

Convocation address essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In 1978, Hungarian poet George Faludy (pictured here) gave the convocation address at the University of Toronto. He described his experiences in a communist concentration camp (after the Soviet invasion of 1956) and made several profound and intriguing observations about the significance of a liberal arts education. As part of his attempts to survive the horrors of the camp, Faludy (a university professor) gave mini-lectures in the barracks at night on a variety of subjects. Some of the fellow prisoners eagerly joined in; others declined. Faludy notes, “ Those who died . . . ere always the men who had been most determined to survive, those who had concentrated on nothing but food, sleep and warmth . . . I was reluctant to admit the obvious: that delighting in a good poem or discussing Plato’s Socratic dialogue could somehow arm the spirit to the point that it could prevent the body’s collapse. ” He concludes his address with this realization: “ Our whole fragile tradition of art and thought is neither an amusement nor a yoke. For those who steep themselves in it, it provides both a guide and a goal for surpassing all the half-baked ideologies that have blown up at our feet in this century like landmines . . All we have to guide us in this present is the accumulated thought and experience of those who have lived before us. ” This convocation address has had a significant impact on my view of education. Most people agree that there is potentially something noble about teaching, yet Faludy proves it. I am reminded of film critic Roger Ebert’s assessment of the film *Life is Beautiful* in which Ebert argues that since Jewish prisoner Guido is a clown, comedy becomes his weapon. Faludy was an educator. Education was his weapon. As it is for us all.