

Comms Convocation
April 26, 2013
Ed Carter

Associate Academic Vice President Alan Harker, Dean Stephen Jones, Chair Ed Adams, Faculty Colleagues, Family and Friends, Graduates:

It is truly an honor for me to speak with you this morning. I heartily congratulate the Department of Communications graduates and wish them much success and happiness.

About the time I joined the BYU faculty in 2004, my wife, Kimberly, and I began skiing with our children at Alta Ski Resort in Little Cottonwood Canyon.

At first we skied just a few times per year and stayed on the bunny hills. As our oldest son and oldest daughter became teenagers, we increased the number of ski days and progressed to more challenging terrain.

In early March of this year, my 16-year-old son graduated beyond anything I could teach him about skiing. It happened on a particular day when he decided to ski Alta's High Rustler.

One guidebook described High Rustler as "one of the most dramatic pitches in all of skiing." The same book calls the view from the top "terrifying" and says "it seems that if you blow your first turn, you'll launch into space, bounce twice and end up at a table" in the restaurant 1,300 feet below.

When Joshua told me he wanted to ski High Rustler for the first time, I did what any good parent would do: I told him to go ahead while I waited at the bottom. If he made it, I would ski it with him the second time.

It wasn't just that High Rustler scared me. The trip to get there scared me at least as much. No ski lift goes to High Rustler. Instead, skiers ride a lift to a neighboring peak and then traverse along a knife-edge ridge with what appear to be cliffs on either side. The narrow trail has bumps, hairpin turns, rocks, trees and other obstacles. When Joshua got on the lift, I prayed for him and then went into the ski shop to buy a helmet for myself in case he made it and I actually had to go with him the next time.

Before he left, Joshua strapped a GoPro camera to his chest, and this 30-second video clip from his camera shows first a portion of Joshua's ridgeline traverse and then part of his descent on High Rustler:

Graduates, you are now leaving the Department of Communications faculty, staff and administrators who have guided your classroom instruction, assignments, projects, exams and internships. You are about to get on the ski lift that will take you to a faraway peak to begin what might seem a terrifying journey.

Your parents and teachers will pray for you but probably cannot accompany you on the perhaps treacherous path that leads to the mountain you must personally conquer. You might feel that if you fall, you will bounce twice and slide all the way to utter failure.

In this age of digital media, your journey may be chronicled on YouTube, Twitter or Facebook. But that won't make the trail wider or the slope more gradual.

In Doctrine and Covenants section 88 verse 73, the Lord said, "Behold, I will hasten my work in its time." Brothers and sisters, the Lord seems to have decided it is time. The pace of missionary work increases daily. Family history work and vicarious temple ordinances compel more attention and effort than ever, especially from young people the age of these graduates and my teenage son. President Thomas S. Monson has raised a new standard for rescuing individuals in need.

Young people are responding to the hastening of the Lord's work. In my ward, all three convert baptisms so far in 2013 resulted from young men and young women talking with their friends about the gospel. Some faithful teenagers in our stake wake up at 5 a.m. one day a week and drive themselves to the Provo Temple to spend an hour in the baptistry before school.

As lifelong scholars associated with Brigham Young University, each of us must consider how our personal learning, teaching and contribution to the world will improve as a result of living in an age when the Lord expects us to do more and be better.

Just as my son's days on the beginner and intermediate ski runs with me prepared him for the steep slopes he now navigates on his own, you graduates have learned from faculty members how to work your way through difficult topics, issues and assignments. But for you, on your own from this point forward, the pace of learning will only increase and the challenges will only become more difficult and exciting.

You can do it, and you will do it. Your faculty mentors know you are ready. In your classroom discussions, written assignments and research practica, you have proven you are prepared for the treacherous traverses and steep slopes that lie ahead. My faculty colleagues and I will do what any good teacher would do: We will let you go while we stay here and pray for you.

But before you get on that ski lift alone for the first time, I have three pieces of advice.

First, and perhaps counterintuitively, remember that one of the best ways to learn in the present and prepare for the future is by studying the past. Know your family stories. Listen to your parents. Study the scriptures. Read biographies of people who were both great and good.

On Easter Sunday this year, I set aside some time to read about the resurrection. In Alma chapter 40 verse 12, I read that after death and before resurrection, "the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow." I felt powerfully the truth and reality of this description. I wanted to live so that I could experience that state of

happiness, rest and peace. The Atonement of Jesus Christ is more real and more important to you graduates than your grades, your future salaries or your job performance evaluations.

One of the most enjoyable parts of being a faculty member is the freedom to research. I love to pick a topic and bury myself in learning about it.

A bright graduate student and I once spent a delightful year researching and writing about a Brigham Young Academy graduate named George Sutherland, who remains the only Utahn ever to serve as a Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

While at Brigham Young Academy in the late 19th century, Sutherland studied under Karl G. Maeser.

Sutherland always valued what Maeser taught him about the U.S. Constitution and about life. Sutherland once said that Maeser “believed that scholastic attainments were better than riches, but that better than either were faith, love, charity, clean living, clean thinking, loyalty, tolerance, and all the other attributes that combine to constitute that most precious of all possessions, good character.”

Maeser’s example stayed with Sutherland throughout his time as a lawyer, U.S. Senator, president of the American Bar Association and Supreme Court Justice. Although not a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Sutherland served many people in Utah through pro bono legal work and even paid the court fines of some of his indigent clients, including at one point, his mentor Karl G. Maeser.

Some current lawyers in the Salt Lake City firm Sutherland founded are now using our published research in lobbying for Utah’s new federal courthouse to be named after Justice Sutherland.

What I learned about Justice Sutherland leads to my second point of advice for the graduates. What you do for free will undoubtedly be more valuable than what you are paid to do. Of course, we hope and believe communications graduates can succeed in their profession. But more importantly, I trust you will find meaning and joy in using your education to bless your families, your congregations and your communities without financial compensation.

Sutherland’s example inspired me to engage in legal work on a pro bono basis. From 2010 to 2012 I represented a lawful permanent resident of the United States of little means and education who was wrongfully deported from the United States. With a colleague, I traveled twice to Denver at our own expense to argue our client’s case before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit. When the court ultimately ruled in our client’s favor, setting a wide-reaching precedent, I felt more richly compensated than through any paycheck.

Similarly, nothing I have done in journalism, law or academia compares to an afternoon spent with my wife and children, or an evening about the Lord’s business with my colleagues in the Provo Central Stake.

Graduates, your efforts to serve others will be infinitely more worthwhile than your efforts to earn money, though both must be pursued in balance with one another.

Third, and finally, I advise you to accept the Savior's invitation: "Come, follow me." What that means for each of us is different, but it likely involves taking up a cross and making some sort of sacrifice. Our suffering pales in comparison to His, but no disciple of Christ should plan on an easy and comfortable life. Today's graduates are more well prepared than those of any generation to do hard things in life and the gospel.

It is worth recalling that Christ's admonition to "come, follow me" in Luke chapter 18 was given to a rich young man to sell his belongings and give to the poor. I am not suggesting we literally leave ourselves destitute, but on the Savior's path, the needs of others take priority.

I conclude where I began—staring up at the daunting face of High Rustler. Joshua did make it down in one piece, and at that moment he became the teacher and I the pupil. With my new helmet firmly in place, I followed him on the lift, the ridgeline traverse and to the top of the steep descent.

Just before I launched myself down the slope, I gathered courage and realized that, no matter how many times or how hard I fell, the learning experience would be invaluable.

May God bless you, graduates, in your journey. I know He will because He loves you. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.