Loved ones, classmates, dear friends, members of the community, faculty and staff, first, I want to say what an honour it was to be chosen by individuals whom I am proud to call colleagues to prepare this valedictory address. With this honour came anxiety, since to represent you is a challenge because I know collectively your 65 voices are more brilliant, insightful, and powerful than any I could ever speak in my lifetime, as well, anxiety, because those of you who know me will know that I rarely am at a shortage for words, but the problem lies in the organization and succinct gathering of my thoughts. So in preparing this address, I thought of several ways in which to organize my thoughts, some seemed reasonable, others ridiculous. I even considered the PEO: I thought I could talk about you, the person, who you are and are becoming, the environment, including our networks of support over the past two years, and the occupation in which we are about to embark. It seemed plausible, albeit academic, but then I thought your guests here today would have no clue about what I was speaking. Moreover, the engineers in the audience, each time I said PEO, would think that I was speaking about their professional organization, so I scratched the PEO idea.

For a week or so, I thought and I thought and nothing went down on paper. The more I thought, the more I came back to one idea. A quote I had seen a while ago kept creeping into my mind. Emerson said “But do your thing and I shall know you.” This spoke to me about the way in which our lives are lived through occupation. It is the active participation in life that creates meaning and allows us to connect with other people.
“But do your thing and I shall know you.” So simple but the more I thought about it, the more I thought I would just come up here speak those nine words and thank people for coming and then sit down --- that simple. However, as we have learned, context is important, so here’s my attempt to articulate why, in the end, I have chosen to base my address around this quote, “Do your thing and I shall know you.”

I would like to ask my colleagues to take a minute and think back to a couple events:

☐ Remember Mid-June 2003, and receiving an acceptance letter to OT at U of T.

Maybe you opened the envelope first hand, or maybe as in my case, you were away from home and a family member called to read the news.

☐ Now remember almost one year later, wrapping up the second academic term, and getting ready to start your first full placement, feeling so happy that you had the term behind you and excited to gain some clinical skills.

☐ Now, another year down the road, July 2005, finishing your research project, handing it in and starting your final placement.

☐ And just recently, Sunday, November 6, 2005.

Think about these moments, the joy you had, the well-deserved feeling of accomplishment, and the meaning that these moments gave to our lives. You even may want to take a minute to add a personal accomplishment to this list. For some of my colleagues, these moments over the past few years have even included trips abroad, marriage, running a marathon, or the birth of a child. These moments in life are indeed special. Hold them with you for a few minutes while I switch gears, from the momentous to the everyday, as it is the everyday in which our profession is based.
One of my favorite things to do when I am visiting my grandmother is to read from the diaries of my grandfather. My grandfather, a man I adored, kept a journal every summer until his retirement and every day after his retirement until no longer able. These journals include moments such as the birth of a grandchild or the death of a family member. However, most of the moments captured in his journal are not all that monumental, some seem so insignificant they are humorous, but it is only within these past two years, I have realized just how important these “small” moments really are. I could likely tell you the yield of the red currant bushes in 1984, the day the tuberous begonias were planted in 1994 and how long neighbors Margaret and Louis stayed on a hot summer’s night in 1991. It is these events though seeming not all that momentous to many, that gave meaning to my grandfather’s life, and that subsequently enriched the lives of those around him.

However, I don’t really need to tell you this because we have been given a gift as we have become occupational therapists, a gift more precious than many I have ever received. It is to recognize that each moment of a day can be as joyful, meaningful, and as enriching as these major accomplishments which I previously asked you to recall. We have seen how, for some individuals, these significant occasions have been ones that many people would consider small day-to-day tasks, such as taking the TTC while negotiating through an anxiety disorder, dressing independently after a CVA, or the first few successful pedals on a bicycle for a child with DCD.

We have seen this in many examples of highly-significant “small” moments in life and will have the gift of continuing to do so as we gain experience in our practice. Let us never lose sight of how, to one person, a seemingly insignificant event can be a
major milestone for another. Moreover, may we recognize this in our own lives and live each day with the same excitement we had the day we opened the acceptance letter to this program.

So in a round about way, my wish for you is to live with joy, appreciate the small moments as much as the milestones in your life and in the lives of your clients.

“But do your thing, and I shall know you.”

Do your thing with joy and it will be a pleasure to know you.

