

Making Something Out of You

KAREN BYBEE

Congratulations on your graduation from BYU! What a thrill it is to celebrate you in person today and to look out over this sea of graduates. You are an awe-inspiring sight. It is my privilege to speak to you today on behalf of the BYU Alumni Association. Our BYU Alumni motto, Connected for Good, keeps us connected to each other as students, alumni, and the community.

We have heard much this past year from President Spencer W. Kimball's 1975 address "The Second Century of Brigham Young University" about the inspired mission of BYU and its students. President Kimball spoke of "the unique light BYU can send forth into the . . . world" and even described the university as an "educational Everest."¹ I don't know about you, but when I arrived at BYU as a naive freshman from Kentucky living in the old Heritage Halls, I felt "unique"—but not in a good way—and it certainly felt at times that I was climbing Mount Everest as I navigated the demands and rigors of college life.

Many of you may have had a similar experience when you first arrived as new students, and you may once again find yourselves, now that you are about to graduate, feeling some apprehension for what this next chapter will bring. You may even be feeling a little uncertain about your abilities going forward. To you, I happily share the unofficial motto of my freshman dorm that became the mantra of my college years. Our Mary Fielding Smith Hall motto was (and I am not making this up), "If they can make penicillin out of moldy cheese, they can make something out of you!"

I promise you that this thought is going to be *way* more comforting than you might think!

Now I can't speak to the role of fuzzy cheese in this scientific finding—I'll leave that to you graduates from the College of Life Sciences—but Dr. Alexander Fleming, the Scottish physician first credited with the discovery of penicillin, said:

When I woke up just after dawn on September 28, 1928, I certainly didn't plan to revolutionize all

Karen Bybee, president of the BYU Alumni Association, delivered this commencement address on April 21, 2022.

*medicine by discovering the world's first antibiotic, or bacteria killer. But I guess that's exactly what I did.*²

Dr. Fleming went about working dutifully on his experiments in his lab each day, never dreaming that his “making something” out of contaminated petri dishes would change the world of medicine forever. As a dedicated researcher and physician, Fleming could never have known of all the lives he would change through his efforts or how he would be “connected for good” to millions of people almost a century later. He assuredly could not have anticipated how his discovery would help inspire and sustain a young college student feeling uncertain of herself and her future.

The world can seem like a Mount Everest after you graduate, and most likely it will be some time before you clearly understand what your contributions will be. You may never shake the world with a monumental discovery such as penicillin, but you most certainly will have an opportunity to make something of yourself through diligent effort, a commitment to excellence, and a desire to be a “unique light” that blesses the lives of others. We hope that your BYU experience has been your laboratory both educationally and spiritually and that it has prepared you well to benefit the world in ways you may not be able to imagine today. The world needs what you have to offer. The world needs *you*.

It is now my privilege to confer upon you lifetime membership in the Brigham Young University Alumni Association and to welcome you into an organization of more than 444,000 alumni around the world. That is a lot of people who have your back!

Your BYU experience doesn't end just because you are graduating today. As you enter the world and go forth to serve, there will be many opportunities for you to join fellow alumni in meaningful activities associated with the university. We encourage you to get involved with one of our eighty-five regional alumni chapters located across the country or, if you are staying in the area, participate in one of our professional chapters located along the Wasatch Front. Just

imagine all that can be accomplished with BYU alumni connecting for good together throughout the world.

We hope that you, as a new BYU alum, will cultivate a culture of giving by generously sharing your time, talents, and, yes, even your treasure. We recognize that many of you may not have much treasure right now, and that is to be expected. But as you progress through your life, we hope you will always be looking for ways to pay forward the benefits of your BYU education. All the information you need to get involved as an alum and to stay connected for good can be found at our alumni website: alumni.byu.edu.

Remember, from now on, wherever you go and whatever you do, you will be representing BYU.

As you embark on this new chapter in your lives, we hope you go forward, as President Kimball said almost half a century ago, “as thinking, thoughtful, and sensitive individuals who . . . [are] dedicated to love of God, pursuit of truth, and service to mankind.”³ We hope you can pursue and live your dreams with passion. We hope you understand the power you have as a unique light to make a difference in the world in ways both large and small. You may need to look at that moldy cheese in your refrigerator from time to time for a little inspiration, but never forget that greatness can come from you.

Well done, class of 2022. Please come back and visit us on campus often. And may you always be connected for good. Congratulations!

Notes

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.

2. Alexander Fleming, quoted in Kendall Haven, *Marvels of Science: 50 Fascinating 5-Minute Reads* (Englewood, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1994), 182; see also Howard Markel, “The Real Story Behind Penicillin,” Health, PBS NewsHour, PBS, 27 September 2013, pbs.org/newshour/health/the-real-story-behind-the-worlds-first-antibiotic.

3. Kimball, “Second Century.”