

But because I knew you
I have been changed for good.

And just to clear the air I ask forgiveness
For the things I've done you've blamed me for.
But then, I guess we know there's blame to share
And none of it seems to matter anymore.

Who can say if I've been changed for the better?
I do believe I have been changed for the better.
Because I knew you
I have been changed for good.

{After performance ends}

***FADE CHOIR LIGHTING TO BLACK**

***BRING UP LIGHTS ON THE PODIUM ONLY**

PRESIDENT BENSON: The Class of 2026 will now be represented by
one of their peers: **Micah Cajilig (cuh-hill-ig)**

Micah is from Lehi, Utah. He is graduating with a bachelor's of Fine
Arts degree in Acting. Please welcome Micah.

***FADE STAGE LIGHTS TO 80%**

Micah

Good evening graduating class of 2026. My name is Micah Cajilig. I am an acting major and, in true storyteller fashion (if you don't mind), I'd like to tell you two stories that took place at this university. As I tell you these stories, I invite you to think of a time when you took a chance on yourself, a chance you were given, or a chance you gave.

Four years ago, in this very gymnasium at a little event—I think it was called “Thunder U,” maybe you remember it? There were members of the Student Association who were picking participants from the audience to compete in a dance off.

There was a boy sitting in that section over there. I'm sure he was just like you: timid and scared to start college. But he has this thing—this intuition—where sometimes he just knows when something is going to happen to him. You know that feeling, when your stomach tightens slightly and you can't tell if it's good or bad but you're really hoping it'll be good?

Roars from the audience filled his ears. And as he stood up, time slowed down...

“You.”

“Me?” He said.

Before he knew it, his feet had already started moving towards the floor of this gymnasium.

If you’re wondering why I look familiar it’s because that boy was me. Believe it or not, I actually did not win, despite my best efforts (cartwheels, splits and “shaking my groove thang”). But I still felt like I was on cloud nine.

That day, I was given a chance to be myself in front of all these people I did not know: all of you. And I was astonished at the amount of compliments and introductions that followed. For the next few weeks I didn’t go a single day without someone saying, “Oh my gosh, wait, aren’t you the guy who did the dance off?”

And even when that died down, looking back at this story now, I am awestruck at how a dance-off opened so many doors. I met people. I went to more campus events. I learned how to get involved. I applied for a campus job. I learned to navigate the community. I became a leader.

Taking a chance on yourself can feel difficult at first but once you do, it gets easier to take a chance the next time and the time after that.

The second story I would like to share about taking chances also took place my freshman year. I was confused on which path to take. I could either continue my degree in Theater Education, or audition to begin the BFA program in Acting.

When I was an Ace, I was told most college students change their major at least three times. And standing here now, I'm guessing a lot of us have wrestled with that decision—whether to take a chance and change course or take a chance on the dream you had since the beginning. Either way, I think you can all relate to how I was feeling in that moment: worried that “one choice” would undoubtedly change everything.

All I know is that it's scary putting yourself out there, especially when you don't know if you'll benefit from it, and four years ago, I had no idea if I was good enough. These thoughts raced through my head, and it was at this exact moment that a professor of mine, like some type of bald mentor from a novel, was walking into the breezeway I was sitting in. Time slowed down as I looked up to him.

“Do you think I should audition for the BFA?” I asked him.

“I think you should do whatever you want, but if you're asking if I think you have the talent for it, the answer is yes,” he said.

In a way, it felt like my professor was giving me permission. Permission to prove to him that I also thought I had a chance to succeed in the BFA. As auditions rolled around, I couldn't stop thinking about this boost of encouragement. Honestly, I think it was that conversation that gave me the audacity to audition for this degree in the first place.

I have a feeling we've all had a professor who changed us over the last few years. Maybe they encouraged you to change your major. Maybe they helped you find a great internship. Maybe they directed you to resources when you were overwhelmed. Or maybe their jokes made you smile during every class. (Bonus, if your jokes made them smile in every class.)

What I'm trying to say is that we've all been the recipient of someone—a professor, a parent, a friend—who took a chance on us. Someone who spent their time and energy to help us get here today. These people saw something in us and that belief, the encouragement, the opportunities helped get us all here today. To all the people who took a chance on us, now more than ever: thank you.

Our lives are nothing but chances and the choices we make to take them. Every time it felt like time was racing away from you, every time you

made a change or started something new; every time you hoped and believed and stepped out of your comfort zone, those moments of chance are what brought us from Thunder U to graduation.

So while you may feel nervous today—here's a secret: you already know how to take the next chance that comes your way.

I know that if I did not take every chance my professor gave me to believe in myself, I would not have had the same experiences at this university. I know that if I did not dance in front of you all four years ago, I can't say I would be an ounce of the person I am today! I know that you may not relate to these exact experiences of mine, but isn't that what makes us human? Knowing that each path, every choice we take is uniquely ours?

We all have some pivotal moment, or defining story that made us who we are today, and these stories, they're all rooted in chance— a chance on yourself, a chance you were given, or a chance you gave.

Chance is defined by the Cambridge dictionary as an occasion that allows something to be done, but I would argue that its definition goes further than that.

Chance is an opportunity to do something that will allow you to fully commit to your vision, your dreams, your life, yourself. If you did not take a chance by putting in the work on the silent floor of the library, or by joining that club, or by simply choosing to persist despite feeling like the world is falling apart—you would not be here either. Yet, here we are.

And let me tell you this: the world needs you. It needs your creativity in whatever field you find yourself in. Elementary educators, chemists, journalists, doctors, nurses, engineers, artists—No matter what your degree is, it does not define your creativity and I suggest we access that creativity by taking chances AND by looking for opportunities to give chances to others.

We know what it looks like, what it feels like, and how one person's help can and have changed OUR lives. And now it's our turn to do the same.

You can never know how a chance you give can change someone's life, and as we all head off campus into thousands of different directions and onto many different kinds of stages: I challenge you to remember all of the chances that helped you become who you are today. And then look to give someone else the opportunities they need.

If I have learned anything during my time here at this university, it is that when time seems to slow down, chances will arise, and it is on you to take them. And when burn out strikes, when it feels like there's nothing you can do, when you don't know what to do, it's in your full capacity to slow time down, and to look for the chances that—even if they're not what you may have been expecting—are all around.

With that, I am begging you to go ahead, class of 2026...Take a chance on a dance off...take a chance on other people—say hi to them, involve them. And most importantly, now, as we've walked under that Bell Tower I want you to remember to *take a chance on yourself*.

Friends, T-birds, graduates: now is the season of our lives where every decision both big and small, is in our hands. Do you see it? Do you feel it?

How magical it is to have the choice to change, to create, to save lives, to live, to laugh, to love. And when time slows down, how wonderful is it that we get to take a chance?

-End of speech-

{Applause}

CONFERRING OF DEGREES

HONORARY DOCTORATE DEGREES