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The number 24 has always been foreign to me. As a kindergartener, using the email rrightmire24@dasd.org meant nothing. I probably couldn't even count to 24 at that age let alone conceptualize that it was the number that was my graduation year. Now, standing here today, with all of the momentum that has been flowing and chugging along since 2020, if just for a moment, coming to a silent halt, it's nothing short of an honor and a privilege to stand in front of you today and speak with you.

I'd like to begin my remarks by sharing a story of an abnormally warm, beautiful Sunday, just a few months ago.

On this particular day, I sat around a small table in the backyard of my house that I still live in now. Joined by a few neighbors, housemates, and friends, we hovered around this table, playing cards and soaking in the rare February sun.

We had decided to play a friendly game of spoons. For those who are not familiar spoons is a card game. The goal is to be the first player to collect four-of-a-kind. Once a player achieves that perfect hand, they grab a spoon from the middle of the table, triggering a race between the rest of the players to claim the remaining spoons. It's kind of like musical chairs, and it's a lot of fun.

As the sun climbed higher into the sky, a new round was about to begin, and I was dealt my starting hand.

Much to my surprise, as I carefully flipped my cards over, being sure to keep them hidden from the prying eyes around me, it dawned on me that I had been dealt a perfect hand.

Nine of spades, nine of hearts, nine of clubs, nine of diamonds.

With my best poker face on, I began the round. But instead of picking up and discarding cards like the rest of my eager friends, I quickly grabbed the spoon nearest to me. I had been dealt a perfect hand!

Everyone scrambled to follow suit. My good friend Bobby sitting beside me bursts out,

“How is that even possible!”

His tone half shocked, half impressed, as if I had somehow made a deal with the card playing devil to achieve such a feat. “No one is dealt a perfect hand.” He insisted.

No one is dealt a perfect hand...

It is a statement that stuck with me, begging the question:

What is a perfect hand?

Aside from the obvious run of nines I had thrown down in front of me, what constitutes the stars aligning so much that you need not make a single change before finding success? What powers were at play that led you to this moment in time, meeting you right where you are when you needed it most?

It is a fairly profound idea that I just pulled from a simple game of cards, but one that I am so confident reigns true. In life, the word perfect is often used to describe things like the “*perfect* storm”, pitching a “*perfect* game”, sticking the landing, and earning a “*perfect* 10”. A definition of “perfect” that is better equated to the outcome, the destination, something magical like today.

- “Perfect” is the taste of Gatorade rolling off your brow after a centennial conference championship on Clark Field.
- “Perfect” is the view of your own feet as you bow to the crowd following your final senior recital.
- “Perfect” is the final brush stroke on a painting that just two weeks ago had you in tears.
- But alas, “perfect” is how your mom would describe that same piece, remembering how she used to hang your artwork on the fridge with the same pride in you that has not once wavered.

“Perfect” should not be used to describe legitimate perfection, but rather it should be used to celebrate a properly *imperfect* journey. One that concluded just as the universe intended it to -- flaws, scrapes, bruises and all.

You sitting here before me today is your perfect hand. It is you revealing your cards, throwing them down on the table in triumph and grabbing what is rightfully yours. You’ve earned it, and that is what we are celebrating today.

It feels appropriate at this point to say our “thank you’s”. A gesture that I’m sure today has already been full of.

- Thank you for the flowers,
- thank you for the card,
- thank you for calling,
- thank you for coming,
- thank you, Grandma, for leaving a mark of lipstick in the shape of your kiss on my cheek...
- thank you for excusing me from the table while I go wash that off.

I’d invite you at this time to turn to the people to your left and your right, the person who’s back of their head you’re staring at, and the person gazing ahead at yours. To these people around you, take a moment now to say thank you, as your classmates and families have played a key part of your success here at Gettysburg.

** Give audience time to say thank you to those around them. **

It would be an injustice for me to stand up here and give this speech without acknowledging the role that the people around *me* have played in my experience here at Gettysburg.

Gettysburg College, an institution founded on the grounds where all men were declared equal, an institution that prides itself on providing a consequential education, one that guides students to “gain a greater insight into who they are, what they want to accomplish, and how they will define, and then lead, their own consequential life.” An education that much like the sacred land that surrounds us today, you cannot find anywhere else on Earth.

