

# How great we are: Graduation gifts

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [July 27, 2004](#) issue

I am going to let the family of a recent high school graduate write most of this column. Nothing I could invent would portray as well the self-centeredness that marks the lives of many in our culture. The names have been changed as a courtesy, though it may be impossible to protect this attention-seeking family from itself. Here is the ad they placed in the community newspaper: Congratulations Margaret Stanford on being valedictorian of Murphyville High School. From: your parents, Drs. John and Thelma Stanford, and sister Mary-Ellen.

The ad went on: What is Margaret going to be? Ans: Double-majoring to be a 'doctor' . . . Fall 2004—going to Central State University. Attending Warren Beecher Honors Science College . . . . 1 of 10 students accepted into medical school from high school

Margaret's graduation gifts include . . .

- New 3-level condo overlooking Lake Watertown in Harper.
- New Lexus RX300, sapphire, navigation, loaded.
- Hawaiian party deluxe—catered and decorated.
- Trip to Rhodes, Greece, this summer for 1 month with full wardrobe.
- Surprise gift.

Up-to-date achievements doesn't include scholarships & school awards which will be given first week of June

- Valedictorian of class—A+ avg. throughout high school (All A's)
- Top 20—academic students NCTL (Southwestern Digital League)
- Top 50—academic students—Sioux County; A+ Academy of Excellence—Huron County
- MENSA (top 2% of intelligence in the world)

- DAR (Daughters of American Revolution) Good Citizen award & pin—3rd place over several counties
- Murphyville Science Fair Blue Ribbon—1st Place fair pin x 3
- National Honor Society—all four years: NHS president 2003-04
- 2003-04 student council secretary . . .
- All “A” award honor roll-1999-2004
- CSU valedictorian scholarship
- Tri County honors band award (plays flute) . . .

Etc., etc., etc.

The reader who clipped this ad for me noted: “Not one word of gratitude to their daughter’s teachers or to the Murphyville community.” He thought of the damage done by this “chest-thumping egotism of obviously gifted parents publicly gloating over the accomplishments of their gifted daughter and announcing lavish, materialistic rewards and provisions. . . . How can she identify as a physician with her peers in school or hospital or patients who live in circumstances of poverty or modest means and struggle to keep soul and body together from day to day? . . . How can she possibly understand their brokenness and pain so as to empathize and help them find healing?”

To compensate, then, let’s lift a glass and toast

- the helpful teachers at Margaret’s high school
- the coaches who had something to do with her winning
- the second-place winners in every event in which she triumphed
- those who consoled the losers
- those who noticed that slower learners also have their place in the human economy
- those who exemplify virtues such as humility

- those whose parents cannot afford the Lexus and the condo, or even an advertisement thanking God for their children's gifts

And let us praise those who teach communities about the stewardship of gifts—for others.