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Charlie Daniels

WILMINGTON'S OWN





"one-hit wonder." He responded with some of his reasons for accepting the invitation to speak, first in thoughtfully worded prose, and then in a poem printed in the *Morning Star* that delivered a message tinged with sarcasm and wit.

"You don't go through forty years of hard work and unrelenting competition without learning a few things," he wrote. "My qualifications are humble, but extensive and diverse." He told of standing "at the 38th Parallel and looking into the hostile eyes of the North Korean border guards," of being "catapulted from the deck of an aircraft carrier in the Adriatic Sea," of riding "across the frozen wastes of Greenland on an Eskimo dog sled" and taking "a hammer and chisel to the Berlin Wall." And, he continued, "I've seen the royal palaces of Europe and the hovels of Hong Kong. I've seen the Mona Lisa and stared in awe at the timeless works of Vincent Van Gogh..."

Though he is frank to admit that he does not travel in intellectual circles, Charlie Daniels is a man who has known five presidents and played fiddle with his band at Carter's Inaugural Ball. He has lobbied for legislation in Congress, performed in all fifty states, acted in movies, appeared on numerous television shows, and he recently hosted a show of his own to promote talented young performers.

The Charlie Daniels Band has toured Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, traveled to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for the USO and to Japan for the Country Gold Festival. Daniels has also made special guest appearances at the White House, the 1988 Olympics Festival Opening Ceremonies, and the 1994 Super Bowl.

He has recorded with Bob Dylan, two of the Beatles, and Marty Robbins and has performed side by side with Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs, and hundreds of other country music legends, as well as with some of the great symphony orchestras of the world.

"Almighty God has blessed me with things that I didn't even have the imagination to think of," he says. "I've done things these kids will probably never get a chance to do."

It is a shame the two UNCW students failed to do their homework. If they had, they might have learned many of these things for themselves and avoided a great deal of embarrassment. They might have learned, too, that this "hill-billy" musician whom they deemed inappropriate to address their graduating class, still performs over 150 shows a year and has sold more than 16 million albums in his career. Hardly a "one-hit" wonder!

Daniels' message to the graduates is really a lesson for anyone who wants to be successful—in whatever career. "I'm gonna tell you something; that's a rough, tough world out there. Success is pyramid-shaped—there's plenty of room at

recent war of words, Charlie Daniels could laugh off, but one letter printed in the *Seahawk* had racial overtones. It was very upsetting to him. "If I took offense at anything at all, it was that. I learned my lessons in race relations and in judging people on my own. I didn't get them out of a book. I learned them with my heart. I love everybody, and I extend my hand in fellowship to anybody in this world."

He demonstrated this love for his fellow man in his work as state chairman of the adult literacy campaign in Tennessee and was honored for his achievements in 1995 with a Sequoyah Literacy Award by the Tennessee Association of Adult and Continuing Education.

A deeply religious man, Charlie Daniels is probably proudest of his gospel album, "The Door." It was his first gospel album and it earned him both a Dove Award and a Grammy nomination. The public response has been positive and overwhelming. So much so that he is now hard at work on another Christian album.

There have been many awards and accolades throughout his long career, but Daniels is quick to share the credit. He speaks of the love and support he received from his mother and dad, and he recalls with great affection his grandfather and his diminutive grandmother. "She was only about five feet tall," he says, "but if God ever made a sweeter woman, I've never met her." All four have been mentioned in his songs.

About Hazel, his wife of more than thirty years, he has this to say. "We've had the greatest marriage. She's had an awful lot to do with that. She gave me the freedom to do what I had to do to accomplish what I have accomplished. She's not with me on this trip, but she usually travels with me." And what would Hazel say about him if she were here? "I think she'd tell you she loves me very much. She'd tell you we've had a wonderful life together, and she'd tell you the Lord has blessed us."

Not the least of those blessings is his son, of whom Daniels speaks with fatherly pride. "He is married now and



the bottom, but as you keep moving up there's only room for one at the top and the closer you get, the tougher it gets, and the more you've got to want it. Somebody needs to tell these kids, hey, don't let anybody tell you it's not there because it is—it's there—but you've got to want it worse than all those people sittin' up above you in the pyramid, because if you don't, no matter how much education you've got, no matter what you do, if you're not willin' to put the work in, you won't get to the top."

Most of the jabs hurled at him in the