

CLASS DAY 2020

JUNE 12

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Four years ago, I walked through UChicago for the first time. I was seventeen, just recently admitted to UChicago. I stood before Harper, not aware of its name yet, but its size. My heart sank. These buildings felt bigger than I would ever know — they still do.

They tell you college should feel like home. Well, UChicago was certainly a very *different* place to call home. It was a home I had to apply to, one that considered me and said, by some work of miracle, *yes*, as it had to nearly 2,000 others from all corners of the world.

Should a home tell you how to live in it? If so, UChicago did. I'd only just learned my way to the library when I realized that UChicago pointed us in more directions than I'd ever known: directions that demand us to deconstruct what we believe we know; that ask us to challenge the reality we live in.

The Class of 2020 feels the import of reality now more than ever. We've worked so hard, only for our most precious moments of college to be seized by something far greater than us. Something global — something that has rendered our future most uncertain.

Nothing we could have learned in class could have readied us for the process of adjusting our reality to the impossible. Nothing could have prepared us for every standard of value we know to be subverted in the face of human fragility.

With all that's happening in our present moment, there are so many things I could focus on in this speech. But what I want to focus on first is the story of my parents.

When my parents were my age, they were finishing college in China, the only country they'd ever known. A few years later, they would uproot everything to move here, all for the possibility — even if slight — that their daughter might have a better future.

I highlight my parents because I believe they embody love. They embody the sort of enduring, unwavering faith you have for those you love; the sort of relentless belief that, by some work of miracle, survives every doubt.

Homes, much like the ones my parents forged for me, are built with love. And to give with earnest love to what you care about can be the deepest, most painful renunciation of strength and will. To build a home is one of the greatest acts of love. It is uncertain. It demands sacrifice. It is, in a word, difficult.

Somewhere along these four years, I began calling Hyde Park my home. And as we leave our campus behind, know that it is from having braved the uneasy, braved the difficult, that we were able to make UChicago home.

And as we delve into the unknown, remember that so many believe in you. More than your parents: friends, professors, dining hall workers, security guards, strangers. It is upon the shoulders of their willful kindness and generosity that you are here today, a graduate of the Class of 2020.

There is so much grief, injustice, and misery in our world now. All of these things are crippling and demoralizing — but it is too soon to give up. The fight to make the world a better place continues with you. The world needs you, now more than ever, to believe in it, and to move with courage and hope. It needs your love.

Being a young adult means unlearning the ways you've understood the world while growing up; growing into, with trial and error, your own values; having what others may consider lofty idealism clash, and at times, fall flat, against the face of a world that may not serve you — that can even, at times, work against you.

But I urge you to maintain that idealism for as long as you live — because that sort of idealism moves the world. In the most uncertain, most unbelievable times, we all need something to believe in — and if you don't believe in anything, you stand for nothing.

Remember the way you've learned to first endure, then love UChicago — the unwavering resilience you've held for this home. Know that it is from having made UChicago ours that we now know how to make the world ours.

Know, too, that UChicago, with its all-too-Brutalist architecture and primal screams will always be your home. But now it's time to make the world your home. Remember that wherever you'll be, the world is yours now, and it's ready for you to make it what you want it to be. The world needs you — and it's your turn to change it.