



LIVE IN. LIVE FOR.

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Class of 2012, Musical Theatre Graduate

It's here! Let me say that again because, honestly, I swear I thought it would never happen. It. Is. Here.

I think we deserve the biggest and loudest cheer the Centrum has ever heard.

Today is one of the biggest days of our adult lives: commencement. The day we get our diplomas. The day we move out of our college palaces. The day extended relatives we haven't seen since we were six, send us copious amounts of free money. Today is the day we have dreamed about, when all of our challenges, failures, triumphs and visions come together in a single celebration. Life is good, right?

Remember when you were a little kid and you knew you were destined for great things? I know I did. At age six, I had goals and aspirations that astonished my parents. I wanted to be a star, understand quantum mechanics and compete as a Red Jaguar on The Legends of the Hidden Temple. When I was young, life's possibilities seemed to stretch to the end of the universe. Want to know what has changed over the past 17 years? Absolutely nothing...except that Legends of the hidden Temple was canceled in 1995.

While at Southern Utah University, I have been BLESSED to have received so many wonderful opportunities, I find them far too numerous to count. I arrived at SUU a tall, gangly and awkward teenager with no idea what I was doing. I dreamed of being a performer but had yet to learn what was needed to attain those dreams. I had so much passion, drive and focus; I just needed someone to give me a chance. SUU took a chance on me. I was able to travel and perform around the world, meet new people, see new cultures, study new art and eat new foods—like pig's brain, which, actually, wasn't all that bad. SUU helped me to discover the tools I needed to succeed not only in my profession but in my life, and for that, I will always be a proud Thunderbird.

I want to share a philosophy with you that I live my life by, a philosophy my grandfather shared with me when I was ten: "Live in the moment. Live for the moment." He passed away only a few months after sharing this with me, and at ten years old, I never really understood what he was talking about, but now I do.

The most important part of any moment is the people that you share it with. I know in my heart that my grandfather's philosophy was referring to the people in our lives—our friends, our families, our life partners—the people we love and care so much about, life would be empty without them.

We have just invested two, three, four, and a few others of us, five...six years, into our education, and I want you to consider something. Stop what you are thinking right now, and think back on your education here at SUU. What stands out? What's the first thing that comes to your mind?

For me, it's not my grades, my classes or the plays I've acted in. It's people. It's the people from the past five years that have truly made an impact on me—members of late night study groups, lab partners, team mates, cast mates, friends I cheered with at football games, my bald mentor, professors and that group of people I ate lunch with every day in the rotunda. The innumerable moments with these people over the past few years—the everyday and, oftentimes, unexpected moments—these are the moments that are full of more promise and opportunity than any other. Those are THE defining moments of our lives.



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Consider this: every time we meet someone, a little bit of their persona, who they are, rubs off onto us and, over the years, all of those “little bits” of the thousands of people we meet makes up who we are. It shapes our personalities and the choices we make in life. Whenever we meet someone, it forever changes us in some way.

Last summer, I traveled to China to dance as a principle male dancer in a world premier ballet performance that was a collaborative effort between SUU’s College of Performing and Visual Arts and the Hubei Opera Dance Drama Theatre. This was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity. I remember taking my final bow, looking out over the audience, scattered throughout three separate balconies, and I was completely stunned. I was so excited watching all of those people cheer; it took everything in my soul to keep from crying. It was everything I had ever imagined such a success would be. And yet, something was missing. All I could think about was my family and my friends. It was a great and amazing experience, don’t get me wrong, but today is just like that day, but better. If you feel at all like I feel, you must be on top of the world right now. This incredible audience is cheering for us—for you! And it’s completely comprised of the people that you care the most about. What an amazing and exciting day, much like my performance in China, but today is made even more special because of the people who are here with us.

During this past Spring Break, I experienced one moment that will be with me my entire life simply because of who I was sharing it with. Mid-break, I decided to drive to visit my Grandma Cooper, the kindest and most loving woman I know. She and I made very routine trip to the grocery store, and while walking out of the store, out of nowhere, my grandmother said, “Payden, I am so proud of you. I am so proud that you aren’t afraid to be yourself or to stand up for your beliefs in this life, and I am so happy I get to be here with you as you do just that.”

Everything that my grandfather said when I was ten had come full circle. Here was my 85-year-old grandmother, and in this simple moment with me, she was content and reflective and satisfied. She didn’t need a grand reason for feeling connected or proud; she was merely enjoying, celebrating the moment we were in.

We are all going to have big and important moments in our lives—weddings, job interviews or, right now, graduation; those are the easy moments to recognize as life changing. But we are also going to have tiny,

everyday moments with the people around us, simple and unimportant moments that will shape who we become. Every moment is important. Every moment holds vast potential for good—simple and endless opportunities to impact those around us and to allow them to impact us.

Our lives are like the dots in a comic strip, made up of thousands of individual spots. Up close, a comic strip is just a jumble of colored dots that don’t make any sense. But in the end, when we step back, we see how they all come together. Though we may not understand why certain colored, “dots” (or things) keep happening up in our lives—whether they be good or bad—this is simply because, right now, we can’t see the whole picture. I know that in the end, all of those dots—those thousands of moment in a single life—will come together, and we will finally be able to see the picture they create.

Step back and look at all we’ve accomplished over the past few years here at SUU, filled with big and little moments. Every moment was important, and all of the people we shared them with are to credit for getting us here, to this day: graduation—our roommates, parents, classmates, everyone. We did the leg work, but they were our cheering section and our inspiration.

Time passes in the blink of an eye. I know the past five years did for me. Every moment matters—not because time is fleeting, but simply because, together, those moments make up the whole of our lives. Don’t miss a single moment.

As we all move on to the next chapter in our lives, remember this: there is opportunity in everything we do, in every place we go, and in every person we meet. It is simply up to us to seek it and to seize it. Find and add characters that splash color and depth to your story, see new worlds, find new limits and push those limits. Become a star. Conquer quantum mechanics. Be the Hollywood producer who brings Legends of the Hidden Temple back to Nickelodeon.

Congratulations Class of 2012, I love you all so much, and I’m so grateful to have shared these past five years with you; honestly, it has been life changing. And thank you to all of the people—to our friends and family and professors—who have gotten us this far, we couldn’t have done it without you.

Thank you.