

2011 Odyssey Project Graduation Remarks by Walter Parnell

Wow so this is where my journey with the Odyssey Project has led me.

I've always been intrigued by the idea of transformation. Images such as the phoenix rising from ashes, the ugly duckling changing into beautiful swan or watching a butterfly emerge from its cocoon, have always captured my imagination. So, I guess as fate would have it, I get involved with a project whose very name embodies the archetypical story of exploration, self-discovery and transformation.

The first time I ever spoke in front of an audience, it was due the very strong and persistent encouragement a teacher. That moment still resonates as one of the more vivid memories of my life because I'd come out of my ten year old cocoon. Because of that experience, the world opened up. I would like to believe that in a small way that experience, in addition to, my experience with the OP, has prepared me for this moment, by providing the tools in which to speak with authority from the ground my own experience and talent.

It's hard to convey in a few short minutes, the depth and scope of an experience that began almost two years ago, which is still unfolding into this very moment and whose impact will probably last a lifetime. If I truly had to summarize my experience, it would be tantamount to the proverbial kid in a candy store, and I had no qualms about indulging myself on the low-hanging, forbidden fruit of knowledge.

For, if there is one consistent theme that I observed about the OP, it is the love of learning; deep-rooted among the students as well as the Professors. Not only was I impressed by the dedication and commitment the professors showed to their own education, but more importantly, I was appreciative of the commitment, dedication and passion the professors devoted to providing us with an ideal liberal education.

So I would like to take the remainder of this time to express my immeasurable gratitude to my professors; the tutors, the staff and faculty of The Illinois Humanities Council and Bard Clemente College, as well as the Mexican Fine Arts Museum, for bringing depth and color to the tapestry that is my life. I would also like to give a special shout-out to my fellow classmates from the bridge course, especially those of you who started this journey with me from the first year course. I couldn't have done it without cha'.

If there is one sure thing I've learned about any experience, journey, odyssey, or transformation, is not so much about who you are going in, but who you are when you emerge.

Because of the OP, I will never be the same and I thank you all for it.