19 may not be so friendly to each other?

20 What did you learn from peer mediation that
21 will help you teach others to resolve their
22 problems peacefully, to teach others to respect
23 each other?

24 How do you teach people when there is
25 -disagreement? And there will always be some

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1 disagreement. How do you teach people to deal with
2 that disagreement?

3 I think this is so important because it is not
4 just a matter of trying -- my concern is what you
5 talk about here on our streets and being able to go
6 to sleep at night in a peaceful way.

7 What concerns me so much is that violence is
8 down a little bit in most of this country amongst
9 adults, but what has increased so dramatically in
10 the last several years is violence by children and
11 oftentimes against children.

12 And that is the reason it is so important that
13 all of you who have had the opportunity to learn
14 this mediation process speak out and start teaching
15 other people the skills, because it can make a
16 difference.

17 I have been to various programs that deal with
18 the issue of violence and how they resolve
19 conflicts. Some of these programs will be very
20 carefully evaluated, and there is every indication
21 that these programs are working to reduce the level
22 of violence.

23 So I hope that you will carry forward when you
24 go to the middle school and that talent you learn
25 here be applied there and throughout the rest of

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1 your life.

2 Friends are a wonderful thing to have. It has
3 been so -- I don't know how many I heard that
4 from. Mediation, you can make more friends that
5 way.

6 I have been hearing from friends of mine from
7 elementary school that I hadn't seen in 30 and 40
8 years. They now live in other parts of the
9 country, but when I became Attorney General, they
10 sent me notes, and one of them is coming to
11 Washington the end of October. He was my friend
12 and my baby-sitter, and so it is going to be fun to
13 see him.

14 But you are right, it helps make friends.

15 You can learn to be a team. You just touched
16 on something that I think I saw as I entered the
17 school. It was teamwork. And we need so much of
18 that.

19 I'm going to Mexico to talk with the leaders
20 in Mexico about how to solve our drug problem, but
21 it is not just the Attorney General, it is the
22 Secretary of State. All of us must work together
23 as a team in Washington.

24 Here in your community, you have got to work
25 together as a team. The schools and the State

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1 Attorney and FBI agents all have to work together.
2 The community has to work together.

3 And I was just so encouraged when I walked
4 into the school and saw teamwork as one of the
5 points, and then to have you echo that is very
6 important.

7 I think another word I saw was trust. And all
8 too often people don't trust each other. It is so
9 important when you tell somebody you are going to
10 do something you do it and you follow through with
11 that and you are there for them when they need
12 you. And that trust is so important. It helps
13 solve so many conflicts.

14 (Concluded at 2:30 p.m.)
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