

I am honored to be with you
today at your commencement
from one of the finest universities
in the world.

I never graduated from college.

Truth be told,
this is the closest I've ever gotten
to a college graduation.

Today I want to tell you
three stories from my life.

That's it.
No big deal.
Just three stories.

The first story
is about connecting the dots.

I dropped out of Reed College
after the first 6 months,
but then
stayed around as a drop-in
for another 18 months or so
before I really quit.
So why did I drop out?

It started before I was born.
My biological mother was a young,
unwed college graduate student,
and she decided
to put me up for adoption.

She felt very strongly
that I should be adopted
by college graduates,
so everything was all set for me
to be adopted at birth
by a lawyer and his wife.

Except that when I popped out
they decided at the last minute

that they really wanted a girl.

So my parents,
who were on a waiting list,
got a call in the middle of the night
asking:
“We have an unexpected baby boy;
do you want him?”
They said: “Of course.”

My biological mother later found out
that my mother
had never graduated from college
and that my father
had never graduated from high school.
She refused to sign
the final adoption papers.

She only relented a few months later
when my parents promised
that I would someday go to college.
This was the start in my life.

And 17 years later
I did go to college.
But I naively chose a college
that was almost
as expensive as Stanford,
and all of
my working-class parents' savings
were being spent
on my college tuition.

After six months,
I couldn't see the value in it.

I had no idea
what I wanted to do with my life
and no idea
how college was going
to help me figure it out.

And here
I was spending all of the money
my parents had saved their entire life.

So I decided to drop out
and trust that
it would all work out Okey.

It was pretty scary at the time,
but looking back
it was one of the best decisions
I ever made.

The minute I dropped out
I could stop taking the required classes
that didn't interest me,
and begin dropping in on the ones
that looked far more interesting.

It wasn't all romantic.
I didn't have a dorm room,
so I slept on the floor in friends' rooms,
I returned Coke bottles
for the 5¢ deposits
to buy food with,
and I would walk the 7 miles
across town every Sunday night
to get one good meal a week
at the Hare Krishna temple.
I loved it.

And much of what I stumbled into
by following my curiosity and intuition
turned out to be priceless later on.
Let me give you one example:

Reed College at that time
offered perhaps
the best calligraphy instruction
in the country.

Throughout the campus
every poster,
every label on every drawer,
was beautifully hand calligraphed.

Because I had dropped out
and didn't have to take the normal classes,
I decided to take a calligraphy class

to learn how to do this.

I learned about
serif and sans serif typefaces,
about varying the amount of space
between different letter combinations,
about what makes great typography great.

It was beautiful,
historical,
artistically subtle
in a way that science can't capture,
and I found it fascinating.

None of this had even a hope
of any practical application
in my life.

But 10 years later,
when we were designing
the first Macintosh computer,
it all came back to me.
And we designed it all into the Mac.

It was the first computer
with beautiful typography.

If I had never dropped in
on that single course in college,
the Mac would have never had
multiple typefaces
or proportionally spaced fonts.

And since Windows
just copied the Mac,
it's likely that
no personal computer
would have them.

If I had never dropped out,
I would have never dropped in
on this calligraphy class,
and personal computers might not
have the wonderful typography
that they do.

Of course it was impossible
to connect the dots looking forward
when I was in college.
But it was very, very clear
looking backward 10 years later.

Again, you can't
connect the dots looking forward;
you can only
connect them looking backward.
So you have to trust
that the dots will somehow
connect in your future.
You have to trust in something —
your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever.

This approach has never let me down,
and it has made all the difference
in my life.

My second story
is about love and loss.

I was lucky —
I found what I loved to do
early in life.
Woz and I started Apple
in my parents' garage
when I was 20.

We worked hard,
and in 10 years
Apple had grown from
just the two of us in a garage
into a \$2 billion company
with over 4,000 employees.

We had just released our finest creation —
the Macintosh —
a year earlier,
and I had just turned 30.
And then I got fired.

How can you get fired
from a company you started?

Well, as Apple grew
we hired someone
who I thought was very talented
to run the company with me,
and for the first year or so
things went well.

But then
our visions of the future began to diverge
and eventually
we had a falling out.
When we did,
our Board of Directors sided with him.

So at 30 I was out.
And very publicly out.

What had been
the focus of my entire adult life
was gone,
and it was devastating.

I really didn't know what to do
for a few months.
I felt that I had let
the previous generation of entrepreneurs
down —
that I had dropped the baton
as it was being passed to me.

I met with David Packard and Bob Noyce
and tried to apologize
for screwing up so badly.

I was a very public failure,
and I even thought about
running away from the valley.

But something slowly
began to dawn on me —
I still loved what I did.
The turn of events at Apple
had not changed that
one bit.

I had been rejected,
but I was still in love.
And so I decided to start over.

I didn't see it then,
but it turned out
that getting fired from Apple
was the best thing
that could have ever happened to me.
The heaviness of being successful
was replaced by
the lightness of being a beginner again,
less sure about everything.

