

Clark College Welcomes Commencement Speaker Byron Pitts



Television journalist Byron Pitts will deliver the keynote speech at Clark College's 2014 Commencement. *Photo courtesy of Greater Talent Network.*

Byron Pitts, who overcame a childhood marked by illiteracy and poverty to become an award-winning television journalist and book author, will be sharing his story with the Clark College Class of 2014 as the college's Commencement keynote speaker on June 19.

Appropriately for an event that celebrates academic accomplishment, Pitts' life story is a testament to the power of education. As a child, Pitts suffered from a debilitating stutter that made him so quiet and shy that the adults in his life never discovered his other obstacle: He was functionally illiterate. Only in his teens did he learn to read and write, but with the help of his mother and several kind strangers, Pitts entered a field that requires strong written and oral communication skills: broadcast journalism. Today he is Chief National Correspondent for *ABC Evening News*.

"Byron Pitts has a powerful story of overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds to get to where he is today," said Clark College President Robert K. Knight. "It was through education

that his life was turned around. I believe he will make a strong connection with our students.”

Pitts was originally scheduled to speak at Clark’s 2013 Commencement ceremony, but had to decline in order to cover the illness of South African leader Nelson Mandela.

About Byron Pitts

Known for his thought-provoking coverage and his commitment to exceptional storytelling, Byron Pitts is a multiple Emmy Award-winning journalist. He has been recognized for his work under fire as an embedded reporter covering the Iraq War and was CBS’ lead correspondent at Ground Zero immediately following the September 11 attacks. A news veteran with over 20 years of experience, other major stories he has covered include the war in Afghanistan, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the military buildup in Kuwait and the refugee crisis in Kosovo, to name but a few. Pitts was named a Contributing Correspondent to CBS’ *60 Minutes* in 2009. In 2013, Pitts became an anchor and the Chief National Correspondent at ABC *Evening News*. He is also the author of a memoir, *Step Out On Nothing: How Family and Faith Helped Me Conquer Life’s Challenges*.

Pitts’ many achievements are all the more extraordinary when he tells of the many obstacles he faced as a child. Raised by a single mother in a working-class neighborhood in Baltimore, Maryland, Pitts was illiterate until the age of 12 and had a persistent stutter. Capitalizing on his desire to play football, his mother mandated he receive B’s or above in school in order to play. With that focus, Pitts learned to read and went on to attend Ohio Wesleyan University. With the help of his roommate and a professor, Pitts found the support and encouragement necessary to pursue a career in broadcast journalism. Overcoming both his odds and his disability, he graduated in 1982 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism and Speech Communication.

Pitts' grit and determination shone throughout his illustrious career, garnering him several prestigious awards, including a national Emmy Award for his coverage of the Chicago train wreck of 1999, a National Association of Black Journalists Award, and a second national Emmy Award for individual reporting of September 11. He is also the recipient of four Associated Press Awards and six regional Emmy Awards.

Pitts lives with his wife in Upper Montclair, New Jersey.