

I'm not supposed to be here. Honestly, four years ago, I was accepted into what one might call their first choice. It was a small liberal arts college that was a place that had everything that I thought I would need; a music conservatory, a strong theatre program, it was even close to home. What more did I need? I expected this college to be the best place for me to hone my talents and pursue a career in the professional theatre world. Everyone, my parents, high school teachers, and friends all expected me to go there. I was set for the next four years. With my plans in order and all of the proper paper work in the mail to seal the deal with my first pick, I got the opportunity to visit another small liberal arts college in Southern Ohio...Jason Weber, at the time a friend I acted with all through high school, told me of his plans to go to Marietta College. My response was of course..."Where's that?" He gave me the brochure of the college. On the front were all of the classic pictures that every anxious high school senior looks at a million times over when trying to narrow down their choices in what institution they want to shape their future with. You know the pictures that I'm talking about, the ones with all the minorities and that one blonde girl. And they're all reading a book they have never seen before, sitting on a lawn in front of a pretty building, smiling and being studious . . . right. However, on the cover of this particular pamphlet was a phrase that I was reminded of just this fall..."Marietta College, everything you expect college to be." At the time, it sounded cheesy, even now it sounds cheesy, but then Jason and I pulled into the lot adjacent to Hermann Fine Arts Center where his audition would be held. I'll never forget the day. It was spring time and the Cherry trees at the bottom of the mall where in blossom, it was sunny and clear, and the pictures on the cover of the brochure

were real...not like on the brochure of my first pick college. "So it's pretty...so what?" I tried to stop paying attention. I'm not supposed to be here. We walked into Hermann, and Jason was ushered off to a practice room where he could prepare for his auditions. Just by tagging along, I got to see the facility as we got swept on a tour. Jackie Massé, class of 2006 took us very eagerly through the entire building top to bottom. I was impressed, but I didn't really mention it, I just tried to ignore that too. I'm not supposed to be here. Finally, after auditions were over and Jason wasn't a bundle of nerves anymore, we got to talk to some of the students there. We might have asked a million questions, but only one sticks out, and I agree with that answer I got four years ago.

I asked Dek Ingraham: "Do you like going to school here?"

To which he replied: "I couldn't imagine going anywhere else."

And I knew he meant it. I would have never expected one phrase to change my life.

But that's what life is I suppose: expectations. What did you expect when you got here?

Were you expecting to get wasted every weekend at keg parties? To make lifelong friends? To study and get the highest grades possible to get into a good grad school? I know we were all expecting to get evacuated after an enormous flood, right?

Expectations are also far reaching into the future. Now that I greet you persons on the brink of accepting degrees in your respective majors and other studies, what do you expect to do with that piece of paper? What do you expect of yourselves?

Wait. Before we really become grown ups though, let's recall the old days for a minute. What did you anticipate college to be like? I mean really. I know for many of us, our parents never went to a four year college and we are among the first generations

in our family to be here, so our folks couldn't tell us what college would be like; and even if they could have, we wouldn't have listened. And a lot of us got sucked into what Hollywood says college is like. Many of us wanted to hang out with Bluto and go to the Toga Party! Some of us thought we'd go streaking in the quad! And others wanted to be the prettiest sorority girl and find a guy to be their husband, but go to law school instead; I know that's what my plan was. In reality, I had this grandiose idea that I would be surrounded by thought provoking intellectuals that made it their daily regimen to absorb knowledge like a sponge absorbs water. I couldn't wait to be around passionate people that had other things to do than gossip about fly by night trends or whether or not so and so was dating so and so like in high school. I knew that I was going to a place that would open my eyes to the way the real world works and where I fit in it. I think I gave up on that idea the first time the tree in the freshman quad was tee-peed. I was mortified. I had an elitist breakdown. "What kind of place am I in?! Do they let just anybody into this joint?! I'm going to write a letter to the provost?!" Do you remember that letter Dr. DeWine? But after I calmed down, I realized that it takes all sorts to make a world, even if they wouldn't make it past first semester. My pretentious idea of what college was going to be like was soon extinguished, just like the fire that was started in the huge dumpster freshman year. Whatever you were banking on Marietta to be, I'm sure that she surprised you in one way or another. That's the beautiful part about Marietta College, you have no idea what's coming to you. I may have expected some pretty outlandish things, but I never expected that I would be going to a college where I could plan my destiny with more tangible growth than any other college could offer me. For

example, when I tell people that my capstone was a two person musical, they stare at me in awe. “Who does that?” Some stare at me in confusion,

“What’s a capstone?”

