

Thank you, thank you, President Faust, and Paul Choi, thank you so much.

It's an honor and a thrill to address this group of distinguished alumni and supportive friends and kvelling parents. We've all gathered to share in the joy of this day, so please join me in congratulating Harvard's Class of 2016.

I can remember my own college graduation, which is easy, since it was only 14 years ago. How many of you took 37 years to graduate? Because, like most of you, I began college in my teens, but sophomore year, I was offered my dream job at Universal Studios, so I dropped out. I told my parents if my movie career didn't go well, I'd re-enroll. It went all right. But eventually, I returned for one big reason. Most people go to college for an education, and some go for their parents, but I went for my kids. I'm the father of seven, and I kept insisting on the importance of going to college, but I hadn't walked the walk. So, in my fifties, I re-enrolled at Cal State — Long Beach, and I earned my degree. I just have to add: It helped that they gave me course credit in paleontology for the work I did on Jurassic Park. That's three units for Jurassic Park, thank you. Well I left college because I knew exactly what I wanted to do, and some of you know, too — but some of you don't. Or maybe you thought you knew but are now questioning that choice. Maybe you're sitting there trying to figure out how to tell your parents that you want to be a doctor and not a comedy writer.

Well, what you choose to do next is what we call in the movies the "character-defining moment." Now, these are moments you're very familiar with, like in the last "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," when Rey realizes the force is with her. Or Indiana Jones choosing mission over fear by jumping over a pile of snakes. Now in a two-hour movie, you get a handful of character-defining moments, but in real life, you face them every day. Life is one strong, long string of character-defining moments. And I was lucky that at 18 I

knew what I exactly wanted to do. But I didn't know who I was. How could I? And how could any of us? Because for the first 25 years of our lives, we are trained to listen to voices that are not our own. Parents and professors fill our heads with wisdom and information, and then employers and mentors take their place and explain how this world really works. And usually these voices of authority make sense, but sometimes, doubt starts to creep into our heads and into our hearts. And even when we think, "that's not quite how I see the world," it's kind of easier to just to nod in agreement and go along, and for a while, I let that going along define my character. Because I was repressing my own point of view, because like in that Nilsson song, "Everybody was talkin' at me, so I couldn't hear the echoes of my mind." And at first, the internal voice I needed to listen to was hardly audible, and it was hardly noticeable — kind of like me in high school.

But then I started paying more attention, and my intuition kicked in. And I want to be clear that your intuition is different from your conscience. They work in tandem, but here's the distinction: Your conscience shouts, "here's what you should do," while your intuition whispers, "here's what you could do." Listen to that voice that tells you what you could do. Nothing will define your character more than that. Because once I turned to my intuition, and I tuned into it, certain projects began to pull me into them, and others, I turned away from. And up until the 1980s, my movies were mostly, I guess what you could call "escapist." And I don't dismiss any of these movies — not even 1941. Not even that one. And many of these early films reflected the values that I cared deeply about, and I still do. But I was in a celluloid bubble, because I'd cut my education short, my worldview was limited to what I could dream up in my head, not what the world could teach me.

But then I directed "The Color Purple." And this one film opened my eyes to experiences that I never could have imagined, and yet were all too real. This story was filled with deep pain and deeper truths,

like when Shug Avery says, “Everything wants to be loved.” My gut, which was my intuition, told me that more people needed to meet these characters and experience these truths. And while making that film, I realized that a movie could also be a mission. I hope all of you find that sense of mission. Don’t turn away from what’s painful. Examine it. Challenge it. My job is to create a world that lasts two hours. Your job is to create a world that lasts forever. You are the future innovators, motivators, leaders and caretakers. And the way you create a better future is by studying the past.

“Jurassic Park” writer Michael Crichton, who graduated from both this college and this medical school, liked to quote a favorite professor of his who said that if you didn’t know history, you didn’t know anything. You were a leaf that didn’t know it was part of a tree. So history majors: Good choice, you’re in great shape...Not in the job market, but culturally. The rest of us have to make a little effort. Social media that we’re inundated and swarmed with is about the here and now. But I’ve been fighting and fighting inside my own family to get all my kids to look behind them, to look at what already has happened. Because to understand who they are is to understand who we were, and who their grandparents were, and then, what this country was like when they emigrated here. We are a nation of immigrants at least for now.

So to me, this means we all have to tell our own stories. We have so many stories to tell. Talk to your parents and your grandparents, if you can, and ask them about their stories. And I promise you, like I have promised my kids, you will not be bored. And that’s why I so often make movies based on real-life events. I look to history not to be didactic, cause that’s just a bonus, but I look because the past is filled with the greatest stories that have ever been told. Heroes and villains are not literary constructs, but they’re at the heart of all history.

