

A LIFE QUIXOTIC

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Good afternoon, CCA! Today is a joyful day. No screens, no webcams, just our hearts and minds in unison.

To our friends and family watching: Thank you for your love and support, and all of the snacks.

To our staff and the student workers who supported our programs: Thank you for always having our backs.

And to our esteemed faculty: Thank you for the wisdom and valuable time you've bestowed upon this phenomenal graduating class of 2022.

Our CCA journey began in the midst of great uncertainty. We were all hustling and scrambling to figure out how Zoom worked, how class worked, how life worked.

For me, once the initial wave of shock came and went, I felt oddly inspired. I was hacking things together, sharing quick tips with my classmates. I considered it my duty and purpose to ensure that my class and I did not merely survive, but that we thrived in these circumstances.

There are many words that capture this, but the one word that comes to my mind is "quixotic." That's 26 points in Scrabble, a baller move, and it means "to be exceedingly idealistic."

The word "quixotic" comes from Don Quixote. Those books have been around for over 500 years, but they are still the prototype for the modern novel. And there have been countless adaptations, including an orchestral version that just happens to be playing at the Symphony this weekend, right down the street.

Don Quixote is a nobleman who reads so many tales of knighthood and chivalry that he sets out on his own fantastic and entirely fictional quests.

He performed knight's errands for no money, so he was effectively the world's first freelancer. (Emphasis on "lancer." En garde!)

Don Quixote's ideals and romanticism can be overwhelming, like when he's tilting at windmills thinking that they're giants, or charging at sheep that he mistook for an army. After a while, you're not sure if he's on something or if he's on to something.

But I think that's what makes him special. I genuinely admire him for that. As students, we too have read many tales. We too are about to embark on our own fantastic quests. And we've also asked ourselves: "Am I on something? Or am I on to something?"

On the flip side of all the quixotic moments, we also had gentle and deliberate reality checks from others, from our systems, and mostly from ourselves. I call them our "Sancho Panza" moments.

Sancho is Don Quixote's squire, and while he doesn't have a game-ending Scrabble word based on his name, Sancho Panza was an essential foil to Don Quixote.

Don's headstrong idealism and Sancho's humble and witty pragmatism were constantly at odds, but they also found genuine joy in each other's company.

Those two would have been the perfect guests for Sydney Goldstein, the radio legend who created this space, a space that's now named after her.

She's credited with creating the two-people-on-stage-in-conversation format that many shows have since followed, and I can just picture Don over there, Sancho over here. No gallantry, no heroics, just appreciation and understanding through a genuine connection.

My challenge to this graduating class of 2022 is to maintain those connections with each other and with the world, exploring the liminal spaces between the Don Quixote moments of brilliant self-realization and the Sancho Panza moments of modest advocacy and inquiry.

It's tempting to think of change as something "out there," in the great beyond, outside of ourselves. As we disembark from the house and from the Nave, let us take a note from Sancho Panza and remember that the greatest change happens when we look inward with compassion.

No one could have imagined our education here at CCA, which makes us the ideal stewards for quixotically imagining what comes next.

We may find windmills. But together, we will all stand like giants.

Thank you.