

AS MOST OF YOU KNOW, THIS IS MY LAST UNDERGRADUATE COMMENCEMENT AFTER 16 WONDERFUL YEARS AS THE PRESIDENT OF DRAKE UNIVERSITY, SO IT'S NOT SURPRISING THAT I'VE BEEN EVEN MORE NEUROTIC THAN USUAL IN RECENT WEEKS IN TRYING TO MAKE SURE THAT MY REMARKS ARE WORTHY OF YOUR ATTENTION, AND OF YOUR MEMORY.

OVER THE YEARS THERE SEEM TO BE ONLY TWO THINGS THAT EVERYONE REMEMBERS ABOUT MY COMMENCEMENT REMARKS: QUOTATIONS FROM MY FAVORITE RUSSIAN AUTHORS AND THE FACT THAT I PLAYED GUITAR AT COMMENCEMENT 5 YEARS AGO—THE LATTER SOMETHING THAT DOZENS OF YOU IN EMAILS AND MANY MORE IN CONVERSATIONS HAVE ASKED ME TO DO ONE MORE TIME. GIVEN THAT I'D LIKE MY FINAL UNDERGRADUATE COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS TO BE MEMORABLE, I DO WANT TO MAKE SURE THAT I ADDRESS BOTH OF THOSE EXPECTATIONS.

IN YOUR EMAILS YOU WERE GENEROUS ENOUGH TO SHARE WITH ME THE THINGS THAT HAVE MOST DEFINED YOUR DRAKE EXPERIENCE, AND THERE WERE FIVE VERY POWERFUL THEMES IN YOUR RESPONSES:

- YOUR RICH AND REWARDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FACULTY AND STAFF
- YOUR FRIENDSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER
- OPPORTUNITIES TO DO THINGS YOU'D NEVER IMAGINED
- SELF-DISCOVERY

- WONDER AND EXCITEMENT ABOUT THE FUTURE, AND SADNESS ABOUT LEAVING DRAKE BEHIND

NOT SURPRISINGLY, THESE ARE AMONG THE THINGS THAT HAVE DEFINED OUR DRAKE EXPERIENCE FOR MADDY AND ME

- THE WARMTH AND ENCOURAGEMENT WITH WHICH WE HAVE BEEN EMBRACED BY THE ENTIRE DRAKE COMMUNITY—STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF, AND ALUMNI—AND BY THE DES MOINES COMMUNITY
- WE TOO HAVE HAD OPPORTUNITIES TO DO THINGS WE'D NEVER IMAGINED—INCLUDING, FOR ME, WATCHING THE SUNRISE AT THE TOP OF MT. KILIMANJARO WITH OUR TWO SONS AND THE DRAKE UNIVERSITY FOOTBALL TEAM
- AND WE KNOW *EXACTLY* HOW YOU FEEL—WE TOO ARE EXCITED ABOUT NEXT STEPS, ANXIOUS TO GET ON WITH THE FUTURE, READY FOR THE NEXT ADVENTURE—AND WE DON'T WANT TO LEAVE

AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, IN RECENT MONTHS, AS MY 16-YEAR TENURE AS THE PRESIDENT OF THIS WONDERFUL UNIVERSITY COMES TO A CLOSE, I'VE SPENT MORE AND MORE TIME IN REFLECTION—IN THINKING ABOUT THE REAL NATURE OF THIS EXPERIENCE THAT'S OCCUPIED MORE THAN 20% OF MY LIFETIME. I'VE COME TO REALIZE THAT IN ADDITION TO WHAT YOU'VE TOLD ME THERE ARE DEEP AND PROFOUND THEMES THAT DEFINE DRAKE UNIVERSITY.

DRAKE IS A COMMUNITY THAT IS BOUND TOGETHER BY SHARED VALUES AND ASPIRATIONS, BY CIVILITY, MUTUAL RESPECT AND GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT, BY THE CONVICTION THAT COLLECTIVELY AND COLLABORATIVELY WE HAVE MORE MEANING THAN WE DO INDIVIDUALLY.

