

Audrey Schiffhauer

Here we are. At commencement. A day that celebrates our accomplishments, caps off our college career, hands us a fake diploma and then gently pushes us into the rest of our lives. This is the day where everyone quotes Rosa Parks and Ben Franklin and tells you to make sure to follow their sage advice for the rest of your life. Then people tell you to pose for pictures, and to make sure you don't forget anything in your room...and then they tell you to go home. For an infinite vacation in the real world.

We are told a lot of things by a lot of different people during our time at Geneseo, and that's great, because we're here to learn. But while we were here, we also learned to think for ourselves, which is the really awesome part. So what do you think? What do you think about the last four years? When we reflect on our time at Geneseo, we all think of something different. In fact, close your eyes. Yes, seriously, close your eyes. Now think about a time at Geneseo that makes you incredibly happy. Whether it was in a class or a dining hall, alone or with friends, think about something really, really great from the last four years. Open your eyes. Whatever thought you just had is your own; it came from your own experiences at Geneseo.

It is impossible to use one thought or idea to summarize the feelings of all of the graduates here today. From what residence halls we lived in to the last thing we laughed at, we are all unique Geneseo students. We all have individual dreams and goals, and will pursue a myriad of careers, travels, and other adventures. However, there are three aspects of Geneseo that every graduate in this room has experienced, and that unite us as a class. Three things that allow us to walk away from Geneseo with a trail of "class of 2013" bread crumbs that we will always be able to follow back home if we want to.

Our first uniting factor is what brought us to Geneseo in the first place—our classes. Everyone came to Geneseo to learn, to pursue higher interests; that is the foundation of what unites us as a student body. However, all of our academic experiences were different. Depending on your major, you had to learn certain information and ponder specific questions; what inspired Karl Marx to write about class conflict? How do you draw a three dimensional graph? Why is it always so hot in Welles? All of our professors gave us the necessary resources to become experts in our fields. However, they also gave us countless opportunities to develop our own opinions about what we were learning. Professors at Geneseo know that learning has little merit if their students cannot use the information they are being taught. Why bother teaching something if it's not beneficial, not important, not useful? Our professors recognize this. They know that as we thought critically about what we were learning in their classes, we were also forming the methods of thinking that we are going to use in every area of our lives.

As a math major, I had to spend a lot of time working on problems sets, and I can say that I loved *almost* every long, excruciating hour of it. But even the few hours that I did not enjoy taught me to think logically, and use all of my given information to solve a problem step by step. I know that years from now, when I have to think about how to sell my house or how to raise my children I will use the same strategies I did for my problem sets; I'll lay out all of my information and work through it step by step.

One of my best friends is an English major, and every once in a great while she rolls her eyes about the amount of reading she has to do for her classes. But I'll bet you

anything that she will always have tremendously creative lessons when she becomes a teacher, and her own children will be hearing stories about Narnia and Hogwarts before they can even say wingardium leviosa. Her English classes prepared her to think critically about the world around her and teach other people to love reading. So no matter if you spent long hours in the ISC or in Welles Hall, or pulled all-nighters working on labs or group projects, your academics at Geneseo taught you to develop the most important thing about yourself; how you think.

Everyone remembers what it's like as a freshman when one day in October you hop into your friend's car, and as you're putting on your seatbelt it suddenly hits you; "Woah, I haven't been in a car in two months!" Or what about when you meet someone's younger sibling and suddenly recall that people under the age of eighteen still exist? It took time for us to get used to living in Geneseo. Similarly, we will have to get used to life after Geneseo, and we will probably make abrupt re-discoveries just like the ones from our freshman year. "Thank you, ma'am, I'm so excited to work in your office. Do you have a syllabus...I mean, can I see my cubicle?". "Check Please? Hi, sir, you can just put it on my meal plan...oh, right". We will all be starting over, but it's okay, because our time spent on Geneseo's campus has been a sort of 'practice run' for the rest of our lives. This campus taught us all how to think of ourselves as a member of a community. If you stayed after your shift ended in MJ to help during a rush, or if you comforted a classmate you didn't know very well after they failed a test, you were acting as a member of Geneseo's campus community. Eventually we all began to realize how much even our smallest actions could affect other people. During your time on campus you learned to think of yourself as a member of a community, and because of this whenever you enter a new environment you will automatically start considering how your actions affect those around you, and see yourself as one person working among many others to achieve the same goals. The mindset we developed on Geneseo's campus is an invaluable asset that we will bring to any other community we become a part of. Our contributions to these communities will be unique, but our attitudes as a class of 2013 about how to live and work with other people will be the same. We will all do what we can for ourselves and for others, because we know that it matters. A lot.

There is one last thing that unites us as the class of 2013. We all have people that have made our time in Geneseo wonderful, people that make it truly heartbreaking to leave; we all have our friends. All of us have studied by ourselves, eaten by ourselves and awkwardly laughed out loud while sitting the library by ourselves, but these instances are not nearly as memorable as when we did these same things among friends. Our friends were also the people we watched Game of Thrones with and went on vacation with and ate at MJ with. However, they were also the people we had fights with and cried with and had philosophical discussions with when we wanted to procrastinate. Our friends at Geneseo opened our minds to so many new opinions. With our friends we talked about social injustice and what makes a movie funny and how people fall in love. Our friends taught us how to think about, well, everything. Take a second and think about all of your friends at Geneseo. Those people taught us more about life and the world around us than we will ever realize. We all had different friends at Geneseo; but all of our outlooks have been altered and made broader because of those friends.

The air is alive with all of our memories of Geneseo. Can you feel it? These thoughts will stay with us forever. When we leave Geneseo we bring with us our experiences from our classes, the campus, and our friends. And just because they happened here does not mean they will stay here. When we move our tassels we will not erase anything; instead we are merely symbolizing what we are all about to do; move on. And that's scary, but Geneseo has made us well prepared. We are ready.

We have spent hundreds of hours at Geneseo in classes, on campus and hanging out with our friends. All of these experiences have in common one very important message; you can think whatever you want, and you can do whatever you want. You can move five times in a year, become a vegetarian or dye your hair just because you feel like it, or you can really screw up, and you'll be fine. I feel extremely fortunate to have gone to a school that taught me to be a good person, not just a good student. I'm so thankful that I was surrounded by professors and faculty members and friends that helped me to realize that my knowledge and my unique way of thinking is what sets me free to be my own person. Today we celebrate our accomplishments as the Geneseo class of 2013, and then our time here is over. But when you leave Geneseo after getting your fake diploma, taking pictures with your friends and family and packing up your room, don't forget all that you have learned here, because it's more important than we will ever know. At least, that's what I think.