

# Graduation Ceremony Script

## Overton High School Class of 1962

**Prelude: "Fugue in G Minor" .....Bach**

**Processional: "Pomp and Circumstance" .....Elgar**

**Invocation .....Drenda Roberts, Senior Class Chaplain**

Our Father, we recognize Thee as the giver of every good and perfect gift and we especially thank Thee on this occasion for the many bountiful blessings which Thou hast bestowed upon this class. We would thank Thee for the close ties which we have been able to enjoy with one another, for the student leadership, faculty, and administration which has labored in our behalf. We thank Thee for the strength and guidance which has enabled us to complete our high school objectives here at Overton.

We would ask Thy forgiveness for having in any way failed and pray that Thou wouldst help us to profit from our past mistakes in order that we may walk more wisely and closely with Thee.

Father, we would pray for thy continued blessings on our school, that it may grow and be a lighthouse for the youth in this community and we would also ask Thy special blessings on this senior class - be with those who have known sorrow and borne handicaps - be with all of us daily that we may grow in grace, knowledge, and wisdom and continue to develop ourselves in such a way that we would fulfill the course which would be pleasing to Thee, our Creator. Amen.

**Greetings.....Billy Buchanan, Senior Class President**

Mr. Stimbart, Mr. Hewlett, Parents, Teachers, Friends:

We the senior class of 1962 welcome you to Watkins Overton High School's first commencement exercises. The class before you has the unique distinction which few others have experienced -- that of being a senior class for three years. In these three years we have seen Overton's reputation grow. We have placed high in national, regional, state and city competitions in both scholarship and athletics.

In this the largest first class ever to be graduated from a new high school in the city of Memphis, we are proud to announce that we have over seventy percent who are planning to attend college this coming fall.

We are grateful to you for coming to share with us this night, that culminates for us the labor of twelve years. For a large measure this occasion honors you also for without your help, your loyalty, and your friendship we would not be here to graduate tonight.

**Pledge of Allegiance ..... Senior Class**

**"America the Beautiful" ..... Samuel Word**

**"Today We Stand - The Past is Prologue" ..... Bonnie Lendermon**

Here we stand, some two hundred thirteen seniors, eagerly awaiting the crowning moment of our school career, the moment in which we receive our diplomas. To us, these are much more than mere pieces of paper, they are the badges that mark the successful culmination of twelve long years of study, hard work, and fun with our classmates and friends.

In the course of these years we have passed from childhood to the realm of the young adult. As our bodies have developed physically, our minds have matured mentally. Our emotions, our beliefs, our set of values, in short, all that goes into the composition of that complex organism known as the human body has grown and developed. However, this growth did not occur unaided. Our mental development was accomplished through the efforts of our parents, the influence exerted over us by skilled teachers in our school and churches, and the relationships that we have formed with our close friends.

As members of the young adult class, we realize that now is the time in which we must determine the standards that will remain an integral part of our character for the rest of our lives. Absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness, love, and courage, not only physical but the courage to stand firm in our beliefs, these are the standards of life that we have been developing all through school, the standards that will help us face the future with eagerness and with the joy of living.

During the process of our development, our five senses have also been increasing in their efficiency. Through sight we are learning to train our eyes to see the beauty of the world around us and to discover and alleviate the needs of our friends and acquaintances. The sense of sound has shown us that we can use our ears to hear the quiet voice of God within the cries that are raised by our fellow men who need new medicines, new inventions, and many more necessities of life. The development of the sense of touch has given us the touch of hands clasped in friendship, hands that will work diligently at any task, no matter how humble it may be. Through smell we have come to appreciate the fresh air of freedom and the sweet scent of flowers that add aesthetic values to our being. Finally, the development of all these senses has enabled us to enrich our sense of taste to the point where we are looking forward to savoring a rich and full life.

Something should be said concerning the reason for the time spent in training our mental ability. For the past twelve years we have studied a wide variety of subjects, gathering and assimilating knowledge that has covered many different fields of interest. All of us, at one time or another, have encountered subjects that we disliked, ones that were dull, uninteresting, or even boring. Why was it necessary to take courses such as these? The answer to this question is fairly clear. Every subject that we have taken, whether it was

the dullest or the most interesting, has played an important part in shaping our minds and sowing in them the seeds of a general knowledge concerning all the different phases of education, a knowledge that will remain with us no matter what we become in later life, and that will help us regardless of the vocation that we enter. We have been well prepared to face the majority of the situations that life will throw at us, and with God's help, we will be able to overcome them all.

