

“SAFER HARBORS”

Speech by David Eltz, 2018 Undergraduate Commencement Speaker
for Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

Whisking headlong from safer harbors
Trotted the academics, sons and daughters
We entrained ships bound for tempestuous waters
Borne by the spirit of the day

Storms tossed our vessels, turned us round
And chilled and thrilled our lives new-found
But on we ventured, far from ground
Borne by the spirit of the day

A few were displaced along our way
Some gone, some frittered afar, astray
But we grew close, all those that stayed
Borne by the spirit of the day

And twixt tumult and torpor we found identities
Tempted away by baseless obscenities
But in truth to our course, we found serenities
Borne by the spirit of the day

Until once more – years later – to shore returned
With hearts that for other lands no longer yearned
From shoals far off, we brought them home and
learned
Borne by the spirit of the day,
That we carried with us the spirit of the day.

Greetings, President Hawkinson, Provost Zayaitz, Board of Governors Chair Emeritus Pichini, members of the KU Council of Trustees, faculty, staff, friends, family, alumni... and the Class of 2018!

The process of speaking at commencement - of standing in front of all your peers, professors, and parents and praying that you don't word your fumble order - is actually very simple. The Center for Academic Success and Achievement offers a form, and it asks for four things: a transcript, a resume, letters of reference, and a three-to-five minute speech that captures the "spirit of the day."

Three of these things are easy enough to come by, especially if you have maintained good relations with professors. That last one, though... I gravitated around it, turning it over and over in my mind, trying to answer just what the "spirit of the day" was. Of course, it literally

meant a speech that commemorates this whole emotional smorgasbord, but what if it were tangible, something to literally go out and capture? I spent so long wracking my brain on it that an idea struck like lightning, and inspired the short poem, "Safer Harbors," that I shared with you just a moment ago.

College is a capsizing lifeboat on a stormy sea, rife with unforeseen challenges. To draw an analogy from my own experience, it is like being asked to sing the National Anthem at a minor league hockey game, and rehearsing the Star-Spangled Banner diligently, but only on the ice, with the arena lights down and spotlights on, with cameras rolling, hearing... "and here to sing the Canadian National Anthem..."

If Kutztown University has taught me anything, it is humility. We have experienced the greatest jubilation and the deepest melancholy on and around this campus

– and many of us have been molded by the crucible into leaders and thinkers and doers.

Over the past four years, I've been student and teacher, follower and leader, dependent and provider. In the tumult of college, in the past year alone, I have taken charge of two organizations on campus, gotten the chance to sing in Carnegie Hall, and lost two parents, my most avid and earnest supporters, to cancer. And in the interval, Kutztown's clock tower, or the angry chicken if you prefer, watched on without passing judgement.

My journey with Kutztown has given me the humility to acknowledge a few monolithic facts. I understand that the family that sent me away to learn won't be the one receiving me when I return. The seats I once expected to be full of parents and grandparents are not empty, though - instead, they are filled by my brothers in Fraternity, and my sisters in Education and

English. The home I left behind no longer feels quite so much a home as those leather chairs in the Bear's Den where we wasted hours between classes, or the MediaScape room in the library where we watched movies like the Santa Claus instead of working on our Unit projects, or even the vacant dorms above Old Main that we certainly never went exploring after dark.

And, while this campus may be mine, I have as much of a commitment to it as it has to me.

All this only means we have made Kutztown our new safe harbor. Now, armed with four years' experience and a fearlessness instilled by our alma mater, we are called back out to those stormy seas. It's time again to shed the safety and security of this campus where stately trees bend and nature's glories shine, time to go and explore the uncharted waters and leave childhood behind. Let us go fearlessly in the wrong direction,

hoping and knowing that Kutztown, and her daughters and sons, will be there to redress us when we are led astray.

If I have given back one iota of what Kutztown has given me – with all its trials, tribulations, and triumphs – my Sacrifices will have been worth it. I've had the pleasure of singing with my brothers of Phi Mu Alpha at the inauguration of Dr. Hawkinson and represented my school at a nationwide conference in Indiana. We've shared in exalted experiences: this school has allowed us to do huge things, but it has humbled us, as well. I've come to Schaeffer Auditorium late at night to set up a podium. It was a task which I didn't fully appreciate at the time, but now realize the truth - that it has had an impact on hundreds of soon-to-be Kutztown students, and not-quite-so-soon-to-be Kutztown graduates.

As we step onto this stage and accept the symbolic culmination of everything we have done in the past four years, we must acknowledge that we answer to more than a desire to go out into the world; instead, it is a matter of loyalty. We have learned her lessons and obeyed her rules, but to echo Clyde Lytle, author of our Alma Mater, we promise to ever love our school, and to spread her fame.

It is time for us to complete this momentous task, and bring Kutztown's glorious name – and her daughters and sons – to all the world. Let us go on and ever upward, humbly but with heads held high, into our new world – carrying with us the spirit of the day.

Thank you, and congratulations!