

Welcome to the Entering Class and Formal Opening of the 2008-2009 Academic Year

by President Thomas C. Galligan Jr.

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Good afternoon and welcome to Colby-Sawyer College. Your college career effectively begins now. We are honored you are here and we know you are optimistic, eager and enthusiastic, and maybe even a little bit nervous as this next step in your lives and your education begins. At times like these I sometimes think back to experiences in my own life, and that is the case today.

Today, I remember my grandparents and their kitchen. They were my mother's parents, and they were both Swedish. My grandfather, Carl Reuterskiold, had been born in Sweden and immigrated to the United States when he was 19. My grandmother, Eva Benson Reuterskiold, was born in New York City but her parents had been raised in Sweden and had worked for the Reuterskiold family there. So, when Carl got off the boat on Ellis Island, he headed straight for the Benson home, and it was there that he met Eva, my future grandmother and the person with whom he would spend the rest of his life.

Today, I remember their kitchen. It was indelibly Swedish: light, clean, open, and uncluttered. Ingmar Bergman could have filmed in it. It was a place where I ate Swedish meatballs, Swedish pancakes—what I now call crepes—pickled herring, and the best chocolate cake and chocolate chip cookies I have ever had. It was a place where I learned to play pinochle and where I heard stories about both Sweden and Hell's Kitchen, New York at the turn of the last century.

I heard about my great uncle, the maritime lawyer, my great uncle who had travelled with Amundsen to the South Pole, and about my great aunt and her beautiful singing voice. I heard about how men with guns being pursued by police raced through my grandmother's New York apartment to seek an escape route via the fire escape. Their kitchen was the place where I learned about my culture, my family, and where I came from. It was also the place, coincidentally, where I learned to drink tea. Like Greg Mortenson in *Three Cups of Tea* who learned about Pakistan and Afghanistan as well as learning a lot about himself along the way, I learned about my grandparents' background and about my own in that wonderful kitchen.

But I also remember something else about my grandparents' kitchen. They had a ceramic plate that was for resting hot dishes on—a hot plate. But they mostly used it for display. It had a beautiful picture on it of two people—a man and a woman—appearing over and over again on the steps of what looked like a Mesopotamian or Mayan ziggurat or pyramid. The couple climbed up one side and climbed down the other side. On the lowest step of the climbing side, the couple was crawling; they were young children, still really babies. By the third step they were about your age. As they climbed, they aged.

At the top of the platform, I'd say they were about my age, although they might have been even younger. Then, as they descended they aged further; and as they aged they became stooped until on the last step going down they were bent over on canes and leaning on each other. You get the picture I hope—the plate depicted the process of aging, the arc of life, from young to old, from crawling to standing to leaning over.

And at the top of the plate was an expression. As I recall and whether I am right or not my memory has become my reality, it said "*Tiden flyger* (teedin fleager)." What did it mean? "Time flies," my grandfather told me. "Time flies." My grandmother said that in Latin the expression was —"*Tempis fuget*." The idea was that over the course of the life of the couple ascending and descending the stairs, time had literally flown by. You could see it before your eyes.

So, why does this occur to me now? It occurs to me because time really does fly—whether or not you are having fun. I daresay that if any of us sitting up here today thought back to our own first day of college, we would say that it seemed like it was only yesterday. We would ask ourselves, where the heck did that time go?

I am also sure that for your families, who are here to drop you off at college, time has also flown by. I bet there are many parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts and others sitting in the audience today recalling when you were born; what your first words were; the day you started nursery school or kindergarten; and the day you graduated from high school. They are thinking these things as they prepare to give you a hug and to pat you on the back after this ceremony and wish you well.

I am sure your family would agree with me: "Time flies."

Now there is no way to stop time from flying. My grandparents are no longer with me; they have both passed away. In 1986, after my grandmother died, I was the one

responsible for selling that house I still remember so well and saying good-bye to that wonderful kitchen. Since I got the idea for this little talk, my wife and I have been looking for the plate and haven't found it yet. *Tiden flyger*.

But by looking back and remembering and thinking how happy I was in that room, I can sometimes succeed in slowing down time. By focusing on the present and being in the moment, I can slow it all down just a bit. I, for one, believe that the risk of not focusing, of not stopping or reflecting on and enjoying life, is that it is gone before you know it. And then you will wonder where it went and what you might have done with it.

Think of Greg Mortenson climbing down from his failed attempt at climbing K-2. His stop; his pause in the village of Korphe, changed his life and maybe the world. If he had not stopped who knows what would or would not have happened? Stopping gave him the time to find and begin to implement his life's mission. Later as he stops to make sure he drinks three cups of tea with new and old friends, he is investing in relationships; he is investing in truly understanding the culture of which he seeks to be a part, and in understanding and improving the quality and meaning of his own life.

The same holds true for you. College is a time when a world of ideas will open up to you. It is a time when you will learn and hopefully that learning will inspire you to celebrate and participate meaningfully in a world of ideas, creations, possibilities, and diverse perspectives. It is a time when you will experience and participate more intensely in your education than you have ever thought possible.

It is a time when you will live with others in a collaborative, co-operative setting that will be fun but that will demand patience, tolerance, civility, and then maybe, understanding. It is a time when you will be engaged in dialogue and even argument about life, love, and learning. And ideally at the end of those inspired conversations you will realize that reasonable people can indeed see the world differently and even after spirited disagreement can sit down and revel in one another's company.

So this is a very exciting time. And it will fly by—but I counsel that if you stay open to the moment and focused on the present, it might not go as fast as it otherwise would. Work hard; enjoy yourself; grow. And relish the moment. It clearly will not all be fun—there will be hard times. That is part of growth. There will be at least some

grades lower than you expect. There will be demands to rewrite or redo work for which you might have been praised in high school. There may be disappointment, illness, even heartbreak. But the disappointment is as much a part of the learning as the happiness. Don't get stuck in the pity pot; yet sometimes it isn't wise to simply rush through the tough parts without taking time to extract meaning from them—even though they are painful experiences.

Now there is another reason why you should pay attention to the fact that *tiden flyger* or time flies. That is because before you know it you will have writing assignments due. Before you know it you will have mid-terms and will have to select research paper topics and turn in drafts. Before you know it you will be doing lab reports. Before you know it those papers and reports will be due. Before you know it the end of the semester will be on you. Then you will really feel that time has flown.

So what does that mean? That means that you must stay in the moment day to day and get your work done. It will be harder work than you have ever engaged in before. It will be more demanding. So, stay current; stay prepared; and get involved—that will be an investment in your ultimate success. We expect a lot of you as we expect a lot of ourselves as your educational guides.

So, time flies, but try your hardest to make sure you do your part every once in a while to slow it down and get the most out of every minute.

Let me turn for a second before closing to your families. I know at this moment you want very much to slow time down so that the end of this ceremony when say good bye does not come too soon. I have parted from three children as they began college and I know it is not easy. But I assure you—*tiden flyger* (time does fly). Before you know it after you say good bye today, you will see your children, grandchildren, siblings, nephews, nieces, friends again very soon. If it is any solace today—that may be the good side of time flying.

Turning back to the Class of 2012 and our other entering students—once again, welcome. We are glad you are here. Work hard; learn; expand your horizons; get involved; have fun. And, I am willing to bet that even as you succeed in focusing on the moment for the next four years here at Colby-Sawyer that in just a few short years when

we meet again under the tent for commencement, you will look back fondly, shake your head and ask where did it go? *Tiden flyger*.