

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE



Valedictory Address

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So I have some good news and some bad news. I'm going to be telling you a good story, and a bad story. As a matter of fact, I have had five specific nightmares about this moment. This tells you that I'm nervous, but why am I nervous? It's because you are all human beings: But why is it frightening to be standing in front of you? Simple: Because you all have the ability to judge every single word that I am saying. No one wants to be judged! Other people have the ability to make us feel like we are not good enough for the life that God gave us, and when things get really bad, to make us scared for our entire life.

So here is where the bad story begins. When I first came to Bryn Athyn College I was scared. But I wasn't scared because I was moving thousands of miles away from home – from Sweden to the United States. It was more simple: It was because I didn't know if other people would like me. My whole life I've always just wanted to be liked. We all want to be liked.

But my life used to revolve completely around other people. I wanted to help other people and make sure that whatever difficult experience they were going through was fixed. And that doesn't sound so bad when I'm just saying it like this – right? That sounds like a pretty solid and good way to be – right? Wrong. It wasn't good: I was the nice person that my friends came to when they needed something,

I was also there in a way that they could walk all over me, whenever it pleased them. And so all of that needing to be liked by people doesn't make for a very well-balanced person. My life was not bad. I've always had a great family and a good friend here and there. But I didn't yet know that living my life just to please and be liked by others was not the way to live my life.

And here is where the good story starts: At Bryn Athyn College, I found out what true friends were supposed to be like. I found out that there are friends out there who accept you for who you are – through good times and bad. So when I came here, I knew that I had found friends and faculty who genuinely loved me. And as my friend situation started figuring itself out; now I had to start figuring out myself.

Have you ever truly looked at yourself for the purpose of figuring out who you are? I've taken a few classes here at Bryn Athyn College that have forced me too look at myself in a way that most of the time is actually uncomfortable.

The two classes where I most had to look at myself in uncomfortable ways were Clinical Psychology, with Calvin Odhner, and Theater with Suzanne Bernhardt. In both classes, I was encouraged to really discover my flaws, and then to analyze those flaws in relationship to the problems that I felt that I had in my life.

If you look at history – as I did in my history classes here with Professor Brian Henderson – you'll

see that throughout time, all people have had flaws. It is a human thing to be flawed! No one is perfect, because everyone has his or her own definition of what perfect is supposed to look like. So it's OK to struggle sometimes: it's part of history; it's part of humanity.

If we look at all of history, humans' biggest enemy is other humans? Not like zebras or lions or bears or aliens or predators or dragons. It's humans and humans. So is it true that other human beings can be considered "our" enemies? No the real truth is that the hardest person to please, the one person that gives us the most trouble, the one person that is our biggest critic, is ourselves.

The truth is, we have the power – all by ourselves – to make ourselves feel like we're not good enough to be here, to have friends, to feel loved and to live life. We are here for a reason. No one is here by mistake. God didn't create you and go, woops, that one isn't quite right! Whatever, I'll just leave her to fend for herself. No, that's not the case.

God created us in His perfect image. Yes, we all struggle with life sometimes. We all struggle with our own personal demons. But part of discovering our purpose is finding a road map for getting through our struggles and to turn our flaws into strengths to become better human beings.

I know this because I've been in these classes where I have had to take a deeper look at myself. In one of my Clinical Psychology classes we could volunteer to be put in a situation where we had to function without any of our normal defense mechanisms. I did this, and when I felt so vulnerable there was really nothing else for me to do than cry. But my insight from that painful experience led to new realizations and as you realize the source of your problems something amazing happens. You start to build yourself up again, you start to become the person that you want to be and have full potential to be – maybe even the person God intended you to be.

So why am I talking about this? Because I wanted to share the personal journey that I have taken by coming here. Not only have my classes helped me, but the people that I have met here have helped me. I have started the process of finding a balance in my life that's helping me every day. Putting it simply: By coming to Bryn Athyn College I have found Jennifer Elizabeth Maria Gardner. And it turns out – I like my new self a lot more!

Graduates, fellow students, friends, I want to say to you: try to find yourself. Start looking for that in your life. There are so many opportunities and people here to support that development. And it's not all going to be in one place. It's a journey that we all are going through. But just know that we are all awesome human beings! And we all live in a beautiful world! Don't be afraid of the pain and struggle that comes from this journey. Look for yourself, and you will find yourself; and once you've started accepting yourself, you can truly be of better use to other people.

All I know is this: I am a different person than I was when I first got here. I want to live all the time that I have on this earth. I want to live and feel that I'm good enough to be here. I want to feel that I have lived my life fully. And because of my experience at Bryn Athyn College, I believe that my life is now off to a pretty fantastic new start. And I think that was God's purpose all along.

Thank you God, thank you Bryn Athyn College, and thank you all for listening to me today.