

ANDIE MARIE SZEKELY

SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY STUDENT COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

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We sit here today, anxious and excited, wired yet secretly exhausted, and ready to dive out into the next adventure of our lives. But, if you're anything like me, this day hasn't come easily.

I remember my very first day here at SUU. It was spring semester of 2013 and I had an 8 am stagecraft class (8 am class, my first mistake, I'm still not a morning person). I was living in the dorms and I distinctly left my room an hour early to make sure I wasn't late. I got to the library and realized that I had no idea where the GC building was, so I was *that* freshman standing in front of a campus map for a solid 15 minutes until I thought I had an idea of where I was heading. After another 10 minutes I saw that holy grail of signs "general classroom" and I rushed inside. Because, did I mention it was snowing? My class was on the second level, so logically, I walked up a flight of stairs landing myself on the third level? This felt really strange because if I entered on level one and went up one flight of stairs that should put me on level...two? Okay, so I walk down another round of stairs, rationalizing how that whole mix up could have been possible, and as I looked at the sign of the floor I now stood on, it read, "103." At this point GC room 209 didn't exist in my mind and I started looking around for cameras or pinching myself because obviously this was a nightmare. I gave up and just walked into the first classroom I saw and asked how to get to the second level because at this point I was desperate...oh and late. But, I made it. And I never got lost heading to that room over the next three years. Moral of the story: it got a lot better.

I look around this room today and realize that each and every one of you have your stories, your experiences, your successes and most importantly, your failures.

Here at SUU, we have all been given the safest environment to fall on our faces, to screw up, to learn lessons that will last us a lifetime and develop into advice for future generations. How incredible is that? Really, think about all of the times you've made a mistake, wondering how you're going to bounce back, and then look at where you are right now. Sitting here. In a cap and gown. More mature and full of lifelong lessons that have shaped you into a young adult. You did better on the next test and retook that class you failed, passing this time. You apologized to your friends when you screwed up, strengthening those relationships, and your team encouraged you to let that mistake roll off your back and do better next time. You killed that job interview and it led you down a road that opened up so many more doors than you could have ever expected. Isn't that incredible?

SUU is filled with unbelievable faculty and staff members who have watched you grow over the course of your time sitting in their classes. They are the people that have pushed you to the breaking point because they know your limits and they know the caliber of what you can achieve. And now, they are the people who will transition from professors into colleagues and more importantly friends. So thank them.

I know we wouldn't be here without our families and the friends who have become family. I know that we wouldn't have made it through early mornings and late nights without those people who stuck by us, especially when we didn't deserve it. We wouldn't be here today without parents picking up hundreds of phone calls we've made to them in these passing years, some of them filled with tears and others with excitement. We wouldn't be here without the relationships that failed but successfully helped us grow, and the relationships that have forced us to love ourselves more than we ever thought possible. Thank those people. And don't be surprised when you get thanks in return.

I challenge you to leave here today, ignoring this phrase that I'm sure you've heard far too many times: "College is the best time of your life." We've all heard it, right? "College is the best time of your life!" We are talented, creative, strong, hard-working, ambitious, driven, absolutely stunning human beings who have the capacity (and right) to accept that college was incredible. I mean, it was, wasn't it? It was filled with late nights of uncontrollable laughter, eating too much junk food, meeting best friends, triumphing with a

team, and generally learning how to become the current version of ourselves. But, why should we feel trapped in the notion that our lives aren't going to get any better from here? I sure hope they do! I don't always want to be this naïve or irrational! We would be doing a huge disservice to all of those people we were just thanking a minute ago if we left here today always reminiscing and never moving forward. We would be doing a huge disservice to ourselves to believe that there is nothing good to come after today! Now, that's naïve!

Don't get me wrong, I will always remember my time here at SUU. I will always remember the first time I climbed (struggled) my way to the top of Angel's Landing. I will always remember the day I woke up to tweets and Facebook notifications that said SUU would be closed...for a snow day! I will always remember the first time I saw one of my lighting designs come to fruition on the Main Stage. Oh, I ugly cried through the whole opening number because of the pride I felt in myself and for my peers. Those moments shaped me, and created, what felt like the best time of my life.

But, I want to be mature enough to realize that this, right here, right now is *definitely* not defining the end. Standing here today does not signify my conclusion on learning. Standing here today does not close out my account of happiness on life. Standing here today does not conclude my progress! I refuse to let the best time of my life be crammed into a mere 4 years. No! The day I get married to my best friend, the day I throw a perfect 300 game in bowling, the day I win a Tony Award for my lighting design, and every other moment in-between can *also* be the best time of my life.

There are far too many adventures in my life, in *your* life, still to be experienced for us to cling to the past. I challenge you to accept that each adventure (as it occurs) can be "the best time of your life." Because, why shouldn't it be? You have the right, the ability, and the perseverance to achieve far, far more than the past few years. You have all of the knowledge, the support, and the love to take what you have experienced here at SUU and use it in any way you choose. Embrace that fact, then just go out and do it.

Here's to us. And here's to the best damn time of our lives.