

College of Fine Arts and Communications Convocation Address **Kory Katseanes, April 24, 2015**

Good morning. It's a great honor to be asked to say a few words today at this ceremony and celebration. That's what this is about—today is about celebrating. I applaud you graduates and join in this celebration. As I've been thinking about today, some music has been going through my head; not Pomp and Circumstances, but a folk song, sung here by the great Nancy Griffiths.

Where are you goin' my little one, little one?
Where are you goin' my baby, my own?
Turn around and you're two,
Turn around and you're four,
Turn around and you're a young girl
Going out of the door.

Where are you goin' my little one little one?
Little dirndles and petticoats, where have you gone?
Turn around and you're tiny,
Turn around and you're grown,
Turn around and you're a young wife
With babes of your own.

Time goes so quickly—certainly for you parents who look at your children now graduating from college, and for you students who look back on your time in college. I'll bet for almost all of you it was, "Turn around and I'm a freshman, turn around and I'm a sophomore, turn around and I'm a graduate walking out the door."

Today is one of those turn around days. You'll always remember it. I've been thinking about what you graduates accomplished, and what you'll take away from here.

A couple of weeks ago I had an interesting experience: my daughter found through some online research a picture of my college orchestra when I was a freshman. It was startling for me to see, and remember. First of all my hair—it was thrilling to see. But I've forgotten most of my classmate's names, though I certainly remember my teacher. And I didn't remember it being so small. It was the first orchestra I had played in with people my age, and I had remembered it as pretty big, but it was a far cry from the mighty BYU Philharmonic. I was fascinated that the experience I remember was different in so many ways from the archival evidence my daughter had found. And though I didn't remember the details correctly, I still can remember the feelings I had, and some of the music we played. One of which has been a favorite since that first experience, and which I repeated two weeks ago with the Philharmonic. This experience of looking back, of turning around, has caused me to wonder how time will begin to start working on you and your memories, and how time will affect what you have acquired.

This university experience is quite an amazing process. On the one side are professors who are experts in their field. They love what they do, and they love their students. They try very hard to fill their students full of knowledge and desire. The students, for their part, try equally hard to take it all in, to balance all the demands from these passionate professors, to meet deadlines, to be ready for downbeats, to perform, and to measure up—not only to their professor's expectations, but to their parent's expectations and to their own, and often to a spouse's as well. I think about the collective practice hours these students behind me have put in these last few years—the study time, the performances. It's staggering. And on this day of celebration, I salute you all—the professors, the graduates, the parents. You all did it. You all share in reaching this monumental goal, this pinnacle.

But after the celebration dies down, the hills ahead loom. President Kimball in his famous and oft quoted speech here at BYU in 1983, called the Second Century Address, said this about what you now face:

It ought to be obvious to you, as it is to me, that some of the things the Lord would have occur . . . are hidden from our immediate view. Until we have climbed the hill just before us, we are not apt to be given a glimpse of what lies beyond. The hills ahead are higher than we think. This means that accomplishments and further direction must occur in proper order, after we have done our part. The hills ahead are steeper than we realized. We get to the top of one hill and we often see taller hills ahead.

So I want to say a few things about what you graduates have acquired and might need for the journey ahead. The first thing to recognize is what you have actually gained. What did a college education give you? What are you as a graduate that you weren't when you came?

Some have maintained that the purpose of college is to become a more interesting person. I would think each one of you certainly have become that. But truly, you won't know what college has done for you for a while.

There's an old saying: "An education is that which remains when we have forgotten all we've been taught." Next week you will remember fewer of the answers you needed this week for finals. In a year you will remember far fewer still. With every passing year, the data of education fades, and the residue of refinement becomes more evident. This is proper. You are more than knowledge. Especially these days, when the data of every subject is now in your hand. Knowing the right questions to ask is now more important than knowing the right answers. And as the data recedes, you will value even more highly that which remains. That essence is you—the educated you.

This process is beautifully articulated by author William Deresiewicz, in his book *Excellent Sheep*, who said:

Education is more than the acquisition of marketable skills . . . no matter what the rhetoric of politicians or executives would have you think. To ask what college is for is to ask what life is for, what society is for—what people are for. What's the return on investment of college? What's the return on investment of having children, spending time with friends, listening to music, reading a book? The things that are most worth doing are worth doing for their own sake. What's at stake when we ask what college is for, is nothing less than our ability to remain human.

As you steer for those hills ahead I will give you one piece of advice. Optimism is the power to use whatever remains from your education. This is the most powerful tool you can employ. Knowledge is one thing. Skill is one thing. Excellence in anything is one thing. But optimism—that faith, or belief, or confidence that empowers you to take knowledge, skill, or excellence and use them in some fashion—is more powerful than the level of any of those categories.

There are few graduates who don't need to keep getting better to succeed at the next level. But remember the ones who make the most impact, the most lasting contribution, are the ones who continue to work the hardest. No one works very hard who sees his glass half empty. But all the glass half full people are really hard to beat. These are the people who cannot be knocked down, or if they get knocked down refuse to stay down. These are the ones who win, who find real success, who find careers, and happiness, and beauty, and yes, even truth. They are those of you who 5, 10, 20 or 40 years from now, who, though they have forgotten most of what they learned in college, will recognize that they got a great education at BYU.

As you turn around and walk out this door, I trust that you leave with your soul expanded, your self discovered, your skills honed, and your confidence enhanced, and I pray the Lord will bless you to be incurable optimists to tackle those hills ahead.