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Foreword

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FOREWORD

Just prior to the PRWAD Convention, 1970, one PRWAD's most distinguished members was honored at a testimonial dinner in Washington, D.C. There were many testimonials to Boyce R. Williams, by persons present in short speeches and by persons absent by telegrams and other forms. It was an evening to remember, not only for Boyce Williams, but for all the people who were able to attend. To help those of us who were not able to be at the dinner to catch the spirit of the testimonial and because of the fact that what Boyce Williams had to say in response to the testimonials is so germane to the purpose of the 1970 Convention of PRWAD, we are presenting Boyce Williams' response as the foreword to the Proceedings of the Convention (Editor).

Each of us has his own inventory of wonderful happenings reaching back to his earliest days. My stockpile is huge. It is rooted in an understanding, tolerant, loving and fully supportive family; in a thoroughly enjoyable childhood and youth; in a rare collection of lifelong friends; in teachers extraordinary, especially that perceptive and concerned small legion at Gallaudet that has guided so many newly deafened youths; in a marriage that has complemented my work and produced three unusually gratifying sons; in generous, supportive, demanding, challenging professional colleagues, in and out of government, all possessed of a fine sense of priorities and eagerness for positive action; in a host of responsive, ready, supportive deaf friends; in a devoted staff who have consistently and happily gone that fourth mile. With such a fruitful base my many wonderful happenings have been inevitable.

Tonight is a super wonderful happening. It has the substance of dreams. I am fully aware that it is not my own private event, but one shared by all of us, one wonderful occasion in which it is my great privilege and honor to be the symbol. The real meaning of our meeting here tonight is to celebrate a quarter of a century of exciting progress in the emancipation of deaf people from the shackles of paternalism, from stereotyping, from sharply limited opportunity, from the myriad deprivations that accompany the generalizing that characterizes public services to a poorly understood population.

Twenty five years ago we were emerging from a war that had severely taxed our national and personal resources over a long period of time. Peace triggered a wave of social advancement that dwarfed all that had gone before. Long past due developments for

deaf people arrived with its crest. I am grateful to have been in the right places at the right times to help direct the flow of events.

This is a very appropriate time for me to identify factors that facilitated that part of our social evolution in which I have been involved. I do so with no sense of priority or chronology.

The vocational rehabilitation movement was an incubator for positive thinking and plans. It aimed higher and higher in its aspirations for all disabled people, including the deaf. It was unfamiliar with philosophy that depressed. It disdained defeatism. Its people had been trained to abhor the negative generalizations that weighed upon our deaf fellow men. In this positive setting, creative thinking and constructive action thrived. The pervasive needs of deaf people found responsiveness.

A great deal more was needed, however, and that was forthcoming concurrently. I refer specifically to the readiness of deaf leadership to rise to the challenge of each link in the chain of new opportunities for social and economic growth that vocational and other legislation have created. Brilliant deaf men and women who have in years gone by reached for security with its shroud of obscurity now face up to and grasp the reins of competitive social leadership with success that one expects from all unselfish, dedicated, intelligent people.

I have in mind also the surging capacity of deaf leadership to define its dissatisfaction with the serious inadequacies of all public services for deaf persons and to register that concern in places where remedial actions can be launched. Our deaf leaders have in truth learned well this basic ingredient of effective function in a democracy.

For these reasons alone, although there are others, I am confident that our greatest accomplishments are yet to come. Each passing day brings new evidence that rigid traditional limitations are crumbling. Twenty five years from now each deaf baby will be identified early; he and his family will have the most effective pre-school training; formal education will be by total communication in all tax supported schools; adjustment training will be available to all deaf adults in all parts of the land; vocational training will match interests, capabilities and opportunities everywhere; employment will be at higher levels, much more in accord with abilities; appropriate services will be provided the mentally ill deaf person in and out of hospitals; all mentally retarded deaf persons will receive training for more effective living; state and local communities will

provide proper guidance to deaf people needing available public services; deaf leadership will be completely involved in all specific policy formulation and execution.

Twenty-five years from now we may be able to reflect with some pride on what we have done to better circumstances for deaf people. Meanwhile, be aware that tonight we mark only the beginning.

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