



CLASS OF 2017 Graduation Remarks

From Murray Kilgour, Senior Ballet Teacher, Professional Division

*“We are lucky that in this ever-changing world,
one of the few everlasting and necessary things
to support our souls is the arts.”*

Thank you to the Academic Principal, the Ballet Principal, the heads of Junior and Senior Ballet Programs, academic teachers, ballet teachers, invited guests, parents – but I am not speaking to you today. My special thank you is to the School of Alberta Ballet Graduates for inviting me today. This is your day! Congratulations to you on arriving at this point in your lives. A goal has been reached!

I am going to start by telling you about the Marx Brothers. The Marx Brothers were an American family comedy act that was very successful in the movies in the 1930”s-40”s. They are widely considered by critics, scholars, and fans to be among the greatest and most influential comedians of the 20th century. Harpo Marks – the silent one of the Marks brothers was really a mime, never spoke, occasionally would beep a horn to comment.

Harpo made a graduation speech starting with – “Unaccustomed as I am to speaking” – and could barely go further for the laughter.

So please don’t laugh when I say “Unaccustomed as I am to speaking” as it is with some trepidation that I speak to you today.

Talking about dance is one thing but the job of reassuring young people about their future is not easy; in fact is it possible at all these days?



Well, yes and no. We are lucky that in this ever-changing world one of the few everlasting and necessary things to support our souls is the arts.

That is what we believe in and even covet for ourselves. “Without art the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable.” – George Bernard Shaw

As a dancer I had my own dreams of sharing my heart with the arts. I dreamed of dancing on the Royal Opera House stage. Never really believed it could happen, but I knew I wanted to dance, so I danced. I continued to learn and take whatever steps to become better.

You know sometimes you have to take chances, jump off the cliff and build wings as you go down.

I did that: left Canada, left everything with no sure future in sight, ended up with the Royal Ballet and did dance that lead role on the Opera House stage. But that was one moment. The real excitement was the path reaching that point, all those different byways and back lanes.

Your theme “A diamond is just a chunk of coal that did well under pressure”, is interesting, even entertaining, but not enough. That coal just laid there and let others do the work. Even after that pressure it was just a rough piece of bright stone. It needed to be finely worked, cut, polished, set in its right surroundings so you could wear a ring on your finger.

You will have different pressures but you will also have guidance, love, care, advice. So with all that, form yourself, become a diamond, or a piece of obsidian, or a dancer, or maybe even a teacher. Form yourself and be you!

Back to the Marx Brothers – crazy characters – out of the ordinary, each one very individual, always trying new things, except one of them who was very straight forward, not wild, not “troublesome”, but he was the one brother who never made a success, or at least not the success his brothers made.

Don't be somebody else. Be the person you form.



Christopher Gable a famous British Dancer who left dancing to work with the Royal Shakespeare Co and then returned to direct Northern Ballet Theatre in England often talked about “ Creative Imagination”. Not imagination, not thinking about being rich or about having a plate of hamburgers to eat, but a creative imagination. You have to be brave to be creative and you must have purpose behind that creativity. Trying new things and travelling new pathways can be scary but that is how you make your future.

Pennsylvania psychologist Adam Grant said –

“Define your dreams broadly enough that you can find new ways to pursue them when your first and second plans fail.”

Let’s talk about some failures.

Michelangelo the famous painter, sculptor, to his father – “I have done everything possible to please you. I have worked day and night and undergone hardships of every description, but I still do not know what you want of me.”

Charles Darwin (creator of *On the Origin of the Species*) heard from his father: “You care for nothing but shooting, dog and rat catching, and you will be a disgrace to yourself and your family”.

Vincent Van Gogh- the famous impressionist painter – sold only one picture in his life and that was to a close friend for little money just before he died.

The most famous dancer in films Fred Astaire – early comment by a producer – ‘Can’t sing, can’t act, a little bald, can dance a little”.

And then George Bernard Shaw the famous Irish playwright said – “My reputation grows with every failure.”

But Shaw also said “Life isn’t about finding yourself, life is about creating yourself.

Back to - “Defining your dreams broadly” – this doesn’t mean being weak or indecisive, **it is an opportunity to broaden yourself, give yourself more**



opportunities, be open and willing to strive to improve at whatever you do.

In some ways life may seem easy today. Easy to find friends online. “I have 1500 friends!” Easy to put your ideas out there and have those “like ticks”. Easy to find information – including those “alternative facts”. In reality life isn’t so easy.

Over many years I have a small handful of friends. But if I am in need I know I can call on them, and they know they could call on me. Life is not easy. You must work hard for your desires and your future. But it is worth that work. Life has little purpose without effort.

Form yourself.

We are not all the most talented, the most brilliant, the strongest, the quickest. But we each have our dreams, our hopes.

Dreams are just dreams if they are without purpose. They need to be worked on. They need to be polished and set in the right surroundings.

So here you are, all diamonds in the rough. What now? I hope you are looking forward to finding your own path, all those different byways and back lanes. **The hardest step to take is always that first one, be brave and take that step forward.**

I leave you with one last thought, a comment by William James.

Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind.