

*Remarks by Middlebury student speaker Benjamin Orbison at
celebration for midyear graduates, Mead Chapel
February 2, 2013.*

Good morning families, friends, faculty and the Class of 2012.5.

Here we are. Finally. Or is it too soon? I don't know.

It's been four years since we first sat in these pews together, which is, in a word: bananas. Four years. Since we were all sitting here nervously asking ourselves the exact same questions. What are classes going to be like? Do I call all the teachers professor like in Harry Potter? Did I hear that we have to square dance? Are *these* kids really going to be my lifelong friends? Our time at Middlebury gave us answers to most of these questions, but we'll get to that.

In thinking about what I wanted to say this morning, I remembered something Professor Donadio said during the first meeting of our Freshman seminar. He said he loves teaching Febs because our path is uncommon. Because, from the first day we arrive on campus, we're different. That we

have, in our little way, some perspective. That we're separate from the crowd.

It's taken me a while, but I think I finally know what he meant.

The whole idea behind being a Feb is that the extra semester forces us to make active decisions instead of passive ones. Whether you arrived here as a Feb, or took time off and Febbed yourself, we all took ownership over our own paths. And, however crazy it may have seemed at the time, we *chose* to be uncommon. We chose to get off that academic treadmill and breathe. And that, Professor Donadio said, makes us thoughtful people. And, though my mom is probably scoffing at the idea that I am at all "thoughtful," I *choose* to believe him. But that wasn't always the case.

I remember when I read that I'd been accepted as a Feb, all I wanted was to be "normal;" to go with the flow. But there's a reason you hear the statistic that we Febs hold a

disproportionate amount of leadership positions on campus over and over again. It's because when the desire to fit in is denied, we're forced to change, to grow and adapt. We were forced to ask ourselves, "what do I *want*?" instead of "what's next?" It's the same question that we're all asking ourselves right now. And as we make those important decisions, let's keep our uncommon path in mind. Let's remember that being a face in the crowd is over-rated. That we should take the lessons we learned when we first got here and apply them to everything we do moving forward. Because, being Febs, we learned that being uncommon is good.

Febs are always a little odd. We don't live in freshman dorms. We have a weird decimal point after our graduation year. We have crazy stories about killing thousands of fish, being a world champion dancer, or becoming the first Miss Teen Malibu. That last story, of course, being my own. To truly understand the feeling of entering school after time off, you

have to experience it. You have to feel the fear that courses through you when you look around a dining hall filled with people who all have friends and are all immersed in college and you feel totally alone, and then feel waves of relief at the sight of a small table in the corner of a few familiar faces from orientation. You have to know what it's like to have to have a stock answer to the question you get asked hundreds of times "what did you do for your febmester?" You have to move along in your college experience and grow and make new friends, but always know that there is a class of ninety people on this campus who you are inextricably bound to because they are the only ones who understand. We have being uncommon in common.

As we move on from Middlebury, lets keep being uncommon. Let's look at the world at an angle point five degrees different from everybody else. Let's not float through our lives, but make those same active decisions and lets strive

to hold a disproportionate amount of leadership positions in whatever communities we may settle into. We need to hold on to our uncommon path because it's probably not going to be easy. That's the path we chose when we checked that box for February Admission.

Which brings me back to this room. Four years ago, I bet a few of us were already thinking about today. Thinking about the treacherous ride we're all about undertake in a couple hours at the snow bowl, asking why can't we just do a normal graduation like everybody else, why do we have to graduate *in danger*? Well, now I see that going down the mountain is the perfect way for us to leave. It's a little bit of a risk. It sets us apart.

It's strange to think that in about a week, a group of ninety bright, smiling faces will pile in here, asking themselves the same questions we were. If I could talk to them I'd say a few things. One, I'd tell them that the square dance, like most

things at Middlebury, is way more fun if you don't judge it and allow yourself to be goofy. Two, if you think arriving at college is terrifying, just wait until you have to leave. And finally, I'd tell them to look around the room because the people sitting in those pews are some of the most thoughtful, intelligent and interesting people you'll ever meet and yes *they* will become your lifelong friends. At least that was my experience with the class of 2012.5.

So, even though we're going off into the unknown, to a much bigger dining hall with many more strangers, where we will probably all at some point feel incredibly alone, we'll know that in the middle of the Green Mountains there is a place where we all belong. Right here. Where we grew up. Where we took risks. Where we were taught to be uncommon.

Thank you very much.