

Good afternoon, graduates, distinguished faculty, and guests.

This day has a surreal feeling to it. I feel as though I am watching a movie of someone else's life. Sometimes it seems like yesterday that I graduated from high school. Now I am graduating from college, very much an adult (although my parents may feel differently at times).

The four years of our Engineering education differ greatly from year to year. Freshman year is overwhelming as you begin a new stage of life, including new people, a new environment, and new responsibilities. Sophomore year is entwined with "weed out" classes to separate those who "can" from those who "can't". Junior year is busy and stressful, but you are reassured by the fact that you are more than halfway there and then...senior year. The academic load lessens slightly and we search within the economy and ourselves for our next endeavor...jobs, graduate school or another major perhaps. I think that as we lose this safety net that we call college, we begin to reflect on the experiences and lessons that we have faced, both good and bad.

Recently, in the midst of my reflections, I remarked to a co-worker how very lucky my classmates and I are to be graduating, to be receiving this honor that says we have completed this degree. My coworker replied that we aren't lucky because we put the time into homework and lab reports and studying and part time jobs, etc.

But, I disagree. In light of the events of eight months ago today, I think that every person in this country is lucky every single day of our lives and I think that this applies to US citizens, as well as, students receiving an education here.

At the end of the 1970's, there were 16 million people in Afghanistan. Two million of those people were killed in the Civil War and the War of Resistance against the Soviet Union, one and a half million have been maimed by the war fallout, and five million were forced into refugee camps in Iran and Pakistan.

The citizens of Afghanistan that remained in the country suffered under the Taliban regime. At the best of times, the rate of literacy in Afghanistan is optimistically reported as 20% among males and 5% among females. The women of Afghanistan have been and continue to be deprived of the right to education, the right to work, the right to travel, the right to health, legal recourse, recreation, the right to show their faces in public and the list goes on.

In India, the MARS foundation awards academic scholarships to children regardless of their caste, race, gender, or religion. Often this is the only opportunity that children have for an education and these scholarships can only accommodate a minute percentage of those that desire to better themselves.

In Africa, a foundation called Books for Africa, delivered 29,000 texts to Ghana to start libraries. The citizens of Ghana were ecstatic at the establishment of a library for their communities, something that we often take for granted. They also received 11 computers that were surplus from the University of Akron. At the University at Buffalo we have over 2,000 computers alone.

For many of us, war is a far off thing that touches our lives only through newspapers and television. In some countries, children do not know a world without war. These children have experienced horrific images that we Americans watch recreated in expensive Hollywood films. Our children grow up in a world of ice cream cones, cartoons, and security.

September 11, 2001 was a tragic day for the American people, as well as, other people around the world. But, there is a need to find the good in every situation. Maybe we appreciate each day a little more, each moment with our families a little more, each opportunity to learn a little more. Myself and other females can appreciate the freedom and equality that the United States gives to us. In this country, you don't need to be from a certain social class, or gender, or race, or religion to succeed.

September 11 has forever rooted the proud feelings of patriotism in us that our grandparents and parents felt during World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. It has made heroes of our classmates that so selflessly took their turn of duty at Ground Zero, putting their lives on hold to serve their country.

And now I quote, the great University at Buffalo hero, Dean Dean C. Millar, “More than any other time in history and more than any other country in the world, we are limited only by our imagination, ability, and motivation to succeed. More than any other time and any other place, we have the power to create our own destiny”.

So on this day that we receive this wonderful recognition, we must ask ourselves, are we lucky? Yes, we are very lucky indeed.

Congratulations, Class of 2002.

Good luck!

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