

## Today Belongs to Us

By Kieran Pereira

I can spend the next five minutes talking about the crossroads of life or the citizens of tomorrow or the nostalgia of the past, or a hundred other clichés that all of us have heard and spoken, but that would be just a waste of your time. The future will be what it has always been—unpredictable, glorious, tragic, and uneven, just like Life.

But now I want to talk about today, about this moment, about this event, because I am suddenly overwhelmed by the thought that this gathering of families which I took for granted so many times at concerts and plays and games will never happen again, and if I focus on the past or the future I might miss the enormous impact of this wonderful present moment.

I am more aware today than ever before that I am part of something greater than myself and that everything I am--everything we are, everything we have done-- was only possible because of this gathering today; a gathering of families, of friends, of mentors. It is customary at moments like this to try to predict what we will do, how we may or may not change the world, where we will go, what we will become. But why worry about that? The future is tomorrow and tomorrow will come in its own way and in its own time. It will sneak up on us when we least expect it or it will crash into today with a bang. But that's tomorrow. Today, I want to celebrate who we are now at this wonderful moment.

Look at all of us—glistening, hopeful, scared, and courageous. But we're here. In fulfillment of all expectations and, sometimes, against expectations, we made it and we made it in spades, filled with the lessons of the past and the promise of the future. And if we made it past the last four years we'll make it past the next four and the next and the next. Does it matter if we become engineers or doctors or lawyers or construction workers or teachers, or business men and women or politicians or entertainers or even garbage collectors? Does it really matter as long as we remain essentially true to who we are today, that rarest of species—musicians, human beings in harmony with one another, brothers and sisters united in a celebration of our common relationships?

Even as things are crashing down around us, our shining presence on this stage today is a reminder that the world is actually built on a solid foundation; every class carries a promise of regeneration and this class of 2009 will take its place with the best of them—we are the proud bearers of a solemn pledge for a better world.

A year ago this month I lost my mother Lorraine. Before she died she was saddened by the thought that she wouldn't be here today. I want to say to her, "Mom, you are here in my most cherished thoughts and I can feel your presence in the memories of so many people here who knew and loved you. I am standing here because you walked before and behind me, leading and guiding me."

So let us look at one another and burn into our memory what we are today—young men and women secure in our friendship and confident in our ability to carry the present into the future, to roll up our youthful optimism today, put it under our arms, and use it as an antidote against any possible pessimism of tomorrow. For we are the Millennial generation, the children of a thousand years, poised to embark on an incredible journey.

Thank you very much.