It freed me
to enter one of the most creative periods
of my life.

During the next five years,
I started a company named NeXT,
another company named Pixar,
and fell in love with an amazing woman
who would become my wife.

Pixar went on to create
the world's first
computer animated feature film,
Toy Story,
and is now the most successful
animation studio in the world.

In a remarkable turn of events,
Apple bought NeXT,
I returned to Apple,
and the technology we developed at NeXT
is at the heart of
Apple's current renaissance.
And Laurene and I
have a wonderful family together.

I'm pretty sure
none of this would have happened
if I hadn't been fired from Apple.

It was awful tasting medicine,
but I guess the patient needed it.

Sometimes
life hits you in the head
with a brick.
Don't lose faith.

I'm convinced
that the only thing that kept me going
was that
I loved what I did.

You've got to find what you love.

And that is as true for your work
as it is for your lovers.

Your work is going to fill
a large part of your life,
and the only way to be truly satisfied
is to do
what you believe is great work.

And the only way to do great work
is to love what you do.

If you haven't found it yet,
keep looking.
Don't settle.

As with all matters of the heart,
you'll know when you find it.

And, like any great relationship,
it just gets better and better
as the years roll on.
So keep looking
until you find it.
Don't settle.

My third story
is about death.

When I was 17,
I read a quote
that went something like:
“If you live each day
as if it was your last,
someday
you’ll most certainly
be right.”

It made an impression on me,
and since then,
for the past 33 years,
I have looked in the mirror every morning
and asked myself:
“If today were the last day of my life,
would I want to do
what I am about to do today?”
And whenever the answer has been “No”
for too many days in a row,
I know
I need to change something.

Remembering that I’ll be dead soon
is the most important tool
I’ve ever encountered
to help me make the big choices in life.

Because almost everything —
all external expectations,
all pride,
all fear of embarrassment or failure —
these things just fall away
in the face of death,
leaving only
what is truly important.

Remembering that you are going to die
is the best way I know
to avoid the trap of thinking
you have something to lose.
You are already naked.
There is no reason
not to follow your heart.

About a year ago

I was diagnosed with cancer.
I had a scan
at 7:30 in the morning,
and it clearly showed
a tumor on my pancreas.
I didn't even know
what a pancreas was.

The doctors told me
this was almost certainly
a type of cancer that is incurable,
and that
I should expect to live
no longer than three to six months.

My doctor advised me to go home
and get my affairs in order,
which is doctor's code
for prepare to die.

It means
to try to tell your kids
everything you thought
you'd have the next 10 years to tell them
in just a few months.

It means
to make sure everything is buttoned up
so that it will be as easy as possible
for your family.

It means
to say your goodbyes.

I lived with that diagnosis all day.
Later that evening
I had a biopsy,
where they stuck
an endoscope down my throat,
through my stomach and into my intestines,
put a needle into my pancreas
and got a few cells from the tumor.

I was sedated,
but my wife, who was there,

told me that
when they viewed the cells under a
microscope
the doctors started crying
because it turned out to be
a very rare form of pancreatic cancer
that is curable with surgery.

I had the surgery
and I'm fine now.

This was the closest
I've been to facing death,
and I hope
it's the closest
I get for a few more decades.

Having lived through it,
I can now say this to you
with a bit more certainty
than when death was a useful
but purely intellectual concept:

No one wants to die.
Even people who want to go to heaven
don't want to die to get there.

And yet
death is the destination we all share.
No one has ever escaped it.
And that is as it should be,
because Death is very likely
the single best invention of Life.
It is Life's change agent.

It clears out the old
to make way for the new.
Right now the new is you,
but someday
not too long from now,
you will gradually become the old
and be cleared away.

Sorry to be so dramatic,
but it is quite true.

Your time is limited,
so don't waste it
living someone else's life.

Don't be trapped by dogma —
which is living with the results
of other people's thinking.

Don't let the noise of others' opinions
drown out your own inner voice.

And most important,
have the courage
to follow your heart and intuition.

They somehow already know
what you truly want to become.
Everything else is secondary.

(end of the third story.)

When I was young,
there was an amazing publication
called The Whole Earth Catalog,
which was one of the bibles of my generation.

It was created by a fellow
named Stewart Brand
not far from here in Menlo Park,
and he brought it to life
with his poetic touch.

This was in the late 1960s,
before personal computers
and desktop publishing,
so it was all made with typewriters,
scissors and Polaroid cameras.

It was sort of like Google in paperback form,
35 years before Google came along:
It was idealistic,
and overflowing with neat tools
and great notions.

Stewart and his team
put out several issues
of The Whole Earth Catalog,
and then
when it had run its course,
they put out a final issue.

It was the mid-1970s,
and I was your age.

On the back cover of their final issue
was a photograph
of an early morning country road,
the kind you might find yourself hitchhiking on
if you were so adventurous.

Beneath it were the words:
“Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.”

It was their farewell message
as they signed off.
Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.

And I have always wished that for myself.

And now,
as you graduate to begin anew,
I wish that for you.

Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.

Thank you all very much.