

Fairfield University Undergraduate Commencement, May 19, 2013

Valedictory Address

By Kevin Reda, of Pleasantville N.Y., a politics and International Studies double major with a minor in economics

Father President, Members of the Board of Trustees, Honored Guests, Members of the Faculty and Administration, Family, Friends and Members of the Class of 2013, I am honored and humbled to have the opportunity to speak to you today. I want to take my time



For me, expressing emotion has been something that has shaped and defined me as a person. As an 11 year old, I remember crying on September 11th 2001 when my teacher told me a plane had hit my father's office building, and they weren't sure if he had survived. I have also cried every year since on that day when I mourn the loss of all those who died, and I thank God that my father survived and is in the audience with us today.

More recently, our community and our state have been moved to tears many times over the past year. From the devastating images of our beloved beaches after Hurricane Sandy, to the bone-chilling reality of the Sandy Hook shooting, we have watched as the world has mourned for our state, and we have mourned with them. We as a class have mourned as we lost classmates over the last four years, and although they cannot be here with us today, their memory is forever enshrined in our collective hearts.

While I think that these instances of sadness and loss are certainly a component of Valvano's message, there is more to this last part than simply sadness. Mathew's Gospel says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

The tragedy of Hurricane Sandy moved us, but the heroic images of rescue and recovery showed the power of the human will to persevere even through the darkest of days. Similarly, we were moved to tears by the candlelight vigils for Sandy Hook, both here on campus and across the country. These gatherings showed that one man's actions of hate cannot, and will not, overpower the innate goodness that God teaches all of us to approach each day with.

Most recently, I was moved by the outpouring of support from the Fairfield Community at my 5k race for M.S. M.S. awareness is a cause that is deeply personal to me, as my mother has courageously fought the disease for over a decade. Through that experience, I have learned that being a man or woman for others is not as much about the impact it has on us individually, but the ability of our selfless actions to move and inspire those that we are serving.

These last four years have changed us drastically, and over that same time the world has changed along with us. Hurricane Sandy reshaped our once familiar beaches, a reality that reminded us of the fragile nature of the world we live in

