

Senior Last Lecture
Miami University
Student Comments – Stayin’ Alive: The Power of Our Dream
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In a poem titled “Dreams,” Langston Hughes writes: “Hold fast to dreams/For if dreams die/Life is a broken-winged bird/That cannot fly/Hold fast to dreams/For when dreams go/Life is a barren field/Frozen with snow.” Sometimes I ask myself, how could Langston say so much in so few words?

Dreams. Have you ever really stopped to think about *your* dreams? Most of us *try* to wake up to the annoying *beep-beep* of our radio alarms, and spend the first seconds of our day fighting for *what starts* as just another moment of shut-eye. The snooze button is pressed once, twice, and then, after we’ve missed a class or two, we jump up out of bed, forgetting the dream world in which we over-indulged, and begin that rat race that characterizes our Miami experiences.

I suppose that in the hustle and bustle of daily Miami, it seems like we just don’t have time to dream. Or do we? In the fight to get ahead, get it done, stay on top...*stay alive*, I would argue that we *must* keep our dreams alive. As I reflect on four years of friendships and hardships, of early-morning exams and late-night conversations, of days and nights that sometimes felt like one in the same, I am grateful today. I am grateful that collectively, class of 2006, we had a dream—and we believed in it.

Four years ago, we entered a red-brick world that knew nothing of pink shirts, popped collars, and i-Pods. We entered a button-up, khaki-clad culture with big dreams. We traveled in groups to go uptown, to Shriver, to class, to church, to the Rec, and yes, even to the bathroom. We went to every free food event—even though they all seemed to serve Papa John’s pizza. We scratched our heads and shrugged as “First in 2009” accompanied plots of dirt and baby-sized bricks at various places on campus. We even spent afternoons searching for buildings with campus maps neatly tucked away in our pockets so that we could *pretend* like we knew where everything was. We were freshmen.

But we were also the products of a dream. I still remember the day my parents dropped me off. My glassy-eyed father told me how much he had wished to go away to school for his college experience, how much he wanted to be in a place where he could be...anything. I didn’t quite grasp his words at the time. I was too busy fretting over how I’d fit in. But, class of 2006, take a minute and reflect: in spite of our financial situations, our diverse backgrounds, or our different majors, we started dreaming the day we set foot on Patterson Avenue...because we *had* to.

We started dreaming when a cross was burned on a community member’s lawn and we joined hands—black, white, Jew, Asian, Latino—and marched through the streets of Oxford, chanting, “Stop the hate.” We started dreaming when we changed our majors

two, three, and four times, not knowing how we'd get through the syllabi of multi-syllabic areas of specialization. We started dreaming when we made friends and lost friends, went through boyfriends and girlfriends, and relationships that sometimes lasted only a week. We started dreaming when our professors told us that digesting and discussing five-hundred-page books were only the beginning of our greatness.

We kept dreaming when we didn't see some of our friends return in Fall 2003 because of grades, finances, or personal reasons. We kept dreaming when Rita Dove, Dave Chapelle, Spike Lee, and Bebe Moore Campbell colored our critical and creative imaginations with the stories of their lives. We kept dreaming when class-loads overwhelmed us and we didn't succeed in a favorite class. We kept dreaming when we lost Stephen J. Smith, Kate Welling, and Julie Trumbull to fire.

We kept dreaming because we needed our dreams—those stories of possibility that replayed in our minds late at night or early in the morning. We kept dreaming in order to stay alive.

As graduation nears, we still dream. But now our dreams are different. Now we look back as we look forward. Now we rejoice that a professor, classmate, Bell Tower buddy, best friend, member of the Gospel Singers, or random person we met at the corner of High and Talawanda believed in us. Now we know that someone believed in us—in our dream—before we believed in ourselves. Now, as we prepare to take our dreams to a new space and place, we have a community of believers behind us.

Class of 2006, as Langston said so eloquently, “hold fast to [your] dreams.” Don't forget the seemingly impossible dreams that have made you who you are, or the unbelievable stories that you are creating in your minds *right now*—because those dreams have power. Those dreams will continue to keep us alive.