

Harvard College Class Day
June 3, 2009
Harvard Oration
(Text is as prepared for delivery.
Check against delivery.)

Be Nervous
Kendra Boothe

Are you guys nervous?

I am.

Anxiety appears

each time I hear

numbers of fear:

economic statistics

of waste that's ballistic

of haste that is in no way

eco-logical

But what can we do?

All this crisis and struggle seems unstoppable.

Love each other.

We could go on guilt trips

Or we could time travel together

To a future characterized by a culture

of humility, encouragement and global consciousness.

Our breath is a common denominator,

So let's take a deep one together

and stand shoulder to shoulder,
not toe to toe.

Let's become better friends as we grow older,
not estranged and distant foes.

Today is our tipping point, our threshold, our departure terminal.

Be nervous.

Our nervous system is for feeling.

Be sensitive

to this precarious moment

in a complex age of transition.

Surf above the crashing waves of contradiction.

That is just the human condition.

Be amazingly human, Harvard.

Let our many capillaries become one

gloriously

nervous

system.

Together we will resist the weights and slough
of greed and prejudice.

We will react swiftly when the sharp pain of a burning stove is at hand.

We will just say no

to the drugs of haughtiness and self-promotion.

We will make eye contact with strangers,

who after all are just friends

we haven't met yet.

And we will smile.

We will drink deep from the chalice of service

and randomly act out in fits of kindness.

We will feel each other's pain

and heal ourselves

before the disease of apathy

overwhelms our body politic.

We will study the arts and sciences of

self-control,

for therein lies our

self-interest.

Our princely past will tenderly kiss our fair damsel future

and we will

melt

in

mindfulness of the present.

And when our reverence marries our daring,

our greatness will be born of our goodness.

Be nervous.

Sustainability is easy to understand when you put your hand on your chest.

That rhythm is a steady march

or a hummingbird's frenzy

or slow steps down the stairs.

When that rhythm stops our growth turns to decay.

But that's OK.

The system just works that way.

Therefore let our vision be larger than our lifetimes.

What shall we do,

given the inevitable deadline,

with this bundle of nerves,

and all this youthful energy?

Who will lead us

to worldwide synergy?

The secret of sustainability

is in the power of

Encouragement.

Have the courage to encourage others.

At the core of the word encourage are the letters

c-o-u-r.

This comes from the Latin for heart.

Let us be each other's humbly,

steadily beating

hearts.

Stop and consider for a moment how we all got here this morning.

How many buses, trains, planes and boats did we arrive on?

So that we could be on this lawn

together

for a time much briefer

than the combined hours of travel.

We spent money and released tons

of greenhouse gas emissions in the process.

For the students, we forsook our homes and moved here,

lived, laughed, cried and ate here

for the four most critical years

of our lives to date

so that we could sit on this lawn today.

Together.

Pondering this is not about exciting anxiety

or exaggerating the weight of this particular point in our lives.

Surely the days we save a life,

tell the naked truth,

get married,

become parents,

grand – parents,

will be more momentous.

So let us take something from this day

that the passage of years cannot erode.

Let us sustain these nervous feelings.

Let us take heart.

Let us take responsibility

for how we spend the spiritual currency

that are our words.

Let us place our attention on the positive

and ignore fruitless worry.

Let us feed the heedless

With a story so grievous

That they cannot help but wake up

and be nervous

and all

together

human

like the rest of us.