

Twenty six years ago, I graduated from High School.

I had big poofy hair - really. I really wanted straighter hair. Now I'd just settle for hair. Computers back then were switches and LEDs. Today a switch and an LED is a lamp. I wasn't very athletic. Since then I've trained for, and run a marathon; and qualified as a Naval Aircrewman - which required swimming a mile, treading water in flight gear, and running an obstacle course ... among other strange feats of physical endurance.

And things have changed a lot.

If you're like me, you will never notice that you're getting any older.

Everybody else will get older, but you will always feel the same - at least inside.

That's because you will always be who you are.

But, you will always be able to change who you are.

If I've learned anything in twenty-six years ... besides Calculus, Chemistry, Physics, Mandarin, Philosophy, or Theology ... I would distill it into these four things:

1. Smile. It takes fewer muscles and it releases endorphins. So, smile, even if you don't feel like it - especially if you don't feel like it. Smile at people - even strangers.
2. Laugh. Learn to laugh just for the fun of it. Laugh when you're happy. Laugh and be joyful. Laugh at yourself - a lot. And laugh with your friends.
3. Dream. Go outside of the ordinary. Don't get stuck being normal. Not that you should try too hard to be ab-normal - but why not be supra-normal? Don't be mediocre. Go beyond what's expected.
4. Be thankful. Thank people for doing what they do - even if it seems trivial. Gratitude is a seriously under-utilized natural resource. Say, 'thank you' - and try to mean it.

The scary thing is - that I don't remember ever being told any of these things. Maybe I'm just thick-headed, and somebody told me - or maybe I thought I knew better, and didn't hear them.

Now, I don't think this is any sort of amazing discovery. But by smiling, laughing, dreaming, and thanking ... just about any kind of situation is improved.

So whether you're going to be the number-one soccer mom ... or if you're going to be the first woman to stand on Mars. Or if you want to be the president of your own multinational corporation ... or if you're content to live in a van down by the river.

Do it with a smile. Be joyful and laugh. Never stop dreaming. And always be grateful.

In Mandarin the proverb that summarizes Chris's story about the horse is:

塞翁失马. 焉知非福. (Sài wēng shī mǎ . Yān zhī fēi fú .)

Which literally means "Old man lose horse. How know not lucky?"

But a better summary of it's meaning is "A blessing in disguise." You go forth into the rest of your life with the blessing of your parents, your teachers, your pastor, and your friends. But make sure that whatever disguise you wear - that you are a blessing to anyone and everyone you run into. God bless you, Class of 2011!