

## My “First” Lecture

The end.

Two words that flawlessly phrased my outlook on life.

I have always tended to view my life as a collection of dead ends—experiences that all lead to cliff’s edges. And reading the final chapters, final pages, and final words of the Harry Potter series. And flights that dragged me back home after a three-day trip to Disneyland. And goodbyes through car windows. It seemed that each of my experiences was a story and at one dreaded point I would have to suddenly discard all the characters, settings, and elation I felt, with the concluding “the end”. Every time this happened, I felt abandoned and unable to cope with the internal mourning of the sudden ending.

I began my senior year dreading the inevitable ending of graduation. On the first day of school I commented to my friends, “It’s our last, first day of highschool,”. From then on, it became a joke to make everything a “last”. (“It’s our last 108th day of highschool!”, “It’s our first, last math test of our senior year!”) And while it was all in good humor, something inside me fractured at every “last”. When people asked me if I was excited to graduate, it was like asking if I was ready to sing my last Sweet Caroline, or helplessly watch as all my friends turned their backs and walked around a corner forever. How do you think I would respond? Was I excited to reach the end of yet another rope and leave behind all the frayed edges? No. But still I continued to tread along my path to the looming ending.

And here we are. You and I made it all the way to the fateful end. And this is my “last” lecture. But I think I’ve come to the point where I’m ready to be done with “lasts”. This is now my “first” lecture. Let this lecture be a start for you and for me. Start by looking at your life from

the perspective of seeing every moment as a beginning. Look at periods as the punctuation to signify the start of a new sentence. Stop seeing your “to do” list as things to get done, but as things to get started. Look at the days on your paper calendar as days to experience, rather than to cross off. I want you to understand something I never did—the end of a rope is the same as the beginning. It's a choice on how we see it. I always saw it as an ending, when if I would have just turned around it would have become a beginning.

But then, how do I cope with walking away from Letherbys after dances, hearing Dallin Butler's voice boom over the intercom in the mornings, or packing my Toyota Tacoma full of my favorite people during lunch times? How do I leave Mrs. Cannon's indecisiveness, or Mrs. Houtons laugh, or the confidence I get when Mr. Simmons nods at me in the hallway and says, “Hey, dude.”? How do I say goodbye to the sack lunches my mom made me, or the dark gray walls of my bedroom? How do I leave Jean Val Jean, Aeneas, Victor Frankl, and Richard Parker? Do I just have to crumple as it all tumbles off the rocky ledge, watch as all the words melt from the pages, and see how all the people dissolve into the atmosphere?

No.

I've made my realization that this isn't an ending at all. I always thought that as soon as something reached its conclusion, I had to just let go of all the pieces and drop them in the sand. But it's not like that. Instead, I'm putting the people, the memories, and the lessons in the filing cabinet of my heart and moving forward. They will stay with me as long as I choose to let them. Jean Val Jean and Victor Frankle don't have to leave me because they are within me, and I don't end. I begin again and again. And so do you. Hang on to everything, not because you're afraid of it lurching away, but because you are going to use it to begin every moment forward.

So I hope you can now see, like I can, that life isn't one great accumulation of endings,  
but one great accumulation of beginnings.

The beginning.