Those of us who stand here today owe a debt of gratitude to our parents and teachers that we may never hope to repay. Without their understanding, kindness, and guidance, many of us would not be here at this time. It is because of their teachings that we will be able to face the future with heads high and hearts uplifted. Having set an example for us to follow, they have made it possible for us to become the citizens of today and the pillars of tomorrow's society. From the bottom of our hearts we offer our deepest gratitude and warmest thanks to these wonderful leaders for making us what we are today, and we know that they will continue performing the excellent job that they have thus far done.

And so, we here are standing upon the brink of tomorrow looking back into yesterday. And as we go forward into the future, we take this thought with us:

"Yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision, but today, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope."

**"Tomorrow - The World"..... Joyce Wilcox**

Here we stand. This is our commencement - the beginning of our lives as citizens of the world - as real individuals. From this ceremony we go on to start our careers or our professional training. We have only begun to scratch the surface of knowledge to be gained, and whether we attend classes or not we will be learning a little something every day that will in some way improve and enhance our lives. From Overton and Memphis our horizons will broaden to include the problems of the world. We must be conscious of these problems and do something to create and perpetuate peace in our time. We must be valuable citizens of the world. This is our duty to ourselves, our families and friends, our communities, and our country.

Many of us already have plans for marriage. Most of us will be married within the next five years. Our marriages should be permanent. This is the most awful legal contract into which we shall ever enter, and we should consider well before taking so great a step; but once it is taken we should remember the vows we shall have made -- to live together in love and understanding until we are parted by death. We should give to our children love, and security, and opportunities even finer than ours have been. We must remember that one's best is all that can be asked of him, and that every man is his own best competitor. Hard work and virtue are still their own rewards.

We must improve our capacity to use our education, for we have only begun to train our minds, our bodies, and our character. In three years we shall help to elect men to

government -- leaders in our city, state, and country. It is our duty to elect capable, responsible people. Therefore we must learn to know the candidates, and then vote. A careful study of the candidates' qualifications is imperative form, as Thomas Jefferson wrote to a friend,

"If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be."

If we fail to utilize our right to express our opinions and preserve our democracy, then we stand in grave peril of losing that right and all others. Vennevar Bush wrote:

"If democracy loses its touch, then no great war will be needed to overwhelm it. If it keeps and enhances its strength, no great war need come again."

We must fight Communism in our daily lives by accentuating the moral code and faith in God, man, and our country. We must remember the principles on which our country was founded, and help to keep her true and strong. We must actively believe in God, for our actions speak louder than our words. I takes the contributions of all to make and keep America a great country.

We must budget our time, our energy, and our money. There is a time for work and a time for relaxation. During this leisure time we should read -- books, magazines, newspapers. We are starting -- now -- some kind of higher education; we must always educate our selves as conscientious citizens of a free nation in order to work toward an informed and free world. We must be willing to learn, to take criticism, to be punctual, to be dependable, to do anything well, to give more than is asked. Thus may we know not only the discipline, but the joy of learning and of work.

As Dr. Russell said Sunday [at the baccalaureate service],

"We cannot know that the future holds, but we do know Who holds the future."

We must give thanks to Him in our daily lives for making us free people -- for granting us such wonderful opportunities.

"What we are in God's gift to us; what we make of ourselves in our (thankful) gift to God."

We must live courageously, abundantly, victoriously -- stand up for our convictions and do, each of us, our small part, that the buf hurdles may be passed.

Why buck convention? Perhaps convention is wrong. If you think so, have the courage of your convictions and perhaps convention will realize its mistake. But even if it does not, you will have done your part by making people stop to think.

These are the reasons why people are successful in life:

"Because they were cheerful when it was difficult to be cheerful;  
And patient when it was difficult to be patient  
And because they pushed on when they wanted to be still  
And kept silent when they wanted to talk,  
And were agreeable when they wanted to be disagreeable.  
That was all.  
It was just simple, and always will be."

In these next few years we must gain a deeper understanding of life, a more social attitude toward all our fellow men, a stability that results from a rounded character and faith in God, a capacity for bringing a larger degree of happiness to ourselves and others, the ability to envision the limitless opportunities of life, and the courage to dare to realize these convictions. This is our duty. Tomorrow is ours. And with diligence, patience, hard work, and study we can take our place in the world of greater service.

**"Forward - Into the Future" ..... Bill Tomlinson**

Current trends provoke many of us to make decisions which will culminate in our success or failure in life. Never before has a generation been confronted with such vast opportunities of prosperity, power, security, position, and spiritual growth. The contention for world power, the space race, and the transition to automation help set the stage for the individual willing to persevere -- to succeed. As we develop into the leaders of tomorrow, we must be willing to prepare ourselves to fill positions in science, business, medicine, law, and numerous other professions and occupations. A careful evaluation of attitudes, talents, habits, interests, and economic status is essential for ultimate satisfaction through choice of a career. For a great many this will mean college raining. For those who enter their occupations immediately following graduation, training on the job will be necessary. Some may wish to pursue a career in a branch of the armed forces. A lack of preparation, immaturity, and inability to accept responsibility will mean failure for us. We cannot predict the future, but we can strive to accomplish the goals we set.

