

Overlooked Marbles

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Thank God we are outside. Dr. Sowell, I apologize for this, but I cannot pass on this opportunity to take a picture. Please don't beat me with that mace. I had to do it.



Juniata College Commencement, 2014. Photo by the author.

Hello, Class of 2014, family, friends, respected faculty, administration, facilities, J.C.P.D., trustees, birds, and squirrels. I guess if this speech were one word it would be “Congratulations.” For better or for worse, it’s a little longer. I hope that you can remember back to last week’s Spring Awards Convocation, and you remember the profound advice that Dr. Belle Tuten gave. Now that was a speech you should have taken home with you, maybe as a bookmark or something. One thing in particular that keeps jumping out at me from that speech, and I guess all royalties go to Dr. Jim Tuten, is, “Never be as funny as you can be.” Well, there goes at least half of my material.

Today I want to bring back a Juniata tradition. Not quite Mountain Day, or Storming of the Arch — it is pretty cool that President Troha participated and got leveled a few times. Typical freshman. This tradition started a few JC presidents back and involves the students giving the President a gift before we receive our diplomas. That’s right, @juniataprztroha, today you get something, too.

Class, I want you to look at what you’ve got in your hand. For those of you in the crowd who are now lost, here is what we have. What appears to be a green glass broken marble is much more, and you

will soon hear why. These marbles once belonged to a booming fiberglass factory in town. It was shut down and moved out and then rebought by a man who, as a result, resurrected some sixty-five jobs here in Huntingdon. This factory can take a pound of marbles and make a piece of fiberglass stretching from here to State College. This material is then eventually made into things like car fenders and bus seats and is even used inside of your iPhone and in the control panel in an airplane. You see, the glass coming out of this factory is high quality and very important in our day-to-day lives.

This glass that you hold, though, will not be important. By the time it arrived here in Huntingdon, the plant decided it would not become fiberglass. Something is wrong either physically or chemically that won't produce the quality they look for. The next stop for these unwanted, overlooked, or "misfit marbles," if you will, would be the landfill.

Now if you've never seen the pile that consists of millions of these marbles I encourage you to check it out. It's at the end of 15th Street near the train tracks. The pile and the hundreds of barrels filled with these things will capture your imagination. There has got to be something else, something better for these than marbles than the landfill. My dad likes the way they feel on his feet walking on them. He calls it "therapeutic." My mom has made a pretty cool lamp out of them. Many people in town, including the Clarksons, use them in the bottom of their planters for something relevant. I'm not yet into plants so I'm not exactly sure what, drainage or something. My nephew thinks they are Tootles' lost marbles from *Peter Pan*. Most people, however, see a pile of broken marbles waiting for the landfill. Don't be most people.

Throughout life, Juniataans, you will find happiness. You will find love. I hope that you work hard and have fun because you've done a heck of a job here, so why stop now — but realize that people anywhere will work hard and have fun. My hope for you, Juniataans, and for you, President Troha and everyone else listening, my hope is that you see the potential in things in life that all others overlook. In that quality, my friends, you will find success.

These marbles and us, we have quite a bit in common. They are all different in their imperfections, but those imperfections are what brought them together. Likewise our differences, imperfections, and all the qualities that make us unique have brought us together at Juniata College. See the potential in each other that others may overlook.

Pretty soon you will be faced with picking your own "marbles" of life — a job, employees, a partner, a home. See the potential in every opportunity in life. Bring out the best in everyone around you; they'll love you for it.

Finally, I want to say that the moment you stand up and leave today, the seat is empty for someone else to sit in. You are sitting here today because of some obvious reasons and you need to thank them — your family, your gods, your professors, yourself, and of course your friends. You are also sitting

here for a reason we often forget — because a complete stranger gave to Juniata so that you had this opportunity. Now someone taking your empty seat is going to enjoy some of the same experiences that Juniata College has to offer, but you can make it even better. The best way to thank those complete strangers who did so much for you is to give back yourself. There may be no way to pay those donors back, but pay it forward by giving to Juniata. We already are off to an amazing start by raising the most money in senior class history for our class gift, the outdoor classroom. Keep up the good work, people.

So come on up one at a time — please wait until Dr. Westcott has called your name — and leave behind this marble as a symbol of you, imperfect but now never overlooked because Juniata brought out your potential. Congratulations, class. Thank you, Juniata. Always see the potential in things in life that others will overlook.