WE ARE BOUND TOGETHER BY THE NEED TO KNOW MORE THAN WE DO NOW, BY THE DRIVE TO DISCOVER AND TO INNOVATE AND BY THE PASSIONATE EMBRACE OF DIFFERENCE.

AND WE ARE BOUND TOGETHER BY THE RECOGNITION THAT OUR PURPOSE—BOTH AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS AN INSTITUTION—GOES FAR BEYOND OURSELVES, WITH AN UNWAVERING COMMITMENT TO SERVE THE COMMON GOOD.

ONE OF MY MOST IMPORTANT TEACHERS, ONE THE PEOPLE WHO TAUGHT ME MOST ABOUT VALUES AND BELIEFS, WAS A RUSSIAN WRITER WHO DIED 111 YEARS AGO THIS COMING JULY – ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEKHOV. HE HAS HAD A HUGE INFLUENCE ON WHO I AM AND WHAT I BELIEVE, AND I WANT YOU TO HEAR WHAT HE SAID ABOUT THE LIFE AHEAD OF YOU.

IN 1894 CHEKHOV WROTE A WONDERFUL STORY CALLED “THE STUDENT,” ABOUT A YOUNG MAN *YOUR AGE*, IVAN VELIKOPOLSKIJ, WHO IS WALKING HOME THROUGH THE FIELDS AT NIGHT ON GOOD FRIDAY, AND HE STOPS TO TALK WITH AN ELDERLY PEASANT WOMAN AND HER DAUGHTER. HE TELLS THE WOMEN THE GOSPEL OF PETER’S DENIAL OF JESUS IN THE GARDEN OF THE HIGH

PRIEST, AND THE OLD WOMAN BEGINS TO CRY. SEEING HER CRY, IVAN REALIZES, AND I QUOTE:

*IT WAS EVIDENT THAT WHAT HE HAD JUST BEEN TELLING THEM ABOUT, WHICH HAD HAPPENED NINETEEN CENTURIES AGO, HAD A RELATION TO THE PRESENT. . .*

*AND JOY SUDDENLY STIRRED IN HIS SOUL, AND HE EVEN STOPPED FOR A MINUTE TO TAKE A BREATH. ‘THE PAST,’ HE THOUGHT, ‘IS LINKED WITH THE PRESENT BY AN UNBROKEN CHAIN OF EVENTS FLOWING ONE OUT OF THE OTHER. AND IT SEEMED TO HIM THAT HE HAD JUST SEEN BOTH ENDS OF THAT CHAIN; THAT WHEN HE TOUCHED ONE END, THE OTHER QUIVERED.’*

THERE ARE OVER 70,000 PEOPLE WHO’VE COME BEFORE YOU AT DRAKE UNIVERSITY—PEOPLE WHO LEFT DRAKE FULL OF HOPE, AND EXCITEMENT, AND ANTICIPATION, AND NO SMALL AMOUNT OF ANXIETY ABOUT THE FUTURE. AND YOU ARE THE NEXT LINK IN A CHAIN THAT BEGAN WHEN THE FIRST CLASS WAS GRADUATED 130 YEARS AGO.

THAT IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER OF THE DRAKE COMMUNITY, AND I HOPE THAT YOU FIND GREAT JOY AND GREAT PRIDE IN YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN THIS REMARKABLE FAMILY.

