

Graduation Speech - SLS 2022

Good afternoon Dean Martinez, distinguished guests, faculty, family, friends, graduating SLS students, including, especially, the Stanford Advanced Degree Class of 2020.

It is rare that one is able to address a graduating cohort two years after the fact. And, in a way, a privilege of sorts. We have had the opportunity to not only reflect, but to do so with the benefit of hindsight. Yet as we sat and ruminated in preparation for this speech, we were reminded of the reality of the past couple of years. Unprecedented times meant cutting off the outside world to a large extent. It meant holing up in our respective apartments – and in our cases – our respective corners of the world. Weeks turned to months, and months turned to years. But while our individual isolation may have made it seem, and feel, like the outside world had somehow ground to a halt – behind closed doors all our individual lives went on.

And with that thought in mind, the two of us would like to take a moment to acknowledge our absent friends. Their very absence reminds us, not only of the exceptional challenges faced by the Class of 2020, but of how the world did indeed go on. Two years may not be a life changing number of years, but two years is plenty of time for life to change. Our friends who couldn't make it here today from Germany, Sri Lanka, Japan, China, ... are not absent because they shy away from long plane rides or because their love for Stanford has changed – but because their lives have changed. Our friends are absent to us only, but they are present in new roles, nurturing new careers, relationships, marriages and even new little lives they've since welcomed into the world. And to our absent friends we say this: One day we will meet again, and we look forward to once again sharing in your successes and lives in person – but until then: we miss you.

Graduations are, by their nature, hopeful, happy occasions where a class of students, and their families get together and celebrate achievements of the years past. Various speakers then traditionally implore new graduates to use their knowledge and skills for the future, to achieve great things, but, also, not forget their humanity, their service to the community and to each other.

Well, today, the two of us are not going to deliver such a message, for two reasons. First, none of us, let's face it, are new graduates. Second, it would be superfluous of us to stand here and implore you to bring sand to the beach. From the very start of our time together, as well as through the unprecedented times of difficulty and isolation, the Advanced Degree Class of 2020 demonstrated to each other the very best of humanity. Through your acts of service and community, kindness and heart, you made Stanford feel like home.

For the Advanced degree cohort, our Stanford journey began just us. We spent our first weeks learning about the American legal system and legal ethics – but mainly we spent them studying each other. And what a bunch of miscreants. A long island iced tea cocktail of cultures and characters. At first glance, the only thing we had in common was that we had been thrown into an unfamiliar setting with each other. But despite this - perhaps even because of it - this cocktail came together like no other. Both as a group – and on a more individual level. Everyone, even our strangest cookies, found their place. We made friends – best friends actually. The kinds of friends you think you're too old to make at this point. And in the glaring lights of a bajillion tv screens and decade old music videos at Patio, some even fell in love. And, hopefully, along the way, we all learnt a thing or two!

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Coming to Stanford also allowed us to learn about new cultures. For example, I remember early on in the year, asking Sigga if Iceland was covered with ice all year around. (**To which she replied:**

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'yes, we also live in igloos and keep penguins as pets you uncultured swine". In turn, I asked Edmund if, being from Australia, he was used to dealing with dangerous and venomous animals like spiders and snakes. To which he replied:)

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"Come'on Sig, it's Stanford, not a certain east coast school who shall not be named, the JD's aren't that competitive!" But, really, in all respects, Stanford did not disappoint. Trips to Yosemite, Dish hikes, dinners in SF and Bob-Dylan concerts on campus.

But then, the pandemic hit, and, if there was one word that described our experience, it was the word "waiting". For the Class of 2020, our Stanford journey began with waiting for our acceptance letter, the joyful anticipation of waiting to come to Stanford, a wait that carries hope and expectations, the promise of good times and great friendships.

But then, during the pandemic, the waiting took a different turn. It became waiting, simply, for the sake of waiting.

Waiting for lock-down to end. Waiting in line at Trader Joes. Waiting for in-person classes to resume. We started waiting with unnerving uncertainty. Waiting for the Bar exam, uncertain if it will go ahead. Waiting for positions, uncertain if firms were hiring. Waiting to see friends again. Waiting, still, for the lockdown to end. And finally, waiting to celebrate today, and this in-person graduation, uncertain, if, and when, it would take place. In the words of John M[e]yer – we were waiting on the world to change.

Yet... while we waited, the AD class was determined not to let life go by. **And, we think, this is where the true strength of our unique, mis-matched, fun-loving cocktail of a community spirit lies.** It is **easy**, during a period of unprecedented isolation, loss and uncertainty, to think only of ourselves. I think I speak for many when I admit that when the Australian currency tanked and tuition fees were due, I channeled Joe Exotic in thinking "I'm never going to financially recover from this".

Yet, instead, these extraordinary times gave rise to extraordinary actions by extraordinary individuals. When the virus threatened the lives of loved ones and familial tragedies struck in distant shores with closed off borders, members of the AD class rose up in support, not through empty words and platitudes, but through demonstrations of grace and community. With our parents, siblings and close friends in our home countries unable to help, the AD class stepped in - we became each other's families - providing the support we all so sorely missed, yet needed. Single Costco runs became community Costco runs. Lockdown dinners that would have been spent in isolation became fully-fledged Zoom drinking affairs. There were other examples too. A humble ask here and there, a quick check-in now and again.

These are the hidden acts of service, and they are not in the least unimportant. For these acts of service, the advanced class of 2020 sought no recognition, taking joy in simply caring for one another with kindness. As we think back to our time here at the Farm, it will not be the missed prom, or the lack of in-person instruction, or that group Vegas trip that never happened. Rather, what will endure will be our international community, and our support for each other.

So, with that all said, what should be our message? What should the AD class do with this experience? Now, most speakers at this point will say something like "now go and do great things"! Well to Stanford law graduates, such expectations are almost a given, and the two of us here have no doubt they will be fulfilled.

So, with our final few minutes, we would like to take a different track.

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We all know that today marks the final, formal conclusion of our time at Stanford. Stanford equips us with a mastery of the law so we can be leaders in our respective fields. But our message today is really a message of hope - we hope, that you will continue to be good people, as you have during our time here. We hope that you take the compassion, grace and service, once upon a time, exercised towards each other, in the residential buildings and lecture halls of this hallowed institution, and apply it to the world at large.

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*Because if anything, waiting has taught us the importance of humility – of doing more, and talking less, to be leaders who are happy to be outside the spotlight sometimes, rather than inside of it always **(Other speaker leans in and says: Yes, we are aware of how hypocritical this sounds coming from us right now)**; be leaders who first extend compassion to the individual, before dreaming of grand schemes for the masses. These are the hallmark qualities of the Stanford Advanced Degree Class of 2020 – a group of remarkable individuals who don't act like they have anything to prove, yet prove themselves, again, and again, and again, when needed most. And that, we say, is reason enough, to raise a glass today.*

It has been our greatest privilege to speak on your behalf. Thank you, and congratulations again to the Stanford Advanced Degree Class of 2020.