

Remarks at Bonfire Memorial
October 25, 2015

A few minutes after two-thirty on the morning of November 18, 1999 the bottom stack of the Aggie bonfire began to groan and creak like a door opening in a horror movie. The 18-foot logs, which were wired together so that they stood perpendicular to the ground around the base of a towering center pole, started to lean slowly to the southeast. Above this base rose three more perpendicular stacks, stair-stepped to make the entire 59-foot structure resemble a wedding cake. Each tier rested on the one below it, so that when the bottom layer shifted, the entire stack of logs, more than a million pounds of timber, was set in motion.

We know the rest of the story. Twelve precious Aggie lives were lost that day. Twenty Seven more were injured, some very seriously. In the following months and years, we, the Aggie Family, struggled with many issues like safety, the worth of the effort, the process, the supervision of the construction, and many other related factors that contributed to the collapse. In the end, bonfire was cancelled forever on campus as a sanctioned event. The biggest issue was and is that the loss of those twelve precious lives from our Aggie Family would not have been in vain. And so, today, officially our Bonfire Memorial stands as true testimony of the burning desire to beat the hell outa t.u., and to honor the loss of those twelve Aggies and the injury to all the others that fateful day in 1999.

I remember the gut wrenching news as I heard it on the TV and radio. I've witnessed many tragedies in my life, but, none ripped my heart like this one. However, I do remember most vividly the pride and the sense of victory that I felt as I watched our beloved football team rally to beat t.u. that Thanksgiving Game in 1999 – and with tears rolling down my face I would jump up and yell and cry out “Do it for the twelve.”....

Bonfire was part of our time at A&M. Those were “the good ole days.” It was good bull. We were Red Ass. And, we were darn lucky we didn't kill anyone with our antics during our time at A&M. We learned leadership – probably the harder way than it needed to be. But, when I look around the room at my classmates now 49 years older than when we first stepped out of our parents' cars and into the loving and waiting arms of the Class of 69, I see leadership, community service, valor, patriotism, and my Aggie Family. Damn I'm proud to be here with y'all today.

And, so, in closing, it's only fitting that we stand and honor our fallen Aggie Bonfire Twelve. May they rest in peace – for we'll meet them again one day.

If you'll stand with me for a moment, let's end this reunion and this memorial service in the only way befitting the twelve. You'll grant me a little bit of literary license as I've changed the poem to reflect this particular ceremony:

In College Station, this October day
Proud sons of Texas A & M unite.
Our loyalty to country and school, we pay,
And seal our pact with bond of common might.

We live again those happy days of yore,
On campus, field, in classroom, hall, at drill.
Fond memory brings a sigh--but nothing more:
Now we are men, and life is one a great thrill!

On campus 16 years ago next month,
A group of Aggies, led by Red Pots,
Held arduous work which to us all doth say:
The spirit shall prevail o'er bonfires' roar!

They toiled to build that which we hold most dear:
Where are they now--those ones we knew so well?
Ask of the winds, let smile repress a tear,
Think only of their glory when they fell!

Bonfire's Memorial! Forever more a hallowed place
To countless sons of Texans yet unborn;
Symbolic like, it stands for matchless grace:
A shrine sublime till Resurrection morn!

Softly call the muster,
Let comrade answer, "Here!"
Their spirits hover 'round us:
As if to bring us cheer!
Mark them "present" in our hearts,
We'll meet some other day.
There is no Death, but Life Eterne
For Aggies such as they!

- Miranda Denise Adams '02
- Christopher D. Breen '96
- Michael Stephen Ebanks '03
- Jeremy Richard Frampton '99
- Jamie Lynn Hand '03
- Christopher Lee Heard '03
- Timothy Doran Kerlee, Jr '03
- Lucas John Kimmel '03
- Bryan A. McClain '02
- Chad A. Powell '03
- Jerry Don Self '01
- Nathan Scott West '02