Although I have now spent four years of my life living in Gettysburg, I’ve never been much of a history buff at all. However, I do live with one of the most dedicated history majors I’ve ever met. A true champion for the Civil War Institute, she is someone from whom I learned what it means to be disciplined.

I share a bedroom wall with a health science major, who since the day I met her, has continued to teach me what it means to be fearless in the face of challenge and hardship. From her I learned resilience.

I cook dinner and walk to class alongside business and public policy majors, who have grown to know me better than I know myself, picking me up on my way down and lifting me higher than I ever dreamt possible alone.

As the sun rises tomorrow, as this chapter closes and the next one begins, who in this crowd comes to *your* mind?

A liberal arts education means that we will leave this place as some of the most well-rounded learners in the country. To me, a liberal arts education means that, while we all started this chapter as individuals, we now leave this experience as a beautiful mosaic; A conglomerate of the people we have met, the experiences we have endured, and the knowledge we have gathered, in a matter of four short years.

My mosaic might not look like yours, and yours doesn't look like his, and his doesn't look like theirs. That is the beauty of who we have become here at Gettysburg. We will take this unique mosaic of self along with us onto our next journey.

To my people here today, and to the entire Gettysburg community, wherever I go, I will take a piece of you with me, and for that I am forever grateful for what I have gained thanks to you.

An important piece of my mosaic is my good friend Emma. Emma is a physics major and a math and Spanish double minor. To say she inspires me would be a massive understatement, and I couldn't help but include a small piece of her passion in this speech. With that being said, I hope Emma will still be my friend after I crash and burn my way through a quick lesson in quantum physics.

Schrödinger's cat is the name that was given to a famous thought experiment that aimed to demonstrate the existence of the multi-verse. You put the cat in the box under unpredictable sub-atomic conditions and make observations. The final state of the cat is unknown until we open the lid and perceive the reality, and universe, before us.

You and I here today are Schrödinger's cats, and back in 2020, your lid was opened. You graduated high school in the midst of a global pandemic and the rest is history (no pun intended). According to these theories in quantum physics, there are countless other universes in which your lid was opened and the world ahead looked entirely different.

- Perhaps in our adjacent universe, we didn't take our first steps on this campus wearing masks.
- Maybe in another universe you decided to pursue an entirely different degree than the one printed on your diploma.
- Maybe in the seventh, tenth, fiftieth, you never went to Gettysburg at all, unaware of the greatness you have already achieved in this here universe today.

All of this is to say that being who you are in this very universe is a blessing. Even if some days you wish you were in another box, one with a lid that has yet to be opened, or maybe a lid that was opened in a world where your 8am didn't exist, it is a privilege to be experiencing the infinite possibilities of the here and now. After all that our class has been through it is especially true that you would never be the person you are today if you hadn't gone through, and survived, every minute that passed you by up until now. A beautiful butterfly effect that I encourage you to cherish and take along with you as an integral part of your mosaic.

In short, Bobby was right.

No one is dealt a perfect hand.

Better yet, perfection will never be reached, as long as you continue forward in your pursuit of gaining, acquiring, growing, and becoming the best version of yourself. A mere checkpoint of said journey, that we are basking in today.

Despite my aforementioned lack of knowledge in the history department, it is still an incredible privilege to give a speech on the same hallowed ground that Abraham Lincoln once delivered his historic address. In his immortal address, he is quoted saying:

“The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.”

If there is one thing I encourage you to hang on tight to from this experience, it is what you did here. Even in the simplest moments, you made your mark on this school, your people, yourself, and your future, in ways beyond description.

In the fleeting minutes we have left as the undergraduate class of 2024, you have nothing left to do. The to-do list is empty. I invite you now to do nothing but take it all in.

Take in what things look like, what they smell like, how they sound, how they feel. Hold on to the feeling of the sun on your shoulders, even the sweat on your legs. Remember the time spent here laughing, eating, crying, dancing, laying, studying, running, running late, smiling, sleeping, partying, hugging, kissing, holding, holding on *tight*.

Living.

Because trust me, you're not going to want to forget this.

Thank you, and congratulations!