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## Senior Class Speaker 95th Commencement Address

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# CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

**Commencement 2013**  
**Remarks by the Senior Class Speaker**  
**Amy Evelyn Cheetham '13**  
**May 19, 2013**

Five months ago, I found passion. It was 4:30 in the morning and I was at the base of a mountain in Chilean Patagonia. I was exhausted from two days of hiking and from a night spent tossing and turning on the hard ground. I woke up in the dark to my tent mate furiously shaking me awake. "Wake up, wake up, we're going to miss it!" she whispered. I crawled out of my sleeping bag, threw on every piece of clothing I owned, and headed off half-running, half-scrambling up the dark, steep trail. After forty-five minutes, we arrived - sweaty, panting, shaking. We were at the edge of a green lagoon surrounded by towering granite spires. Adrenaline filled my body, I couldn't sit still. Though I didn't know it, I had been waiting for this moment for years. Gone were the thoughts of the biting cold and of my exhaustion. I was fixated completely on the coming sunrise. As the first golden ray of sunshine struck the cold, jagged peaks of the mountains before me, I lost my breath.

As I stand here before you now, I find myself breathless once again. I am breathless as I attempt to impart a jumbled smattering of the wisdom I have gained upon you, a community I hold so close to my heart. At the base of that mountain just five months ago, as I reveled in the beauty of nature, I was humbled. Humbled by the beauty in the world, by the sheer vastness of nature, but mostly, humbled by the journey that brought me there.

While the journey up that trail was a sweaty, uphill battle against rocks, wind, and the biting cold, the real journey started four years earlier. It started as we unpacked our cars in the pouring rain, as we ferried our possessions into our new homes, and as we left our comfort zones and entered a new phase of our lives.

With this new phase came freedom. And with that freedom, we soon realized, came both responsibility and opportunity. Our parents didn't wake us up for class anymore and weren't there to make sure we did our homework. But when we did manage to make it to class on time, we were challenged by our peers and our professors to think harder, read more deeply, and write with purpose. We opened our minds to new ideas and developed new interests.

For me, as I reveled in that newfound freedom, I was flexing my intellectual muscles. I was growing. I was shaping my identity. Four years ago, when asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would have responded that I did not know, in fact that I had no idea. But today, I

answer confidently that I want to be a tree-hugging, world-traveling, photograph-taking, NY Times-reading, trail-running, TEDx-loving, bilingual New Yorker, for now.

Over these four years we've grown. As freshmen we shuffled awkwardly down the tree-lined path that leads to Fanning, only to discover that the doors are, in fact, fake. Now, as seniors, we discuss the root causes and deeper meanings of the fake doors. As freshmen we stared in horror when a member of the opposite sex brushed their teeth next to us in our co-ed bathrooms. As seniors, we ponder the social and cultural implications of these encounters. We've gone from simply having experiences, to understanding, deconstructing, and analyzing them.

We've been in school since we were five years old. We've spent more time in school than out. We've been in training: building our toolkit, honing our skills, polishing our presence and developing a sense of self-awareness. We've been training for this very moment: the moment when we leave the comfort zone that Conn has become and step out from the shelter provided by our families, our school, our community. Now, here we are, toolkits in hand, ready to take on the world.

Our most powerful tool is our liberal arts education. We've been taught to think critically about the very foundations of modern society: to question our actions and our ideas, and the thoughts and deeds of those who came before us. When we leave here today, our most immediate challenges may be renting that first apartment and getting that first job. But our biggest challenge is one we'll face for the rest of our lives: to use our educations to chase our passions and cling to them for dear life.

As we turn to face these new challenges, I hope you will all hold in your hearts the words of Alan Alexander Milne: "Promise me you'll always remember: You're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."

So today, tomorrow, and all the days after that, I want all of us to question why we do what we do. If the answer isn't because we're passionate about what we do, then I want each and every one of us to stop and to reconsider. As a recent campus speaker so adamantly reminded us: we've won the lottery of life. We have the tools to find and to follow our passions. We must fix our eyes, our minds, and our bodies on that pursuit.

That sunrise I experienced in Patagonia was one of the most formative moments of my short life. In that moment, I was truly living: For me, I realized that the moment I stop exploring will be the moment I stop living. I had truly found passion. As tears filled my eyes and froze on my cheeks, I vowed silently to never stop exploring. We, the Class of 2013, must treat each day like that sunrise in Patagonia, focusing our minds and bodies on the beauty of the world.

We must never stop exploring.

Thank you.