

So Come Home

by commencement speaker Matthew Nosal

I'm not technically even out of school yet, but I already miss talking about literature in a classroom. So if it's okay, I'd like to use this opportunity to flex the analytical skills I developed in the English program here over the past four years and do a close reading of a poem.

Before I begin, I'd like to say good morning to friends and family, the Board of Trustees, the faculty and staff, and President Stuebner – also, thanks in advance for the diploma. And, of course, good morning and congratulations, fellow members of the Class of 2017.

An extra special thanks to my adviser, Professor Ann Page Stecker, who pushed me to write this speech as well as basically everything else over the past four years. Also, thanks to my grandmother, who provides immense support to me, along with every other member of our family.

The poem we're looking at was published on Twitter. It was written by Jonathan Sun, a Twitter comedian I analyzed in my Capstone, which is about the literary potential of social media.

It's short. It'll be over in no time, so listen closely:

"i just want to go home" said the astronaut.

"so come home" said ground control.

" s o c o m e h o m e " said the voice from the stars.

It's not exactly *Infinite Jest* or a similarly sprawling novel, but the tweet has been orbiting my mind as my time at Colby-Sawyer draws to a close. This tweet reminds me of freshman year: my parents walking away. The hollow silence of my dorm room. I remember staring out the window of McKean Hall on my first day here, paralyzed by fear and sudden loneliness, for a very tense thirty seconds before I went outside and did my best to make friends.

I don't know when I began to call this hill my home. At some point, our dining hall became my living room. One day, the track was my backyard. It probably happened in stages, like the moon growing full.

And I don't exactly know where my next home will be. Like the astronaut in Jonny Sun's tweet, I feel torn between what I know and what I dream of. The stars shine, but they seem lifeless from the ground.

When we graduated high school a few years ago, the idea of Colby-Sawyer seemed equally alien. From some home before this, we looked up and hoped we might be happy here. We hoped Mountain Day tie-dye would stain the beds of our fingernails, and the smiling faces in the college's promotional materials would become those of our roommates, hallmates and dearest friends. And they did. This college has become our home. But only by being, at certain times, difficult to bear.

The fear and loneliness I experienced my first day here has returned sporadically. It arrived manageably sometimes. I felt it past 3 in the morning now and again, as I wrote papers due the next day in an effort to maintain the facade of a student who has anything at all under control. And I felt it during rough a capella rehearsals that made me wonder why I chose to pursue leadership in a musical club when I'm too tone deaf to hit a note with a sledgehammer.

I know we all have experienced struggles that were even more alienating and difficult to endure. When these tragedies happened, I think we did the only thing we could; we went home. Home was a phone call to our families. Or video games with our roommates. Or a walk to Bucklin Beach. Home was late-night conversations in the dining hall, or the Hogan swimming pool, or a trusted professor's office.

I realize the challenges we've faced as undergraduates have only been preparation for those we will face for the rest of our lives. Nursing majors will have to care for people who might not always want to be nursed. Sick people! Who are strangers! I don't even want to touch sick people I'm friends with. Meanwhile, environmental and sustainability students will literally try to save the world, which sets the bar pretty high in terms of astronomical tasks. All of us will face challenges, and many of them will seem impossible. Some of them will be heartbreakingly difficult.

The people – students, faculty, and staff members – who have made this college a home for us in our time here will never be collected in one place like this again. Look around. We're satellites whose orbits have temporarily aligned. And yet because we experienced it together, each person in this crowd holds now, in some small way, a shimmering fragment of this hilltop home. Like stardust. Or scrap metal. So when those challenges become overwhelming, let's come home. Let's write to each other, okay? Or meet up to talk about how things have been.

The stars, metaphorically, are far from lifeless. Eight years down the line, we'll miss where we'll be four years from now. Each one of us is about to take one small step across this stage, which will signify one giant leap into a new life. Each one of us is about to find a home somewhere we haven't ever been. We'll fall in love with a new stream of faces. New places will swell explosively with memories until, like today, the fuse is lit and we blast off again into the future.

All human beings are astronauts, propelled by what we love into the great unknown.

Ground control will be waiting to hear about our travels. So come home.

The future is bright. And massive. It pulls us all forward with its inevitable gravitational grip. So come home.

Thank you, absolutely everybody, and congratulations to the Class of 2017.