

To the Class of 2007,

Congratulations to you all. This occasion seems to call for a particularly eloquent and solemn expression: *Woo Hoo!*

Thank you so much for the Norden Award. On a faculty with so many superb teachers, I'm not sure my "what would your mother do" style of teaching should qualify, but I'm very grateful nonetheless.

And I suppose I can finally come clean. I was on the admissions committee the year you guys were admitted. I tried to keep a low profile until I saw how you turned out, but by my own personal standard, which is nobody's currently in jail, you guys did good.

Before I go much further, I'd like to make a comment about your education. You guys entered the curriculum four years ago as the best credentialed vet students in the country. You came to us with extraordinary intelligence and accomplishment. In the clinical years, you were led by a faculty who were working clinicians, committed to teach by example as much as by didactic instruction. You were additionally influenced by an outstanding group of young interns and residents. At its most effective, the process produces clinicians who are able to combine what they know with a sense of who they are. I saw it time and time again this past year in students who were challenged by difficult or complex clinical situations and who responded with a combination of humanity and professional expertise.

Now I'm supposed to give you advice. Feel free to doze off if you want. I'll wake you up near the end, just like my lectures.

If I were to give you advice, I would tell you two things. The first would be to remember the value of the basics. When I was your age, I mostly had to think about which of the two varieties of penicillin to use and how many times to dunk the radiograph in the developing solution. You guys, on the other hand, have to deal with an extraordinary system of information gathering. At Cornell, we order a Cat scan, an ultrasound, a contrast study, an endoscopy, and three pages of lab data, and that's just for an animal needing a vaccination. But I think we need to remember that the most valuable information we can generate comes from looking at the animal, from taking a thorough history, and from listening to the owner's concerns. I think the more overwhelming and complex the information load gets, the more important the basic skills of our profession become.

The second piece of advice I would offer is to remember that for every animal, there's a person who is emotionally or financially or philosophically attached and we don't have the luxury of treating either the animal or the owner in isolation. All of the knowledge we can summon and all of the tests we can run, must be applied with the best interests of both entities. I know that all too often, what's best for the pet isn't what's best for the owner, or vice versa, and then you'll be called upon to be a clinician who is first a human being, one with empathy and the willingness to realize there is more to care giving than just the science.

Finally, when I'm frustrated by own inefficiency, when a procedure I've done a hundred times goes sour on the 101st, when I become overwhelmed by the complexity of modern patient care, I try to bring things back into perspective with a sentiment that never fails to soften the toughest day. It goes like this:

If we are, as people say, but the creatures of the day,

Let me live, when we must part,
A little longer, in your heart.
You were all the god I knew,
I was faithful unto you.

Those words help to remind me why I wanted to join this marvelous profession in the first place.

It's been an honor and a privilege for a little guy from Kansas to work with such a talented group of people like you. You have enormous ability. Use it well. Be good, do good, be happy, and make others happy, for that's the core of our profession and, coincidentally, the core of living a good life. And keep in mind that it's still a very small profession. When you sneeze in California, a colleague in New York is going to say Gesundheit.

It's been a wonderful time, one that has gone too fast for us old folks but maybe not fast enough for you. It's bittersweet seeing you leave here but at least maybe now the rest of us can get a table at Joe's.

And lastly, after you graduate, please, please, please, send us money.

I wish you all the best. Thank you and good luck.