

Adelphi Commencement 2009

“Life Happens”

By: Atara Stern

Good Morning fellow graduates, esteemed professors, families and friends!

If you told me two-and-a-half years ago that I would be up here today as a student representative, I would have told you to have your crystal ball checked. And if I go back just a little further, I would not have believed that I would even be enrolled in a graduate degree program. None of us have a crystal ball—at least not a reliable one. The future is always unknown. Today, at this pivotal moment in our lives, we look ahead with a dizzying swirl of emotions: pride, gratitude, more than a little relief, and primary among them, I *hope*, is hope.

Hope, optimism, confidence, borne of our excellent training – and also, of course, a healthy dose of concern, anxiety, even a measure of fear. Will I land a good job? Will I be able to apply my training in a meaningful way? Again, the future is always unknown. And this is exciting. And this is frightening—especially today, when our world is in such turmoil.

The future is unknown because it is *ours* to shape. As a clinician, if I have but one single message to impart to my clients, it would most certainly be the belief that we can, indeed we *must*, guide our own destinies. Things happen, *life happens*, so much of it seemingly random and out of our control, and yet who else but us is responsible for the course of our lives? If we are to *direct* our future, to fulfill our unique path in life, whatever our chosen field, then there must be some *critical element* which will empower us, each of us, to do so.

As I mentioned, I would never have foreseen being accepted to grad school just a short time ago—especially to such a highly-regarded and competitive program as ours. I *had* intended to become a Speech Pathologist *someday*, but—life happens. As a mother of three young children, going back to school seemed an unrealistic dream—I had completed my Bachelor’s degree a dozen years before and I would be competing with elite students for a very select spot in Adelphi’s superb Speech Language Pathology program. I can

call it prudent planning now, but it was an impulse which was probably something closer to a whim which compelled me to apply. Someone, for whatever reason, saw something in me, and took a *chance* on me; had *faith* in me. And through the hard courses, and through the *even harder* courses, it was this faith in me that gave me the courage—to have faith in myself.

As a Speech Language Pathologist, I can tell you that there is no better feeling, no greater affirmation that my education has been worthwhile, than that moment when you can feel your client about to communicate what is right there—on the tip of the tongue—just needing your affirmation:

Don't be afraid.

You can do it.

I have faith in you.

So of course we don't know what the future will hold. We leave here empowered with outstanding and hard-won training, each one of us with grand plans. Some will come to be, some may not, and still others will happen which we can't even conceive of today. Life happens.

I stand here today in celebration, as each of us does, because someone somewhere along the way put their *faith* in me, took a *chance* on me. Perhaps it was a relatively minor gesture at the time, but every person I will help for the rest of my career will be helped because of *that one gesture*.

We don't know how big the result can be from one small chance we take. Life happens. When it throws us a chance to build a positive future, let us be *strong* enough, *courageous* enough, to take that chance. May we have *faith* in one another, and the *courage* to maintain this faith, for *this* is that *critical element* which will define our lives, and the lives of those we touch.

Most of all, *as* life happens, I wish you the faith in yourself you will need to *make your life happen!*

Congratulations!