

"The work ahead is yours to find and do, not for us to imagine and place before you." A message from me. <http://bit.ly/MBea5w>

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 144TH COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES OF
LEHIGH UNIVERSITY IN THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA,
THE REMARKS OF THE GHOST OF JUDGE ASA PACKER.

Friends, enemies, and parking services: thank you for entertaining an address from an improbable source.

Secretly, some of you may have remembered getting just a tiny bit choked up when your parents first left you here for the first time. Now you're getting choked up again because they're taking you away for what feels like the last time, though the alumni association certainly hopes that isn't the case.

As I tweeted this morning, I'm not crying, it's just been raining on my face. On a sunny day that would have just been another statement attempting to avoid the truth - that there's almost always some sadness in passing, sometimes apprehension for today, and definitely hope in the future. That lump in your throat as you venture into the unknown is just your body telling you that the next two phases will happen right now and when the sun comes up tomorrow, respectively.

I've got that lump in my throat for you today.

See, people have incredible capacity. But the only way you can achieve it is if you're free to prove yourself - we, the caretakers, the educators, the parents, and the mentors have to let go. You did all the work we asked of you, some of you more, others just enough to make it here today. No matter. You're here, so it's a new ballgame. While the shock of true independence settles in, I can assure you that we're working doubly hard to fight the urge to protect you from it. It's time for you to go.

In a matter of seconds, all those years of education from kindergarten through middle school, on to high school and then the convergence of paths that brought the class of 2012 to this sacred space will meet its idealized conclusion when you shake APG's hand. That is the lump that's in your throat right now. All the people that you met along the way, the loves you had, the loves you lost, the moments you were a king, and all those moments you thought you were well and truly screwed for good. All those years of struggles that felt never-ending at the time compress down to one knot in your throat at the realization that "it's over." And for the first time in your life, there is no plan defined for you. Walking down that ramp today was the last thing we really requested of you.

We're saying that you're ready, that you're the equal of the challenges ahead, and that we'll be here if you need us. **But the work ahead is yours to find and do, not for us to imagine and place before you.** You can do this, because you made enough great choices to outweigh your bad ones - and the greatest of these was coming here as a wide-eyed, clueless freshman. So there - you're already winning because you're not so clueless anymore.

I hope you wake up tomorrow and ask "what's next?" - and say it with the burning desire to solve a problem the world needs solved, then make it happen. That's why I founded Lehigh - to mold men (and eventually women too) to solve the world's problems by training their whole mind, not just the parts necessary for a trade. Admissions and the PR folks at this school talk about how transformative Lehigh is, how those of us in this community of scholars are here to change the world, and that our alumni are a living embodiment of success at just that. That you are now "of Lehigh" and not just "at Lehigh" the world, not just those who helped you get here, expects that much more of you.

So congratulations - you just joined 80,000 others who are "of Lehigh." Today we acknowledge you as their equal and tomorrow we'll be calling you to contribute to the Lehigh Fund so the next kid gets the same or better opportunity you had. And you'll give too, and I'll tell you how:

When they call, remember this lump in your throat. Remember this day. Remember the rain. Remember the mud. Remember the smiles. Remember the sweaty nights on the hill or in a basement on east 5th or Sotto Sundays or Leon's on a frigid winter night. Remember last night if you can. Remember beating Lafayette more times than we actually can remember and Duke at basketball that one time in March. Remember the earthquake and snowmageddon. Remember Debbie. Remember hating calc, orgo, or physics and loving something far outside of your major. Remember the professors you hated and the ones you loved and how both taught you something. Remember all those parking tickets you'll never pay now. And remember that this experience and these people who surround you today are worth every penny of scholarship money, loans, and the retirement your parents no doubt deferred to make it possible. There. Now that you're drunk on nostalgia and not Natty Ice, start reciting your debit card number.

This time at Lehigh will forever be yours. And you, likewise, will forever be Lehigh's son or daughter. Swallow the lump, take the next step with confidence, and call me, maybe.

With love,

Asa

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