I was amazed that not every college required a capstone. When I expressed my surprise to Dr. Suzanne Walker she said:

“No, honey, not every school has capstone requirements. That’s why you go to a good college.”

Honestly, my favorite thing about Marietta is if you want to do something...you do it. You want to organize a gay rights rally, you do it. If you want to create your own major in biological photography, you do it. If you want to travel across the globe and study at a university in another country, you do it. How lucky we all were to come to a school where the possibilities are endless. I bet you didn’t expect that.

And if you didn’t expect that, then I’m sure the expectation of excellence our professors put upon us also came as a shock. Just because a course is listed as 100 level means nothing here. We’ve all put in some serious work to get here. Fred Voner in his Environmental Geology Course takes a bunch of rocks and throws them at you. And after you’re done crying from being pelted with bituminous coal and halite, you have to pick up those rocks and know what they all are. Mr. Dr. O’Donnell takes you on a whirlwind tour of our nation’s roots in American History and does not hesitate to use the B.S. stamp on your essay if he needs to. But he’s willing to help. It’s like he said:

“We don’t all come outta our mommas writing papers!”

The challenges we face in the classroom from day to day have prepared us to step out into the real world prepared for the challenges we eagerly anticipate tomorrow. Sure, we

could have gone to a school where we were spoon fed material and passed along, but that has never been the case at Marietta. A recently graduated alum, Chad Showen, regaled me with a story about his studies in graduate school. Apparently, he learned so much in his biology major here, that he is assistant teaching. I know this may not really come as a surprise, many grad students hold assistantships, but he is teaching in a class that he is enrolled in. *That* doesn't happen that often. He's required to take the course, but Marietta already taught him the material.

This leads me to the ultimate question friends; one I am sure you have asked yourself too many times before approaching this ceremony. What do you expect of yourselves?

Do you already have your career mapped out? Is it carved in stone? Are you going to further your education? So many questions lie on the road ahead, but rest assured that they road upon which your foundation is built is the long blue line.

So what does that mean? Other than the alumni council is going to be calling you for your first pledge immediately following this ceremony;

It means the sky's the limit ladies and gentlemen, if you want it to be. Allow life to happen. Take some risks. Now is only the beginning. Look at all the people that are still movers and shakers after their experience at Marietta. Lisa Grande, a former student of Marietta, has been with us in the Theatre Department for ten years and has recently accepted a position with a professional theatre company in Pittsburgh. Jamie Kendriowski, a Marietta Alum has been our Director of International student affairs for the past six years and has recently accepted a position at Brown University. And our beloved Provost has been appointed as President of Hanover College, thus completing

her life long goal as an educator. Yes, they will be missed, but they embody the spirit of what Marietta College has spent four or five years instilling in us: Live the dream!

You know, the expectations we have for ourselves are great, and if you fulfill them, that's even better. But remember, I didn't expect to come to Marietta College. I didn't expect it would change my life. I didn't know that I would be afforded the ability to go out into the world and make an impact. I expect nothing less from our class.

I imagine years from now, we will all be successful and happy. We'll have lovely homes with white picket fences, if that's your style, and gorgeous families. For holidays you'll take those pictures that are also greeting cards, you know the ones I mean, where everyone is wearing the same sweater. But in order to get there, we must maintain our work ethic. Whatever career you choose will bring you contentment, and one day, when you're working your capable fingers to the bone, someone envious of you will say: "Why are you so ambitious, do you expect you'll make it to the top?" That's when you'll just smile and say:

"I couldn't imagine going anywhere else."