

Kristopher Hooten

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Good morning and thank you Dr. Thomas for the kind introduction. Welcome to graduation!!!

Before we start I feel as though I must admit a few things . . .

First, when I was chosen to give this address I was full of mixed emotions. On one hand, it is a great honor to stand here this morning sharing with you our class' experiences . . . On the other hand, as I was kindly reminded this morning by a classmate that I am the last person standing between her and a diploma, and that I'd better keep it short!!!

I must also admit that when preparing for the speech I was unfamiliar with this graduation process. The last commencement ceremony I actually attended was my high school graduation in the small West Texas town, Menard, and we only had 30 graduating seniors. In fact the past few weeks, I have wondered why do we even have these ceremonies, wearing these funny robes and hats, and our attendance is required . . . So in order to prepare for today, like any medical student of the 21st century I used . . . Wikipedia

Here is what I discovered: The first reason we are here is the past. We are here to honor those who bore the suffering before us. We are here to reflect on the good times and the bad times of medical school. We are here for us, Class of 2009, and I want to share some of our unique memories.

We are truly a unique class . . . in fact we are the only class in the history of UTMB to survive two hurricanes, Hurricane Rita and Hurricane Ike. I would like to think it was because of our

dedication and determination. Those of you in the audience probably do not know this, but during the first hurricane, Rita, two days past the mandatory evacuation of the island, most of the class was still in the anatomy lab preparing for our first Gross Anatomy midterm. Some of us even paddled our canoes to Old Red to study during the eye of the storm.

What? That didn't happen????

OK. So maybe that didn't happen, **but when we tell our medical students in 15 years**, that's the story and we are sticking to it.

In all seriousness, we have come a long way in 4 years. Many of you were with us when we first received our white coats. Here is what we have learned:

Our 1st year we swam into the unknown. Excited by opportunity, we bonded over the new experience of being medical students.

Our 2nd year we united against a common enemy . . . the USMLE, our first licensing board exam. The test occupied our thoughts for most of the spring out second year . . . and we are sorry if we had to take a rain check on mother's day for the first time in 23 years. Our second year . . . we bonded over fear.

Our 3rd year we proudly wore our white coats in the halls of John Seally, finally able to experience why we were here in the first place. We played the role of doctor, without all the responsibilities. We did not know anything about common diseases, but could list 20 zebras for the differential diagnosis of cough. By working long hours on call, we were able share stories of our past and become closer to the classmates we were paired with on service.

Our 4th year we learned to enjoy life again. We knew more about the common diseases and were lucky if we could name one zebra for a differential diagnosis. I think the saying is minimal efforts and maximal results. As seniors, we enjoyed as much of 4th year as possible.

Over the past four years we have studied and worked together, laughed, cried, and some of us have found love or even celebrated by bringing a new life into this world.

To share a personal story on how close you become with your classmates in medical school, I want to share about my father. Before starting medical school my father was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, ALS, or Lou Gherig's disease. Unfortunately he passed away my second year. Not wanting to talk about my loss, I did not tell my classmates why I was away. Within a week I received cards, a gift box, plants, and many kind words. **To this day, I am not sure how exactly, so many my classmates heard about my father's death**, but their support helped me continue my journey. So again I say thank you.

Now, another reason we are here . . . the administration, faculty, and staff. Yes that's right . . . we are also here for you. Over the past four years you have dedicated yourself to our education. We have not always thanked you and many times even taken you for granted. We thank you for this opportunity and gift, and we will not forget the life lessons and medical knowledge you have passed on.

The next reason we are here, and possibly the most important reason for me, is for everyone in the audience. If it were not for your support, we would not be standing here today. You have believed in us and touched our lives in some way. You have been patient and understanding, and even cared for us during the difficult times. For that we cannot say thank you enough.

The last reason we are here is for the future . . . as funny as it may seem to those in the audience who truly know us . . . this class actually has a future. Soon we will all be real doctors, with real white coats, and Real Responsibilities. Soon we will all be under more physical and mental stress than most of have ever faced.

The good news . . . we have been well trained

The bad news . . . we will not have our Dr. Boyars and Dr. Beaches or our Dr. Nealon's and Dr. Gomez's to help us make the right decision.

As the future becomes the present, let us not forget that it is not the medical knowledge that makes us doctors. It is the kind, caring words and the compassionate touch that we can give to a patient.

(Repeat)

Before we finish, Dr. Thomas, told me I must be inspiring . . . honestly I don't know how to inspire a group of almost young doctors, but here is what has been said to me by those who have inspired me.

- 1) From my mother – Everyone says remember where you come from, but it is more important to remember the gift you have been given.
- 2) From my fiancé – You cannot fail, if you never stop trying.
- 3) From my father – remember your purpose for becoming a doctor, it has brought you this far and will continue to carry you through life

4) And last, to paraphrase a quote from Dr. Boyars: When times get tough . . . Don't let the "bad guys" get you down

I must share one last story in closing: Match Day as many of you know is a day where everyone finds out where they will be going for residency. The process is to call one person at a time to receive their envelope. The tradition is that each person, as you are called puts a dollar in the hat. The last person to be called, having to wait in anticipation to find out where they will be going, gets all the money in the hat.

This year, the last person called was yours truly . . . **the catch is though . . . I found out months before everyone else where I was going for residency, because my match process, through the United States Army, is in December.** So that day, when everyone was waiting to find out where they were going, I was not dying of anticipation like everyone else. . . So graduating seniors if you reach under your chair you will find a dollar and a short message.

This is the first dollar you will earn as a doctor

And if you did not attend match day . . . you now owe me one dollar.

Thanks and God Bless!

Congratulations Class of 2009!!