



Dan Miller, Graduation 2023 Speech

Families, friends, classmates, faculty, staff, alumni, dog-walkers within the sound of my voice, and of course, the very-soon-to-be-graduates in the class of 2023, welcome to Urban's 55th graduation ceremony. It's fitting for us to be together in this lovely and *particular* setting after some time away because, like all of *us*, the historic Stern Grove has found redemption and renaissance after some very challenging years, only to emerge into a bright future with, perhaps, fading reminders of the resilience required to reach this moment.

And it is a moment – a moment for us all to hit pause, to breathe in and slowly exhale, to still our busy minds, to be, as they say, present. I will confess, before I moved to California 5 years ago now, I didn't say things like "be present," – in Rhode Island they just say "pay attention!" Regardless, as I started to put together my remarks for this morning, I was reminded of Jackson Galley's senior art project – this well before I knew he'd be chosen as one of our speakers this morning. Jackson's piece was a study of how we experience the passage of time, and I was moved by an especially eloquent and thought-provoking sentence in his artist's statement: He wrote: "Time is the fabric that *weaves* the past, present, and future *together*, creating the story of our lives." I interpret this mean that the passage of time is not linear, and, case in point, as we gather here this morning we celebrate a *convergence*, a *weaving* together – of nostalgia, celebration and anticipation. And I would submit to you that those three temporal forces acting in unison, can actually make time itself stand still, at least for the duration of this ceremony. And if this feels too metaphysically ambitious, just turning off our cell phones is a good place to start. (Actually, please turn off your cell phones.)

Parents and guardians, I know for many of you this proud day is also a sentimental and nostalgic one, as memories resolve into snapshots from your child's evolution: an infant in a car-seat; a toddler begging for one more bedtime story; nervous first days of elementary school when your parting hug made a world of difference – an awkward middle schooler; on second thought, let's just *skip* middle school – and on to these past four years when an adolescent morphed before your eyes into a young adult, in both emotionally charged slow motion, and in an astonishing blur that brings us to today. Please know that your sacrifice and your partnership; your patience; your energy, and the vulnerability that comes with your unwavering love of your children are all recognized and celebrated this morning.

To Urban faculty and staff – from coaches to security guards, receptionists to administrators, facilities and kitchen workers to classroom teachers – many of you are gathered here to bear humble *witness*. But you are not mere witnesses. You are *essential* to

this milestone. Your dedication, minute to minute over years, your talent, your creativity and diligence define you, nowhere more so than between March of 2020 to the fall of 2021 – when the quality of your effort was nothing short of heroic – and since then as you nurtured this group of students past recovery, into stability and on through to readiness for the next chapter of their lives. Only down the road, when these talented young people are in college, on the job, in their community, living their lives – only then will the *full* measure of your gift be realized. Their accomplishment is yours to share, and we thank you.

But soon-to-be-alumni, this is your party, and I save a final institutional, but also personal appreciation for you – a group of students who, like me, arrived in the pre-pandemic fall of 2019, innocent to what the world held in store. As I wrote in your yearbooks, it is worth noting the particular challenge of living something you’ve dreamed of, and worked for – only to have it taken away by forces beyond your control, and beyond anyone’s ability to understand or explain. To watch you emerge from that experience – your growth and accomplishments, your reclaimed optimism – has been a joy, and frankly a relief, though I recognize that we have all been changed in ways we may not yet even fully understand. I *do* know that any history of the Urban school will need to include the critical role played by the 99 students in the calls off 2023 in sustaining our culture and priorities, and providing essential leadership when the school needed it most. For this and so much more, we thank you, we congratulate you, and we will miss you.

A few notes about our ceremony this morning:

As you’ll see on your program, we have 3 student speakers – Julian Infield, Jackson Galley, and Marina Munoz Ledo Farre, and one faculty speaker – science teacher Geoff Ruth – all were chosen by the students in the class. You’ll also hear performances by the Senior members of the Urban Singers, and Chamber Orchestra and the Advanced Jazz Band. We will proceed without interruption until after the presentation of diplomas. Enjoy.