And again, this is why it’s so important to listen to your internal whisper. It’s the same one that compelled Abraham Lincoln and

Oskar Schindler to make the correct moral choices. In your defining moments, do not let your morals be swayed by convenience or expediency. Sticking to your character requires a lot of courage. And to be courageous, you're going to need a lot of support. And if you're lucky, you have parents like mine. I consider my mom my lucky charm. And when I was 12 years old, my father handed me a movie camera, the tool that allowed me to make sense of this world. And I am so grateful to him for that. And I am grateful that he's here at Harvard, sitting right down there. My dad is 99 years old, which means he's only one year younger than Widener Library. But unlike Widener, he's had zero cosmetic work. And dad, there's a lady behind you, also 99, and I'll introduce you after this is over, okay? But look, if your family's not always available, there's backup. Near the end of "It's a Wonderful Life" — you remember that movie, "It's a Wonderful Life"? Clarence the Angel inscribes a book with this: "No man is a failure who has friends." And I hope you hang on to the friendships you've made here at Harvard. And among your friends, I hope you find someone you want to share your life with.

I imagine some of you in this yard may be a tad cynical, but I want to be unapologetically sentimental. I spoke about the importance of intuition and how there's no greater voice to follow. That is, until you meet the love of your life. And this is what happened when I met and married Kate, and that became the greatest character-defining moment of my life. Love, support, courage, intuition. All of these things are in your hero's quiver, but still, a hero needs one more thing: A hero needs a villain to vanquish. And you're all in luck. This world is full of monsters. And there's racism, homophobia, ethnic hatred, class hatred, there's political hatred, and there's religious hatred. As a kid, I was bullied — for being Jewish. This was upsetting, but compared to what my parents and grandparents had faced, it felt tame. Because we truly believed that anti-Semitism was fading. And we were wrong. Over the last two years, nearly 20,000 Jews have left Europe to find higher ground. And earlier this year, I was at the Israeli embassy when President Obama stated

the sad truth. He said: “We must confront the reality that around the world, anti-Semitism is on the rise. We cannot deny it.”

My own desire to confront that reality compelled me to start, in 1994, the Shoah Foundation. And since then, we’ve spoken to over 53,000 Holocaust survivors and witnesses in 63 countries and taken all their video testimonies. And we’re now gathering testimonies from genocides in Rwanda, Cambodia, Armenia and Nanking. Because we must never forget that the inconceivable doesn’t happen — it happens frequently. Atrocities are happening right now. And so we wonder not just, “When will this hatred end?” but, “How did it begin?”

Now, I don’t have to tell a crowd of Red Sox fans that we are wired for tribalism. But beyond rooting for the home team, tribalism has a much darker side. Instinctively and maybe even genetically, we divide the world into “us” and “them.” So the burning question must be: How do all of us together find the “we?” How do we do that? There’s still so much work to be done, and sometimes I feel the work hasn’t even begun. And it’s not just anti-Semitism that’s surging — Islamophobia’s on the rise, too. Because there’s no difference between anyone who is discriminated against, whether it’s the Muslims, or the Jews, or minorities on the border states, or the LGBT community — it is all big one hate.

And to me, and, I think, to all of you, the only answer to more hate is more humanity. We gotta repair — we have to replace fear with curiosity. “Us” and “them” — we’ll find the “we” by connecting with each other. And by believing that we’re members of the same tribe. And by feeling empathy for every soul — even Yalies.

My son graduated from Yale, thank you ...

But make sure this empathy isn’t just something that you feel. Make it something you act upon. That means vote. Peaceably protest. Speak up for those who can’t and speak up for those who may be

shouting but aren't being hard. Let your conscience shout as loud as it wants if you're using it in the service of others.

And as an example of action in service of others, you need to look no further than this Hollywood-worthy backdrop of Memorial Church. Its south wall bears the names of Harvard alumni — like President Faust has already mentioned — students and faculty members, who gave their lives in World War II. All told, 697 souls, who once tread the ground where stand now, were lost. And at a service in this church in late 1945, Harvard President James Conant — which President Faust also mentioned — honored the brave and called upon the community to “reflect the radiance of their deeds.”

Seventy years later, this message still holds true. Because their sacrifice is not a debt that can be repaid in a single generation. It must be repaid with every generation. Just as we must never forget the atrocities, we must never forget those who fought for freedom. So as you leave this college and head out into the world, continue please to ‘reflect the radiance of their deeds,’ or as Captain Miller in *Saving Private Ryan* would say, “Earn this.”

And please stay connected. Please never lose eye contact. This may not be a lesson you want to hear from a person who creates media, but we are spending more time looking down at our devices than we are looking in each other's eyes. So, forgive me, but let's start right now. Everyone here, please find someone's eyes to look into. Students, and alumni and you too, President Faust, all of you, turn to someone you don't know or don't know very well. They may be standing behind you, or a couple of rows ahead. Just let your eyes meet. That's it. That emotion you're feeling is our shared humanity mixed in with a little social discomfort.

But, if you remember nothing else from today, I hope you remember this moment of human connection. And I hope you all had a lot of that over the past four years. Because today you start down the

path of becoming the generation on which the next generation stands. And I've imagined many possible futures in my films, but you will determine the actual future. And I hope that it's filled with justice and peace.

And finally, I wish you all a true, Hollywood-style happy ending. I hope you outrun the T. rex, catch the criminal and for your parents' sake, maybe every now and then, just like E.T.: Go home. Thank you.