

# Valedictorian Address

When I was younger--though not much--I had a favorite tree that I would climb and dream in. Each spring the tree grew new leaves, often growing new bark over branches I had broken or words I had carved. Each fall at the end of another summer of torn knees and sunburns, the leaves that were green turned to brown, and vacation ended.

Today I feel very much like this tree. I have spent a season of my life here at Covington Catholic. Now I have reached my first autumn. I must say farewell to what was once my way of life, to many who are my friends. It is time to change.

Through all the days of my youth  
I swayed my leaves...in the sun  
Now I may wither into truth. (W.B. Yeats)

Life is very much full of seasons and cycles, ends and beginnings. Once we were freshmen, now we are freshmen again. Once we were strangers just entering these doors, all a bit fearful of what we would find. Now these doors are about to close behind us for the last time, and we are strangers to a new world. Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow has yet to feel the tap of our chisel. We must wait till we have aged a bit more, I guess, wait till the cement has had a chance to dry.

Still I'd like to know the answers because I feel a bit green around the edges. I think it is true of all of us, but after all greenness is only the first sign of a new spring.

Some of us either more prepared or more easily satisfied, may already see a good bit of what is to be. But most of us are a bit unsure, a bit unattached. It is not a comfortable feeling, but I'm sure that if we search a little with our head and a little with our heart, we will eventually find a spring of clean, cold water that we can drink from.

The world is a big place. There is room for all kinds of people, all kinds of things.

I have heard it said that it is also a very lonely, a very unhappy place--a machine world full of faceless people. But as of yet I have not met a faceless person. You can usually find what you are looking for so perhaps I have not looked hard enough or in the right direction. Or it may be that I have the wrong perspective, that I so not know how to look at people. --I'll work on it, for I'd like to see one. I hope we all work on finding faceless people, because if we do we will appreciate those who have faces much more.

I hope too that we will all be happy in the future. After all, that is all that counts. And it does not really take that much to be happy, if only you appreciate what you have.

So here we are, soldiers on the eve of battle, or if you like, strangers on the eve of a friendship. Some of us are very much prepared for battle, --fierce, proud, determined--ready to grasp destiny and shake it a bit. Others are going into the world with a spirit of searching and of wonder--ready to roam through the sunsets and the neon. Still others are very unsuited for the role of a foreigner, a stranger--they smile too much.

The world needs all of us. It needs a backbone. It needs a soul. It needs a smile. --We'll fit.

I do not think that we have wasted the past, and I hope we will not waste the future. I have reason to believe we won't.

Good-bye and thank-you.  
That's all I have to say.  
I'll be on my way.

Tom Cook '67