Now, if I’ve lost you, this is where you should perk up since some of you may be receiving honorary OT degrees just for your support. I need to extend gratitude to those who have supported us over our lifetime and over the past two years. Loved ones, faculty and staff, supervisors, colleagues and dear friends, thank you for all the support you have given to us. You have given so freely of yourselves, and supported us on this journey that has been challenging, at times anxiety-provoking, while for me, two of the most pleasurable years of my life. For some today, there may not have been a chance to extend their personal gratitude to those who have supported them along the way, for distances or other reasons, but when I see the look of accomplishment that beams in the faces of my colleagues, the pride of those who are not here is nearly palpable.

Thank you for your support over the past two years: you’ve supported us as we have prepared for exams, spent late nights writing papers, dealt with finances, negotiated academic policies, and continued to grasp and to explain “what is the profession I am studying anyhow.” Thank your for your unending support during this journey.
Having said that, when I really think about offering thanksgiving where it is due, I think about the clients with whom I have had the privilege to work over the past two years. For some, engagement in daily activities, which many of us take for granted, has been a struggle, either due to health status, disability, or social injustices. Take a minute to think about a client who has changed the way we think, who perhaps provided insight into the things we take for granted or how the world in which we live has a way of marginalizing people based on differences. When we think about these clients, it is to them we owe considerable gratitude for we recognize that, despite the challenges over the past two years, being a student of occupational therapy has been a great privilege.

As we become professionals, our privilege affords us something upon which we must reflect and treat with respect—responsibility. We each have a duty to advocate for clients’ rights for participation in activity, at the individual level advocating for each individual’s basic needs and at the societal level, advocating for social change. It is a daunting task, but we can do this through small and large actions alike. We can do this. How do I know? I have faith and I must believe that we can make a difference; it gives me the hope to approach each day with the needed energy to meet the challenge.

This faith in our ability to meet this responsibility, for me, was deepened through a small action. I was participating in corporate orientation where I have recently started working and was overwhelmed with a moment of pride for my colleagues. Two of my shyer classmates (one who even previously had admitted in public that she despised public speaking) said their names and title with confidence, and poise. As their voices echoed assuredly throughout the room, I was able to reflect on how much each one of us has expanded, put ourselves out there, and grown over the past two years. I know it
sounds curious, but the confidence and pride with which my colleagues said they were occupational therapists told me we are ready to take on the responsibility our privilege has afforded us. We can advocate for clients, question the norm, challenge stigmas and break down barriers. We can install hope and will not underestimate an individuals potential. For each one of us, this opportunity is now bestowed upon us as both a privilege and a duty. Let us never lose sight of this, but if we do,. let us think back to the first client we had who taught us precious lessons in the importance of justice and equity for engagement in activity or the importance of creating meaning through occupation in our lives. I reiterate that it is to these individuals we owe an enormous amount of gratitude.

May we be energetic each day to muster an assertive voice for clients, have the courage to stand up to unjust policies and speak our occupational minds. Let us be the voice of reason calling for seeing the individual in context when others may have lost sight of this. This is our role, our duty, and our privilege.

“But do your thing and I shall know you.”

Do your thing with energy, assertiveness, and vision of each client as an individual, and they will know you, the occupational therapist.

Who we are today and are becoming in years of tomorrows is quite exciting for us. We have different backgrounds, come from different places, bring different experiences, but are now all occupational therapists. I alluded to this earlier, however, I can’t say it enough, the past two years have been really tremendous. I have learned much
about myself, and the world in which I live and the diversity in this room has helped me to do so. I have had the opportunity to spend time with 65 amazing people, and had the opportunity to learn from excellent faculty and enthusiastic members of the community. OT school has expanded my horizons: my thinking on issues is grey, and there is no right or wrong, especially if we are inclined to the more qualitative way of thinking. My inability to see an issue as black or white has made it difficult to make decisions in my life. I question everything, try to accept nothing at face value. However, I would not trade this way of thinking for the world and I do know that when I am finding a decision difficult to make, or having difficulty knowing where to turn, I have you, my colleagues and your support. You are loving, bright, insightful, determined people who are now occupational therapists. I admire you more than I could ever express.

Occupational Therapy Class of 2005, it has been a tremendous pleasure and I wish you abundant blessings. You’ve done your thing, and it has been a life-changing experience to know you.

Thank You