

Commencement Address
Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources
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Chuck Ross

Generations

Well you did it.

CONGRATULATIONS

You just successfully crossed one of life's great finish lines.

STOP.....TAKE A MOMENT TODAY.....

THINK ABOUT WHERE YOU ARE AND WHAT YOU HAVE DONE.....

SEE THE COLORS, SEE THE CLOUDS, SEE THE WRINKLES AND TWINKLES IN YOUR PARENTS FACES.....

CONSUME THIS MOMENT IN YOUR LIFE.....

DON'T LET THIS MOMENT SLIP BY YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS.....

LET IT BE A BREATHER BEFORE YOU SLIDE, GLIDE, FALL OR LEAP INTO THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

There is a time to proud --- this is one of those times.

I WISH I WERE YOU ... and 30 years ago I was – UVM Class of 1978

But how would you know that you weren't even alive!

So... I stand here – an aging, balding man ... a virtual looking glass into your future ... one rendition of what you may become.

And you ask... what wisdom is he going to try to impart ...

But before I do any imparting ... let me thank you.

Thank you for inviting me to be part of this important day

ALL OF YOU IN THE RUBENSTEIN SCHOOL

Dean Forcier, Faculty and Staff, Parents and most of all graduates

Thank you for giving me a chance to offer a few thoughts that might be instructive or helpful - to you ... the NEXT GENERATION

And the advice I was given --- “tell them what you would want to tell your kids at this moment in their lives”

And I will do that in two parts – first a few thoughts about how to live life ...

Second a “pontification” about what lies ahead.

So... as you venture forth, here are a few suggestions:

Say “Thank you”. Say it often. It never hurts unless you don’t mean it ...

Try hard at life. Whatever it is, give it your best shot.

Your time will be your most precious resource – don’t waste it

Believe you are always in the prime of your life. What you are prime to do simply changes as you get older. Don’t miss the one time chance each age offers to do what you can only do at that age and stage of your life.

Be nice. Its easier than the alternative

Practice the arts of giving love and granting forgiveness. You will find they create a great positive feedback loop....

You know what I mean – remember the good feeling you get when you do something really nice for someone and then how nice it is when you get a grateful, warm hug in return –

THAT IS POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Speaking of hugging – try giving your mom and dad a hug today – they have earned it.

The chances to express love and appreciation

Or to offer forgiveness ... they don't hang around forever

I'll tell you, I wished I had hugged my dad more times before he died.

So the point here - don't miss your chances

And while you are at it – if you still can – hug your grandparents - because that generation is a special bunch.

In fact, Tom Brokaw wrote a book about your grand parents generation ... he claims they are the Greatest Generation - EVER

And they were great --- they possessed the courage and fortitude to take on the challenges of World War 11. And the cultural and economic response to the war served as the spring board to creating the free and prosperous world we live in today.

But for their efforts ... concepts like civil rights, rights of free speech, assembly and the ability to petition your government as well as the free market might not exist or only in some distorted contorted way.

But that generation was not alone in taking on the challenges of their time. History shows that many generations have confronted challenges.

Think about the courage it took to take on the British Empire in the 1770s and again during the War of 1812 - both conflicts waged in part on our own Lake Champlain.

Consider the turmoil of our Civil War where brother fought brother, slavery was abolished and the Union was preserved.

And consider the importance of World War 1 – the war to end all wars...

And look around the world, the challenges are unrelenting
The earth quake disaster confronting the Chinese
The war in Iraq
The typhoon calamity in Myanmar

These will be generational challenges for the people involved – often struggles of life and death

These events and thousands of others throughout history have challenged the generations of their time. But never - until your time - has the whole world been confronted by a set of risks where the well being of every member of the global community is at stake.

Today, we – you – are confronted with challenges we have unleashed -- forces that can destroy the very ecological foundation upon which we all depend.

And the risks are many –
the risk of cataclysmic damage created by nuclear war.
the risk of dramatic global climate change created by man induced chemical imbalances in our atmosphere.

We are also facing slower, more subtle risks such as soil erosion, desertification, fishery depletion and potable water pollution to name a few.

Wars over energy, food and water may be on the horizon, if not already underway. And as people aspire to the American standard of living in a finite world with a growing population, the negative synergistic interplay between all these forces is a dark thing to contemplate.

