

## Commencement Speech 2020

### The Art of Complaining

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The Art of Complaining has been passed down for generations of my family. If I took a DNA test it would say “50% Ashkanazi Jewish, 20% German, 30% Welsh, 100% complaining.” Our class is uniquely positioned to complain: it feels as though COVID-19 has stolen the end of our Brandeis experience. The less than ideal circumstances of leaving this campus remind me of the less than ideal circumstances which I entered campus.

Unlucky Friday the 13th of January 2017, I came to campus lost and confused. Not August 2016 like most of my class, but January. That was a far cry from how I pictured starting a college experience, and now this is an even further cry from how I pictured graduation. Where was my group of new college friends playing frisbee on a warm fall day? Where will be my Elle Woods moment of tossing my cap in the air while movie captions tell of my future success and my enemies’ future failures? The hard truth is that those movie moments of college experiences are lost forever. Instead I had to be bundled up for my first harsh New England winter and we’re Zooming into a commencement ceremony. We, as the class of 2020, have lost a lot to the recent outbreak: our last Springfest, performances and shows we worked so hard on, our thesis readings, performances, and defenses. For some of us, 4 years of work has led to one anti-climactic email, ending our undergraduate career.

Maybe moving in on Friday the 13th was a curse. So, what can we do? How do we move forward? What is there to do when my Brandeis experience, however filled with friendships, learning, and wonderful mentorship, has been sandwiched by disappointment? My first instinct is to complain, of course. But that is not a complete answer.

When I was accepted in the midyear instead of in the fall, the only thing I could do after complaining was “try to find the bright side” and “make the most ” of something that to me was a failure and disappointment. It became a gift. The relationships I made as a Midyear student and the time I was given abroad when I was only 18 were the highlights of my first year in college.

My usual answer to disappointments is to complain it out of my system and – despite my inherited pessimism – try to be active in making it better.

Originally I wrote a speech about how the true art of complaining is all about being proactive and using that energy to help yourself and those around you and change things for the better. To seek justice. To find truth even unto its innermost parts. I really wanted to give that speech, because I think that’s what I learned most about in my 3 and a half years here.

In this circumstance, there is no way to change the conditions on which we can leave campus and our years of college. It seems nothing can really make this disappointment better... but then I look back on when I had made it through my Midyear semester. Maybe my experience and my midyear pride was not exclusively rooted in the semester being an amazing experience. Looking back, some of it sucked. I wanted to go start college in the fall like everyone else, like how I want a “normal” graduation. When I let myself let go of this self-imposed lack of normalcy I felt I was able to see the gift that being a midyear gave me: support and love from my fellow midyears the moment we connected. I remember before we even got to campus, people on Facebook were helping each other figure out class schedules, clubs and groups we could join together, and auditions. I had such a sense of community and belonging. We all had this shared experience in having this unorthodox college experience and bonded through our confusion and then support of each other.

Now we all have a shared experience together, unique to this class. This class that supports each other and pools together resources and services. This class that gets up at 5:30 am to drive a classmate to the airport. This class that offers a free bed to sleep in to people who couldn’t afford to go home. This class that even in the last 2 weeks here, wanted to meet every other senior they could and catch up with people they haven’t seen in years at a get together in mods.

It’s hard to say goodbye so soon, and it's harder to say goodbye when we weren’t expecting it now. However, I truly do not believe this is goodbye, Class of 2020. While Coronavirus has taken us away from each other...least 6 feet, it can bring us closer together. Complain all you want. Complain, so we see how our shared experiences give us common ground. Complain, so we can resonate with your feelings. Complain, so friends can best support

you. Complain, but never let that be the end of it. Use these shared struggles to help each other. Create stronger bonds through the hardship we have been through together and the hardship we will now face as we prepare to enter the “real world.” As we disperse around the globe, our relationships to each other as a class will change and maybe disappear all together, but I will always hold onto the love and support I have been given by you, the Class of 2020 and I hope to continue to give back.

Along with the art of complaining, I have inherited an inability to say goodbye. Instead, in my family, we say “so long.” So... Thank you and so long, Brandeis. So long to 24 hour musicals, hackathons, liquid latex. So long to Louis’ Deli and so long to asking someone their major and hearing a laundry list that seems impossible. So long to every Shapiro that confuses the first years. So long, Waltham. And with the heaviest of hearts, so long Class of 2020.

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