

President's Welcome to the Class of 2013
2009 Convocation
By President Tom Galligan

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to Convocation. I'm Tom Galligan, president and a professor in the Humanities Department. We come together today to celebrate your arrival, to officially begin our academic year, and to honor the significance of the work we will accomplish together in the year ahead. Before we do all that I'd like to introduce some important people for you to know.

First, I would like to introduce the faculty and ask them to stand. These are the people who will be your academic, intellectual and professional guides. They will meet you, teach and challenge you in the classroom, the laboratory, the field, and beyond. They will work with you while you develop new knowledge, expertise, and intellectual curiosity. They are the heart and mind of this great college.

Next, I would like to introduce our staff and ask them to stand. They too will guide and teach you. Some have recruited you and admitted you to Colby-Sawyer. Now, they will keep you safe, healthy and involved. They will work with you from campus activities to athletics. They will keep you warm and feed you. They will work everyday to help the faculty provide you with a great Colby-Sawyer education.

It is the faculty and staff's commitment to excellence and their passion for the teaching and learning process that makes Colby-Sawyer such a fantastic place for learning.

Next, let me introduce my wonderful colleagues who are sharing the stage with me today. Would you please stand as I call your names? Please hold your applause until the complete stage party is introduced.

- Marshal for the College and Associate Professor of Social Sciences and Education Janet Bliss—This is Janet's first event as marshal and she is already doing a fantastic job.
- Director of Citizenship Education and Associate Dean of Students Robin Davis
- Vice President for Student Development and Dean of Students Dave Sauerwein

- Assistant Director of Residential Education Karin Berthiaume
- Chairman of the Board of Trustees Anne Winton Black, class of 1973 and 1975
- President of the Student Government Association Kyla Pillsbury, class of 2011
- Academic Vice President and Dean of Faculty Deb Taylor
- Academic Dean and Professor of Business Administration Beth Crockford
- Vice President for Enrollment Management Greg Matthews

Finally, also joining me on stage this afternoon to welcome you and of great importance to the college are members of the college's Board of Trustees (my boss). The trustees strengthen, govern, support and steward our wonderful college. Please recognize them.

Now you know everyone. I hope you are as excited and energized as we all are by the many possibilities, opportunities and challenges that this year, and the next four, will bring for you and for us. Now let's continue with our program with Greg Matthews vice president for enrollment management.

I have a son; his name is Patrick and six years ago he set off to college. At the time, we were living in Tennessee and he was starting college way up in Maine. Don't worry, it all worked out great—two years ago he graduated with a degree in history. After graduation he spent two years working and looking for the meaning of life. Now, he has turned his attention to the next adventure—and if you were wondering—he has not yet shared with me the meaning of life.

What is the next adventure? Well about a month ago, he got in his car and drove off to California to start law school. My friends think it's funny that he went from Tennessee to Maine to attend college and just as we got geographically closer to him, he bolted for California. But my wife, Susan, and I realize that's our issue, not his.

Anyway, I'll be honest with you and with your families. It isn't easy to see you, our children or grandchildren, go off to school. We miss you; we worry about you; we hope for you. Sure, we are incredibly proud and excited, but we are also a bit apprehensive. I mean, you are our babies and we want everything to be perfect for you. Am I the only one who feels like that?

When Patrick drove away on August 3, I remembered back to when he left for college. At the time, I wrote him a letter and I would like to read you that letter now—I have of course added some thoughts and some editorial comments just for you as you begin your college career.

I do have Patrick's permission to read the letter, but in giving it he said he was glad he was on the other side of the country that I could not make him come and listen to it all over again.

Dear Patrick: [And, oh by the way, I also have three other children whom you may see over the next four years—Sarah, Aisling and Jennifer. And my wife's name is Susan. She is right over there. But back to the letter.]

Dear Patrick: If the people with whom I went to college read this letter they would definitely tell me that I should be honest and tell you: "Do as I say, not as I did." That will not stop me from preaching, however. So first:

- **Get up in the morning**

This sounds painfully obvious but that does not mean it isn't a good way to start the day. Lots of neat stuff happens all day long but you won't know about it if you spend the day in bed. Some of that great stuff—like classes—occurs in the morning. But you won't know how great it is unless you get up and attend. [By the way, I now frequently teach at 8 a.m.] Getting up is a fantastic way to start the day. It allows you to have breakfast, which they say is the most important meal of the day. Lots of students can't or don't want to get up. I recommend it, even if it's hard some days. That brings me to the next piece of advice.

- **Go to bed at night**

Night is great too; I love it. But if you are going to get up in the morning, make sure that you go to bed at night. I'm certainly not against the occasional late night conversation, movie, or romance, whatever. But too much late at night can make it a lot harder to get up in the morning.

- **Be receptive to what you like**

I suspect that you already have this one down because I have been an eavesdropper on many conversations in which people have asked you what you want to study and do after college. I respect you when you say that you really don't know yet and I like it when you throw in a little laugh. That throws some people off balance but it's not a bad thing.

That's why we are sending you off to college—so you can be exposed to different experiences and begin to figure out what it is that makes you happy and interested and intrigued.