The societal dislocation, chaos and catastrophe which could envelope us as humans compete, exploit and destroy their environments in an effort to survive is a sobering prospect.

Are we smart enough to foretell the ecological response to our specie's over abundance? Can we act in time to avoid the classic ecological collapse we all learned about in NR1 and NR103? Are we smart enough to figure out how to shoe horn our species into this planet's ecological system?

I worry that we...you...and your children could bare witness to the unfolding of a global tragedy of the commons.

The issue of the 21st century is clear: Can humankind live within the ecological parameters of this world.

Can we redefine success to be the number of books you read, the hours you spend with family, the smallness of your ecological foot print and the restorative impact of your daily life?

We must find a new path to personal fulfillment different from the current one littered with huge homes, too many cars, meaningless bobbles and a focus on “I got more than you”.

We must find a way to accelerate positive changes at an accelerating rate if we are to keep ahead of the dark trends of ecological destruction, economic despair and societal dislocation.

But how?

The answer is YOU.

YOU – your generation. I predict you will be THE GREATEST GENERATION of all time.

WHY - because you are not only going to save YOUR world you are going to save THE world.

You are the source of boundless hope for the future.

And let me tell you why.

It's your world view – and that is it --- YOU HAVE A WORLD VIEW. You see the world as one interconnected organism. You understand why the slogan of the 21st century can not be “it's the economy stupid” but has to be “It's ecology sister”.

You understand feedback loops, externalities, and carbon markets. You get the world is dependent upon its ecological underpinnings and that all the ecological underpinnings are dependent upon one another.

You are more akin to a global citizen – one who understands your fate is linked to the Bedouin in Saudi Arabia and the Mauri natives of New Zealand as well as to the German engineer and the Indian telemarketer.

Environmental justice is a concept of importance to you, just like social justice and criminal justice.

You have tolerance and empathy for people who are different from you. You look past race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and other overly amplified differences. And

you vote with your feet – you travel the world and you engage in altruistic efforts to help others less fortunate than you.

You understand the ecological importance of diversity and diversity's importance to our future.

You know the strength of bio-mimicry – in design and function.

You stand on top of a mountain of knowledge, accumulated over centuries. Knowledge of more disciplines and subjects than I can fathom but all increasingly accessible via a click of a mouse.

You are a sophisticated beneficiary, consumer and developer of technology.

From Moores law that expresses the acceleration of computing capacity which we leverage every day to analyze and solve environmental problems

to skype technology that allows you to make internet calls to friends and colleagues all over the world

to new efficient alternative energy technologies which reduce our carbon emissions while extending power to the un-served

You are the generation who is best equipped to understand, expand and leverage technology to help save the world.

You have an engaged and ever awakening consciousness. It motivates you to help victims of Katrina over spring break, to join the Peace Corp as a first career step or to pursue a career in restorative ecological technology.

You are engaged in the political process like never before. You are using the political process as its designed - to make decisions about the future of our communities and our societies.

These are the reasons your world is different than your grandparents and frankly different than mine. These are the reasons you will succeed and why you will be **THE GREATEST GENERATION**.

But it will require everyone- you, me and your grandparents and your children.

Its more likely to be a evolution than a revolution ... but it will happen

It will require constant change and improvement ... and change again.

You will need to understand economics ... because it is the universal language.

You must never stop learning but rather continue push the frontier of your knowledge.

Yes, the stakes are high, and the world is depending upon you. But I know you are up to the challenge.

Me and my generation, we are looking forward to working with you. We know it will take team work among the generations but we also know there has never been a group of people better equipped, educated or motivated than you.

It won't always be easy.

The load may be heavy at times.

Much of the meaning of your life will be about the journey,
the ongoing efforts, celebrations and struggles to make the world a better place for you, your children and their children.

So let me end ... where I began ...with a couple suggestions that I would want to convey to my children as they set out on this journey

Try hard at life
Say thank you
Remember you are always in the prime of your life

Love and Forgive – it will enrich your life
Invest in hope – it's got the best return
Believe in yourself

Finally - Change the world – give the best gift of all to the NEXT GENERATION

Thank you