

One of my favorite quotes that I live by to this very day is, "It is not the strong nor the fast nor the smart that survive; it is those who are willing to change." Oftentimes, I see rigidity confused with strength, which is not always the case. I've seen buildings get ripped from their foundation with tornadoes and tsunamis, yet palm trees can sway past it all. All this to say, it is okay not to know things. Learning doesn't end with high school or college; these are just the sources from which we learn how to learn. We figure out what works best for us and push through what doesn't. Still it's important to struggle, to know your weaknesses and how to grow past them.

I saw this even more in the Culinary Arts program, where, for our major project, we had to create a menu. Both groups had fairly complicated menus, but our group was okay with the chef completely removing elements for the sake of simplicity. In order to grow, you have to understand that it won't be easy, and you have to be okay with branching out. By the end of the journey, you will be able to look back and see how far you've blossomed, like this year's commencement theme, "how the plant has become a tree."

These past 32 weeks have been some of the most challenging of my entire life. And I won't lie—seeing students who couldn't adapt get torn from their foundation was heartbreaking, but, looking back, I wouldn't change a thing.

A long time ago, I lost something significant to me; the people around me said to toughen up and that other people have it worse. And they were right, so that's what I did. I got so good at being numb that, at a certain point, I couldn't tell whether I was being honest or not. And if I've learned anything from my younger self, it's okay to cry. You shouldn't have to keep it all inside. At the end of the day, you should always love yourself and the people who matter most. And the world is a better place for having you in it. Thank you.