

Commencement speech 2025 - HJB

The last time I was asked to speak at a commencement, it wasn't really a true commencement, more like a reenactment and no one really asked me to speak and I pretended to be the elected student speaker who was also the valedictorian. My grandad was the chancellor and I even invited the mayor (he didn't come) So here I am in my living room in front of my closest 2nd cousins and my future brother in-laws ex girlfriend (yes she came after they broke up no she didn't tell anyone she was coming) talking about new beginnings and collegiate tomfoolery. Here is what I would have said if I was being honest and not a performer in my uncanny play:

I'm scared to death. I don't think I know enough, I need more time (I'm not sure what for but I think I need it)

Fear is an amazing thing - it causes a physical and psychological response which is preparing the body for a fight or flight reaction. Fear is going to make sure something happens no matter what - the adrenaline that pumps through your body is going to physically propel you forward into the next leg of your journey if you like it or not.

And that's the thing about fear—it means something matters. It means you care. Fear doesn't show up for things that are pointless; it shows up when we're about to grow. So if your knees are shaking, good. If your voice cracks a little when you talk about the future, even better. It means you're still learning, still open, still you.

But here's the part they don't always tell you: alongside that fear comes courage. Comes all the things you've built—quietly and steadily—across your time here. You didn't just sit through what felt like hundreds of critiques, all-nighters, awkward group projects, and existential dread. You *learned* through them. You made things. You connected. You figured stuff out. You're more ready than you feel, because readiness isn't a feeling—it's a practice.

And practice makes perfect.

Every day is a rehearsal for the rest of our lives. We test out new versions of ourselves—sometimes in front of an audience, sometimes just in front of the bathroom mirror. We improvise, we miss our cues, we forget our lines, and still we keep showing up. That's the beautiful, chaotic truth: none of us really know what we're doing, but we're doing it anyway. We keep learning how to be human, how to be brave, how to begin again.

And maybe that's what I was doing back in that living room, standing on a makeshift stage in front of a collection of half-surprised neighbors and parents who still don't really know what I do. I didn't know what I was doing, but I wanted to mark a moment. I wanted to believe that something important was starting—even if I had to pretend it into existence.

And now, standing here for real, I don't have to pretend anymore. Something important *is* starting. Not just for me, not just for you—but for all of us, together, stepping into what comes next. Scared. Ready. Rehearsed just enough.

So here's to what comes next—may we face it like we did every other day at Montserrat: slightly overwhelmed, over caffeinated, and somehow still pulling it off.