Within the span of our lifetime science has progressed more rapidly than in any preceding age. Many new fields have been opened and many advancements have been initiated in existing fields. Some of the most significant developments are products of medical research. We have seen preventive treatments for diseases which previously could not be controlled. To us will be left the task of searching for causes and preventive measures of seemingly incurable and uncontrollable diseases. We shall also pioneer many new areas.

Other research has tended to make our world grow smaller in some respects and larger in others. Through developments provided by future engineers we can look forward to even more drastic changes in transportation and visualize improvements in safety, convenience, and efficiency in all modes of travel. While transportation tends to decrease

the size of our world through an element of time, increasing knowledge of previously undiscovered realms causes us to feel many frontiers are left to be conquered.

We cannot bypass conveniences afforded by the already inevitable success of automation. The business world, the home, and industry afford the most likely places for the continuance of this utility. To the housewife this transition will mean more leisure time; for industry and the business world it will expedite the operation and production of all essential phases.

Nuclear science will continue to be part of our way of life. Greater developments in power sources, medical research, propagation of vegetation, and preservation of foods will be ours to command.

In another phase of our acceptance of responsibility we should consider the impending threat of Communism.

In order to defeat this threat, sincere, conscientious leaders should volunteer to take their place in government and civic affairs. The outcome of the struggle for world power will be decided by our attitude toward God and this world He created.

Already we can see how this milestone in our life is designed to present to us the grave responsibility which will be ours. At this point we feel inadequate to undertake the task before us. Our hope for the future lies in such sterling qualities as courage, self-reliance, faith, perseverance, and wisdom.

### **Scholarships and Awards .....James Hewlett, Principal**

At this time I should like to recognize those students who have won scholarships and other awards:

- Thomas Brooks, Honor Scholarship to Southwestern College
- Wayne Capooth, Athletic Scholarship to the University of Alabama
- Lynda Clark, the Ernest C. Ball Parent-Teachers Association Scholarship
- Don Berg, music scholarship to Memphis State University
- Billy Buchanan, the American Legion Certificate of Distinguished Achievement
- Margaret Buchanan, the American Legion Certificate of Distinguished Achievement and medal
- Patricia Duffel, a Regional Scholarship to Mississippi State College for Women
- Marilyn Eakin, the Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizen Award and medal.
- James Hight, a music scholarship to Memphis State University
- Thomas Hoover, a Freshman Scholarship to the University of Tennessee
- Elizabeth Huggins, Betty Crocker's Homemaker Contest Medal
- Marijean Justus, Sears' Sew-a-rama Scholarship

- Bonnie Lendermon, a four-year full tuition scholarship to Memphis State University. Bonnie was also a runner-up in the Citation Awards Test given by the National Council of Teachers of English.
- Mary Lockhart, a band scholarship to Lambuth College
- Lloyd McKinney, a music scholarship to Memphis State University
- Judy Rhodes, a four-year full tuition scholarship to Memphis State University
- Sandra Rutledge, the Colonial Junior High School Scholarship
- Jerry Sides, a football scholarship to Northwest Mississippi Junior College
- Charles Stewart, a music scholarship to Memphis State University
- William Tomlinson, a Sears Freshman Scholarship
- Jim Umsted, a music scholarship to Memphis State University
- Donald Watson, an Honor Scholarship to Southwestern College, and a Regional Scholarship to the University of Mississippi
- Joyce Wilcox, a Dean's Scholarship to Cornell University and a Presidential Citation from Michigan State University

These students have been chosen to attend the Commercial Appeal-Chamber of Commerce Banquet for Academic Scholarship. This represents the upper four percent of the graduating class:

- Jane Greenfield
- Bonnie Lendermon
- Don Watson
- Joyce Wilcox
- Bill Tomlinson
- Marilyn Eakin
- Freddie Russell
- Cheryl Murphrey
- Tommy Brooks

These students were chosen as finalists in the National Merit Scholarship Competition:

- Tommy Hoover
- Ronnie Webb
- Joyce Wilcox

At this time there is a special award to be presented. This is the first time this award has been given and to present this award Mrs. Watkins Overton is with us tonight. As you all know, Mrs. Overton is the widow of the late Watkins Overton for whom this school was named ... a great civic leader in Memphis and Tennessee. Mrs. Overton.

