

Ilana Gratch
Convocation Address

Even a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. I would like to take a moment for all of us to think about the single first step of your thousand-mile Middlebury journey. In a lot of ways, you've already taken it. You received admission to this amazing school, you selected it as your choice, you moved in, and you even started classes. But perhaps most of all, convocation marks one of your first official steps.

I hope you are all incredibly excited for what's ahead. And you absolutely should be. But just in case there is anyone out there like me, I'll let you know that when I think back on my first steps at Middlebury, there were some moments where I really lost my footing. Admittedly, leaving home was harder for me than I ever expected it to be, and I struggled to find meaning amidst all of the small talk.

But as my father reminded me on some of those late night teary-eyed phone calls my first semester, even a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. And I slowly took more and more steps outside of my single in Hadley 4. I took one step writing my first newspaper article for The Campus, one step joining a Social House, one step applying for a committee of the SGA. And then I took one step signing up to be the Ross fireplace café chef with a friendly girl on my hall, one step attending Hillel services for the first time, and another step attending a professor's office hours simply because I wanted to get to know him better.

And now, looking back as a senior, I can honestly say that it was these seemingly insignificant moments that shaped my Middlebury journey. There are going to be moments where you're thrilled to be a Midd kid. And I'd venture to say that there might be a few occasions, whether it's this week, this semester, or this year, where you're feeling lonely, discouraged, anxious or confused. In those moments, remember the words of Breadloaf's own Robert Frost: "The best way out is always through."

Once you immerse yourself wholly in the Middlebury community, step by step by step, I think you'll find that what we have here is pretty special. We have some of the most amazing students around, students who are willing to engage in long conversations about life until 2 in the morning and students who are game to drop all of their books at midnight to go sledding and drink hot chocolate. We have faculty and staff who you'll form lasting relationships with, and who will push your thinking to a level you never quite imagined. And all of this occurs on a beautiful campus nestled between the green mountains and minutes away from the peaceful Lake Dunmore.

So, on behalf of the student body, welcome to Middlebury. We can't wait to see where your journey takes you.