

Commencement of the Class of 2016
June 4, 2016, Paramount Theatre, Aurora, Illinois
"Acceptance of the Class of 2016"
Dr. Jose M. Torres, President
Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy

Thank you, Dr. Dahleh. IMSA Board of Trustees and staff, parents and family members, ladies and gentlemen, and Class of 2016! Welcome! Before I formally accept the Class of 2016, I'd like to offer a few remarks.

Today is the culmination of years of hard work. Over the past few years, you've learned to live independently: to wash your clothes, manage your time, study on your own, get up early in the morning all by yourself (although I hear that a few of you are still working on this last one—your roommate or RC, or perhaps your mother called you this morning to wake you!).

Over the past three years, you persevered through disappointments—your first "B" or "C," a lost or ruined friendship, or a broken heart. Knowing all that you know now, I wonder what you would have said to your younger self three years ago.

Perhaps you would have said, ***don't sweat the small stuff and keep your perspective.***

You might have said, *Look, you're going to face some difficult challenging classes, you're going to have peers that are smarter than you, that work harder than you, that have better academic backgrounds than you.*

You might have said, *Don't give in to the temptation to compare yourself with others. Compare yourself to yourself—notice how much you will grow, mature, and learn. Above all, keep your perspective with what life may bring your way.*

The following letter speaks to this idea of keeping one's perspective, especially in the midst of temporary setbacks:

Dear Mom and Dad,

It has been three months since I left for college. I have been remiss in writing and I am very sorry for my thoughtlessness in not having written before. I will bring you up to date now, but before you read on, please sit down. You are not to read any further unless you are sitting down, okay.

Well then, I am getting along pretty well now. The skull fracture and the concussion I got when I jumped out of the window of my dormitory when it caught fire shortly after my arrival are pretty well healed by now. I only spent two weeks in the hospital and now I can see almost normally and only get those headaches once a day.

Fortunately, the fire in the dormitory and my jump was witnessed by an attendant at the gas station near the dorm, and he was the one who called the Fire Department and the ambulance. He also visited me at the hospital and since I had nowhere to live because of the burnt out dormitory, he was kind enough to invite me to share his apartment with him. It's really a basement room, but it's kind of cute. He is a very fine boy and we have fallen deeply in love and are planning to get married. We haven't set the exact date yet, but it will be before my pregnancy begins to show.

Yes, mother and dad, I am pregnant. I know how very much you are looking forward to being grandparents and I know you will welcome the baby and give it the same love and devotion and tender care you gave me when I was a child. The reason for the delay in our marriage is that my boyfriend has

some minor infection which prevents us from passing our premarital blood tests and I carelessly caught it from him. This will soon clear up with the penicillin injections I am now taking daily.

I know you will welcome him into the family with open arms. He is kind and although not well educated, he is ambitious. Although he is of a different race and religion than ours, I know that your oft-expressed tolerance will not permit you to be bothered by the fact that he is different. I am sure you will love him as I do.

Now that I have brought you up to date, I want to tell you there was no dormitory fire; I did not have a concussion or a skull fracture; I was not in the hospital; I am not pregnant; I am not engaged. I do not have syphilis, and there is no fiancé in my life. However, I am getting a D in science and an F in sociology; and I wanted you to see these marks in proper perspective.

Your loving daughter

This fictional letter makes the point of the importance of having perspective!

The second thing you might say to yourself is, ***Be curious, try new things, and don't be afraid of failure.***

You might have said, *Make sure to try out for extracurricular activities, start or join a club, or a sport that interests you; learn new stuff, and fail at something. For goodness sake, fail and learn from your failures! We learn more from failures than from our successes!*

I recently heard on NPR's Morning Edition, a segment called "When a Resume of Failures Becomes a Recipe for Success." The segment is based on the professional setbacks of Johannes Haushofer, a scientist and professor of psychology and Public Affairs at Princeton.

To encourage a friend who seemed dejected, Professor Haushofer put together his own resume of failures. On his way to getting a Ph.D. in neurobiology at Harvard and doing his postdoc at MIT, he didn't get in to the Ph.D. program in economics at the Stockholm School of Economics, the graduate course in medicine at Cambridge, the graduate course in medicine at UCL, etc. Ironically, his resume of failures has been a huge success!

According to Melanie Stefan, author of an article in *Nature* that inspired Haushofer, you will experience six failures for every success that you have. Therefore, your resume of failures will be six times longer than your regular resume.

Perhaps, based on the past three years, you would say to yourself, *fail at something and learn from it*. So class of 2016, (1) Don't sweat the small stuff: take the long view and develop perspective and (2) Be curious, try new things, fail at something, and learn from it. This is a good advice as you look forward to the next several years of your life.

Let me wrap up my remarks by thanking each of you for your commitment to IMSA.

Class of 2016 consider all that you have gained from IMSA and pay it forward. Give to the IMSA Fund so that future generations of Illinois students will also have the opportunities that you experienced at IMSA. And as you graduate from IMSA, engrave our mission statement in your heart and soul: "igniting and nurturing creative, ethical, scientific minds that advance the human condition."

Finally, some of you know that one of my favorite quotes from Dr. Leon Lederman is titled, "Enrolling in our Possibility."

The quote is in our program so I won't recite it, but I urge you to consider the phrase, "in some way **significantly influence life on our planet.**"

"Significantly influence life on our planet." Class of 2016: go and do likewise! Thank you.

And now, it brings me great pleasure and it is my great honor to accept the Class of 2016.

By the authority vested in me as President of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy and on behalf of the Board of Trustees and the State of Illinois, I accept these students as graduates of IMSA and proclaim them as worthy to receive their Diplomas and Medallions.

References

Letter adapted from: <http://www.snopes.com/college/pranks/letter.asp>

When a resume of failures becomes a recipe for success.

<http://www.npr.org/2016/04/29/476124547/when-a-resume-of-failures-becomes-a-recipe-for-success>

A CV of Failures, by Melanie Stefan

<http://www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/articles/10.1038/nj7322-467a>