**Watkins Overton Citizenship Award.....Mrs. Watkins Overton**

Mr. Stimbert, Mr. Hewlett, members of the faculty, members of the first graduating class of Overton High, and ladies and gentlemen:

I think that this must be one of the proudest moments of my life. No greater honor could have been paid to my husband than that an institution of learning should bear his name. Of all his years of public service, which included more than sixteen years as mayor of Memphis, I think he enjoyed most of all the time he served as president of our Board of Education. He always felt that the public education of the youth of America was one of the most important things any person could give his time to.

I feel a tremendous personal interest in this school, and it has been my hope to be of any help that I possibly can, and to transmit to the students here some of my husband's feelings toward public service which he felt to be a privilege - not a responsibility. Because he said it so much better than I can, I would like to ask your permission to read part of a speech which he made in the summer of 1956 when he returned to Carroll College, a small Presbyterian college on the outskirts of Milwaukee from which he had received his B.A. degree forty years before. He entitled his address "Can Democracy Survive?" I would like to read this excerpt of it to you.

CAN DEMOCRACY SURVIVE? Only you - the members of this graduating class - and all the other graduates from our colleges and universities, and all the young men and women who will guide the destiny of our country in the years to come, can determine it.

You must ask yourself in sincerity -- Are you ready to sacrifice to make Democracy a living reality? Its fate rests in your hands.

We have heard much in recent years of spiritual re-armament in America. We must ask ourselves - Are we also ready to couple with spiritual re-armament a real civic re-armament?

In the days to come, you will be busy making a home, and establishing yourselves in your chosen business or profession. But, you must decide whether, ever and above that, you are willing to give of your time and ability in order that this democracy of ours shall endure. Are you willing to cast your ballot, and to cast it intelligently? There are conscientious citizens who, before every election, band together to "get out the vote." But that vote is of little consequence unless the voters have given the time and thought to cast it intelligently. Then, you must ask yourselves - Are you willing to give the time the support your representatives in government who are working to make it honest and decent, and to preserve its fine heritage of human freedom? I say to you frankly that many honest men in public life have either been defeated or resigned because we failed to give them our support.

Finally, are you willing, if called upon, to serve this Democracy by holding some public office? Are you willing to make the sacrifice: whether it be on a school board, a park commission, a city council, or in

your state legislature. If men who believe in righteousness and democracy will serve, then and only then can we be sure it will remain a living reality in the lives of men.

I have observed through the years that many of our finest citizens have failed to answer the call to serve their city, state, or country. First "I am too busy." I hope if the call comes to you, somehow you'll find the time. We need men and women to work for Democracy, if it's to remain strong - not those who have nothing to do.

Next, my friends, there are those who when they are called upon to serve in public or to come out openly in support of some candidate who stands for high ideals and decency, or to take a stand on some issue that affects all of our lives -- will tell you, "I can't do it because it may hurt my business." They are afraid to do their part for democracy because they might lose a customer or a client. Somehow I wish we could make them realize of what little value their business would be should hti great way of life of ours be destroyed through our negligence.

And finally, there are those whom I am reluctant to mention before this group. There are those, my friends, who should be great piritual leaders in the preservation of Democracy -- men and women with Christian educations, who could do, Oh, so much -- in public service, and are needed so badly. But, when they are approached, they look at you as if you were asking them to stoop to some low level, to do something bordering on dishonorable. They are convinced that all politicians are mediocre and tainted, and that politics is something that's unclean and below their dignity. I wish that somehow it was in my power to make them see how much their country needs them in public service -- fighting the forces of evil, fighting to make Democracy live!

Many of the young men and women of our colleges and universities felt that service to their city, state or country is something to be shunned. I say to you, If your democracy is to survive, it needs you, fighting for our ideals wherever you may be called on to serve.

I wish that we could turn back to the days when men like Washington and Adams, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe helped to found this great democracy. Because, whatever was the sacrifice, they believed public service to be public duty.

This was my husband's creed. This was the belief on which he gave his life; his life of service to the city he loved. I hope and certainly believe that his years of public service have been of great value to Memphis.

With the permission of your principal and faculty, and with the approval of the Board of Education, I have therefore established an annual award to be known as the "Watkins Overton Citizenship Award." Each year the principal and faculty shall choose a member of the graduating class of Overton High who, in their estimation, has been outstanding in citizenship in this school -- a student who has gone above and beyond those duties actually required of him. It shall be my privilege each year to present to a member of the graduating class of Overton a plaque similar to the one I hold in my hands.

This award has not been previously announced and the first recipient, I am quite sure, has no idea of its existence. It is with great pride that I present the first annual Watkins Overton Citizenship Award to William Eugene Tomlinson.