

*Below is the text of a tribute to Mayer Mitchell by USA President Gordon Moulton delivered at a campus service on September 28, 2007.*

I'm Gordon Moulton, President of the University of South Alabama. On behalf of the students, faculty, administration and Board of Trustees, I welcome you to the Mitchell Center.

We are here today to mourn the loss of our dear friend, Dr. Mayer Mitchell, and to honor his memory. I used the title Doctor because in our last Spring Commencement in this building that bears his name, we awarded the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters to Mayer Bubba Mitchell. We are proud to call him Doctor and to have him as a alumnus of this University.

During the last several days, I, just like many of you, have had to struggle to think of anything other than my friend, Mayer Mitchell, and what he meant to all of us. I tried to think of what expression would best capture the man we knew and loved.

When I saw the written tribute to Mayer with the words from the Talmud, "Happy is the man who is rich in good deeds, for he shall be honored in life and be remembered long afterwards for his goodness" and I thought you can't do much better than that. He so often reminded us, not with his words but with his deeds, of how wise the writer was when he wrote "and be remembered long afterwards for his goodness."

I've always believed that the most worthy thoughts are often expressed in the fewest words. Recently, I visited with Mayer and we spent over an hour talking about the things we both love and never tire of discussing. He was weak but his eyes seemed to twinkle and his body language changed as we discussed the University of South Alabama, the Mitchell Cancer Institute his family, Arlene and Geri, and the things we wished we could have done before time ran out. We were both amazingly frank about this being our good-bye conversation, and we both seemed to find some peace in the acceptance of that fact. Those of you who know Mayer will not be surprised when I tell you that he raised several current issues and gave me his input just as though tomorrow we would still be occupied with our endless phone calls and discussions about the University.

And then his eyes misted over and he gave me the words that I now know best describe Mayer Mitchell. He simply said "Gordon - I did my best - I did my best." He said "my greatest lifelong desire was to serve my family and build a family structure in which each member would be proud" – and he said – I did my best.

He said "I wanted to build a business and personal wealth that would allow me to provide for my family and return my good fortune to my fellow man and those institutions that serve men. And I did my best."

Mayer loved the dynamics and human emotion of his friendships with powerful and effective people – governors, congressmen, senators, presidents and heads of state. Many in this audience will tell you that no one matched his compelling arguments to help him build a better Alabama, a better Mobile, a better University of South Alabama, Camp Ramah Darom, and I could go on and on – He did his best.

All of us know of his kindness and generosity relative to the big things, the numerous headlines, the big gifts, but what you may not know was that no act of friendship was too small or too insignificant for Mayer's attention. He returned every phone call, no matter how trivial the issue might seem, and usually the same day. He helped many people who were trying to get to the next rung of life's ladder, – admission to college, a job, help with medical bills –I can tell you there were thousands of acts of kindness that most of us never knew about – He did his best.

While energy, tenacity and a will to win may not seem like spiritual virtues, that's the way Mayer used these attributes. You could not have a better ally in a struggle – or he could be a worthy adversary. If he believed in you and your cause, he would go the last mile, make the 100<sup>th</sup> phone call and remind you once more that we must stay on task – He did it because he genuinely cared – He did his best.

To me – that may be his greatest legacy and will be the message that will live on in other lives. He, through his own work, inspired all of us to raise the bar, don't settle for mediocre results—in short he asked us – to do our best.

We all know that part of our grief is selfish – we resent having to give up the magic Mayer brought into our lives. He listened, he did not judge, he was brilliant and caring. We knew we could depend on him.

To the children and grandchildren: I hope you will let the memory of Mayer's love comfort you, fatten your smiles, increase your laughter, and I think he would agree with the words from one of my favorite poems:

Clouds are not the cheeks of angels, you know.  
They are only clouds.

Friendly sometimes  
but you can never be sure.  
If I had longer arms  
I'd push the clouds away.

I've been going a long time now;  
along the way I've learned some things.

You have to make the good times yourself;  
take the little times and make them into big times;  
and save the times that are all right,  
for the ones that aren't so good

To Arlene: Your love gave him wings, and he never spoke of you that he didn't smile. We knew you were his soulmate in every thing he did.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees and the entire USA family, we hope you feel our love and compassion for you and your loss. We know Mayer loved poetry and I would offer you the following words from the poet.

“Farewell to you and to the youth I have spent with you. It was but yesterday we met in a dream. You have sung to me in my aloneness, and I of your longings have built a tower in the sky.

But now our sleep has fled and our dream is over and it is no longer dawn. The noontide is upon us and our half waking has turned to a fuller day and we must part.

If in the twilight of memory we should meet once more, we shall speak again together and you shall sing to me a deeper song.

And if our hands should meet in another dream, we shall build another tower in the sky.