

Annals of the Bowdoin World

President Mills, Members of the College, and Guests: welcome. Welcome family, friends, and fellow hooligans. Welcome and thank you for attending this celebration of the Class of 2013.

I have a not-so-secret confession to share. I am a dork. I love bears. I love beets. And you know I love Battlestar Galactica. More importantly I love rocks. Rocks are fun. Rocks are wise. They were here long before us and will last long after we're gone. They stand mute witness to our rampant pillaging and plundering. To them, we are but a passing shadow.

Rocks tell stories. Some rocks are loud; they're ostentatious braggarts. They spin wild yarns of journeys to the center of the earth and back again. Some of their stories are quiet. They tell tales of the slow accretion of dirt on the bottom of a lake or the steady drip of water in a dark cave.

I begin today with rocks because they can teach us lessons. Consider this question, if you will: what kind of rock are you? Are you a simple sandstone, a fabulous, columnar basalt, or a hard working granite? I'm going to offer a hypothesis: we, the Class of 2013, are metamorphic rocks. Metamorphic rocks start out as different, less cool rocks but with added pressure, increased temperature, and the addition of volatiles they become new, spectacular rocks. This process is violent. Rocks are unwillingly dragged down into the mantle or fried by plumes of magma. Continents collide, folding and fracturing anything unlucky enough to be caught in the middle. But out of these traumatic processes, that cause earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, comes strong bedrock with spectacular crystals like tourmaline, zircon and ruby.

College is a metamorphic process. We enter into this mixing bowl from hundreds of different paths, and from the first day we are pushed and pressured and stressed. We are forced together in uncomfortable ways and sometimes our reactions are explosive. We accumulate all these bits and pieces of our selves like rocks building new, beautiful

minerals. Our lives take wildly unexpected turns. We join clubs, we quit clubs, we add classes, we drop classes. And all this time we are building layers of knowledge. Like metamorphic rocks being dragged deep into the earth, we have become immersed in the environment of Bowdoin. But now, just four years after first entering this pressure cooker, it is time to step back out of the Bowdoin Bubble. We are stepping out into the sunlight and it's bright and blinding and confusing. The world outside of our bubble is absolutely, pant-wettingly, terrifying. We have to find jobs and apartments and cook for ourselves. Terrifying.

But, we are metamorphic rocks and we are strong. These four years of crushing pressure are worth it because we are now new, better people. I myself am partial to metamorphic rocks because, well, they're awesome. They tell the best stories. If there were a rock bar, the metamorphic rocks would be the salty sailors sitting in the darkest corner, smoking a pipe, drinking something bitter, and spinning long tales of shattered garnets and sheared micas. I like college students for the same reason I like metamorphic rocks; they tell great stories. Some of the tales we've written over the past four years will become legends we share with our children. Some are unbelievable. Some were security report worthy. In the years to come we will probably forget many of these stories. This period will become a hazy blur of good food and hard work. But these stories are important. They are our wisdom and strength. They make us the beautiful, metamorphic rocks we are.

So what now? Where do we go from here? What do we do with this new-found strength? I don't have the answer, I'm just a student. All I have to offer is two quotes.

The first comes from Annals of the Former World by John McPhee. This 700 page book explores the geologic history of America; it is a 4.6 billion year long tale of epic proportions. Near the beginning McPhee declares:

*"If by some fiat, I had to restrict all this writing to one sentence; this is the one I would choose: the summit of Mount Everest is marine limestone."*

The summit of Mount Everest is marine limestone. This legendary peak standing five and half miles high is covered in sediment from the bottom of the ocean. Those are rocks with a story to tell. They have been lifted from the lowest low to the highest high. We graduates, though deeply metamorphosed, have not travelled far into our lives. We are young and inexperienced in the eyes of those above us. We may be intelligent, knowledgeable and creative but we don't carry the wisdom of long experience.

And this graduation will shove us once again, unwillingly, into high pressure, stressful environments. We are emerging into a world on the brink of chaos. There are ugly wars and rebellions; hunger is a real issue for many close to home here in Maine as well as far away. And these social tragedies are compounded by environmental catastrophes. Ice caps, glaciers, aquifers and rainforests are disappearing at an alarming rate. Species are vanishing around and beneath us. Drought, famine, overpopulation. It is cloudy outside of the Bowdoin Bubble. However, we metamorphic rocks have the tools to fix and heal. We are a generation with immense power. We may lie in the metaphorical ocean sludge but we have the opportunity to become the sturdy bedrock foundation for future generations. And this leads me to my second quote:

*“It is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succor of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till.”*

JRR Tolkien wrote that in the Lord of the Rings in 1955, and it is still applicable today. There is evil all around. There will be evil in the future. It is not our role to rid the world of all future evil. Instead we must seek to curb the expanding evils of the present. We are not the weak mudstones we were when we arrived here and it is time to show our strength, to let our crystals shine. Our metamorphic wisdom lies not only in our tangible skills and knowledge but in the tales we have written together. This is our time to build on the sturdy basement of Bowdoin alumni who have come before us. To create a legacy of new, healthy soil for future generations so that they “may have clean earth to till.”

Our path is not easy, but we can rise just as high as the limestone of Mount Everest. This graduation is a call to action, to start pushing. It is the first tremor before the quake. We may stand on low ground, smothered in the rubble of the generations who have gone before. But we have the strength to rise up, to stand up, to become the Appalachians, the Andes, the Himalayas of the future.

There is only one question: Will your name be writ in stone on the top of Mount Everest?

Thank you.