I WANT TO READ TO YOU THE LAST PARAGRAPH OF CHEKHOV’S STORY, AND HOPE THAT YOU NOTICE THAT YOU’RE NOT UNIQUE IN YOUR WONDER ABOUT THE FUTURE. I ALSO HOPE THAT YOU WILL LEAVE DRAKE

UNIVERSITY WITH CHEKHOV'S WORDS AS MUCH A PART OF YOUR LIVES AS THEY ARE OF MINE (AND AS I READ THEM, PLEASE REMEMBER THAT HE'S WRITING ABOUT A *STUDENT*, AND SOMEONE YOUR AGE—MOST OF YOU!):

*. . . HE THOUGHT THAT THE TRUTH AND BEAUTY WHICH HAD GUIDED HUMAN LIFE THERE IN THE GARDEN AND IN THE YARD OF THE HIGH PRIEST HAD CONTINUED WITHOUT INTERRUPTION TO THIS DAY, AND HAD EVIDENTLY ALWAYS BEEN THE CHIEF THING IN HUMAN LIFE AND IN ALL EARTHLY LIFE, INDEED; AND THE FEELING OF YOUTH, HEALTH, VIGOR—HE WAS ONLY TWENTY-TWO—AND THE INEXPRESSIBLE SWEET EXPECTATION OF HAPPINESS, OF UNKNOWN MYSTERIOUS HAPPINESS, TOOK POSSESSION OF HIM LITTLE BY LITTLE, AND LIFE SEEMED TO HIM ENCHANTING, MARVELOUS, AND FULL OF LOFTY MEANING.*

SO LET CHEKHOV TELL YOU WHAT'S REALLY OUT THERE—IT'S ENCHANTING, MARVELOUS, AND FULL OF LOFTY MEANING. I WANT YOU TO GO OUT THERE AND LOVE EVERY MINUTE OF IT—GO OUT THERE AND MAKE THE OTHER END OF THE CHAIN QUIVER.

IN CLOSING (BEFORE WE GET TO THE GUITAR PART), I'M GOING TO READ TO YOU A BRIEF PASSAGE (WITH A LITTLE APPROPRIATE PARAPHRASING) FROM DOSTOEVSKY'S *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV*—A NOVEL IN WHICH THE DEATH OF A YOUNG BOY BRINGS A COMMUNITY TOGETHER IN PROFOUND WAYS. I'M QUOTING FROM "THE SPEECH AT THE STONE," DELIVERED TO A GROUP OF BOYS BY ALYOSHA KARAMAZOV, THE PROTAGONIST, AT THE VERY END OF THE NOVEL:

*AND EVEN IF WE ARE OCCUPIED WITH THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS, IF WE ATTAIN TO HONOR OR FALL INTO GREAT MISFORTUNE—STILL LET US ALWAYS REMEMBER HOW GOOD IT WAS ONCE HERE, WHEN WE WERE ALL TOGETHER, UNITED BY A GOOD AND KIND FEELING WHICH MADE US BETTER THAN PERHAPS WE ARE. YOU MUST KNOW THAT THERE IS NOTHING HIGHER AND STRONGER AND MORE WHOLESOME AND GOOD FOR LIFE IN THE FUTURE THAN SOME GOOD MEMORY...*

BEFORE I CLOSE, I'D LIKE TO ASK MADDY TO STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED—BECAUSE WHAT I'M ABOUT TO SAY I'M SAYING FOR BOTH OF US. I WANT TO CIRCLE BACK TO ONE MORE THING THAT HAS DEFINED THE DRAKE EXPERIENCE FOR MADDY AND ME—THE REMARKABLE OPPORTUNITY TO BE PART OF OUR STUDENTS' LIVES, TO BE PART OF YOUR EXPERIENCE AS YOU DISCOVER WHO YOU ARE AND WHO YOU WANT TO BE, AS YOU DREAM YOUR BIG DREAMS AND SET OFF ON THE PATH TO MAKE THOSE DREAMS REAL.

SO FROM THE BOTTOM OF OUR HEARTS, THANK YOU FOR LETTING US BE PART OF YOUR LIVES AND YOUR DREAMS, AND—TO REPEAT DOSTOEVSKY—“THERE IS NOTHING HIGHER AND STRONGER AND MORE WHOLESOME AND GOOD FOR LIFE IN THE FUTURE THAN SOME GOOD MEMORY . . .” WE WILL REMEMBER YOU ALWAYS.

NOW LET'S PLAY SOME ROCK 'N ROLL!!