The more that interests you the better your life will be. Those Renaissance people were onto something.

Anyway, be receptive to what you like. Take a bunch of different courses and then take more of what interests you. Just because you do well at something does not mean you love it, but doing well may show that you have talent and interest in an area. Always keep an eye on your happiness meter. [My fantastic faculty colleagues at Colby-Sawyer are here to open your eyes to what you like or what you may like. They are here to teach you, to challenge you, to advise you, and to invigorate your intellectual lives. The staff is here to engage and encourage you to be involved in school, in activities, and in the life of our community. Take advantage of their willingness to teach and help—that is why they are here.]

- **Be receptive to the views and backgrounds of other people**

A lot of what I learned in college came from reading, research, and creating but a lot also came from the people I met—faculty, advisors, staff and students. Of course, if I had followed my earlier advice and gotten up in the morning I might have met even more people. C'est la vie. People are wonderful, interesting, curious, amazing and confounding things. They have all sorts of ideas, biases, talents and traits. Listen to what they have to say. Don't just hear it; listen to it! Get to know people who are not like you. By way of example, in just a few years this nation will have no majority race. That will be a good thing. Get ready for that day by interacting with all sorts of different people. You'll know more as a result and the rest of your life will be a lot fuller and a lot more fulfilling. Now, along with this point:

- **Fall in love**

If you are still reading this letter this piece of advice may cause you to crumple it up and throw it out but I have to say it. Go and fall in love. Fall in love with ideas. Fall in love with books. Fall in love with knowledge. Fall in love with an activity. I know you love to read and watch movies and listen to rock n' roll, jazz, funk, R&B, hip hop & glam. Keep it up (but remember to go to bed at night). Fall in love with a cause. And if you can manage it and are fortunate enough, fall in love with another person. It is one of the best feelings in the whole world—hopefully for both of you. The odds are that falling in love will end up breaking your heart a couple of times but it really is worth it. It lets you know you are alive. While the love part helps you get up in the morning, the heartbreak part makes you want to pull the covers over your head. You probably should allocate a few cover-over-the-head hours per broken heart. Falling in love leads me to hope that you will:

- **Be Bold**

Being receptive to what you like, to ideas, to people, and to falling in love all fit under a bigger umbrella of taking risks. I know you well enough to know you won't jump out of a plane without a parachute, intentionally harm yourself, or rob a bank; but do take some risks. Don't always pick the safe way when it comes to classes, activities, your career, etc. If you want to go to Hollywood to write screenplays (after you graduate), go. If you want to be a freelance

journalist, figure out how and do it. If you want to be an athletic trainer for the Olympic Volleyball team, figure out how. If you want to be a teacher, a writer, a nurse, a doctor, a lawyer or an artist, do it. Society is going to provide you with a lot of easy ways to do stuff you don't really want to do but that you'll get paid for—but don't fall prey. Think for yourself, and make your own choices, even if that's hard.

- **Always be as honest as you are**

You have a tremendous amount of integrity and are one of the most honest people I know. Stay that way. These days, it is easier than ever to take shortcuts, thanks to the Internet. But, be attentive, put the hard work in, be yourself, and you will be fine.

- **Be nice**

My mother always told me to be nice and she was right. I would like to add: be compassionate. You have a great opportunity. I don't say that to add pressure. You probably feel enough of that. But college is a great opportunity. Know how lucky you are and use that good fortune to help others to the extent you can. In this world we try to strike a balance between helping ourselves and helping others. Don't fall totally into the me, me, me side. A ton of people in the world hurt a whole lot more than you and me. Do what you can to make them feel a little bit better.

- **Stay great**

You are a great person. You have already accomplished a ton. Remember when you were in first grade and were diagnosed with dyslexia? Well, thanks to your hard work, Nintendo magazines, your JRR Tolkien books, and your mother's optimism, you did great in high school, and are going off to a fantastic college. The point is: you can do this! Not only can you do it, you can do it well. Remember what you did to get where you are and have confidence that you will continue to do great things and to be a great person.

This gets me to my last little point:

- **Figure out what makes you happy and never settle for less**

There is a song by a guy from Indiana named John Cougar Mellencamp, or some combination of those names. It is one of his early hits called "Jack and Diane." He is still around by the way. In any event, the song "Jack and Diane" is about a girl and a boy, and Mellencamp says: "Oh yeah

... Life goes on, long after the thrill of living is gone.” You know thirty years after hearing that song for the first time; I still think the trick is to prove John Cougar wrong. I think the trick really is to live a long life where the thrill of people, the thrill of ideas, the thrill of service and the thrill of being compassionate never goes away.

We’ll I’m sorry to go on for so long. Have fun at college and good luck.

Love,

Dad

And, best wishes to all of you as you begin this most exciting time of life and your quest for what interests and intrigues you and makes you happy. Everyone at Colby-Sawyer is here to support and encourage you and to provide you with every possible opportunity to grow and thrive and become as great as you choose. Now, go fall in love with life—fall in love with college life, and fall in love with all that you are and will be.