

To The Class of 9/11 & 2005

By Todd Huffman, M.D.

Portland Oregonian, June 4 2005

You were barely freshmen that terrible September day when planes screaming with great power at terrible heights changed your future forever. Your world which just days before had so radically changed was altered a great deal more - though to what degree was not then apparent to you, nor to any of us.

Having reached the end of your beginning, you of the class of 2005 and 9/11 are soon to enter into this altered world. You are coming of age during a time of great uncertainty. September 11 was a powerful lesson in impermanence, and the rapid succession of events since have proved Heraclitus' maxim that "Nothing is permanent but change."

Nevertheless, the story of the coming age is yours to write. It's not, perhaps, a task you would have chosen. But know that if you do not, if you evade the challenge, someone else will write the story for you.

As you enter into the world, do not make the mistake of so many before you in thinking that the state of the world does not concern you - your private concerns, your happiness, even your life's course will be affected by the condition of the world you live in. Do not say of the world: "it's not for me to understand", or "I cannot change the way it is." The future cannot bear your resigned indifference.

Those who wish to control the story of the future are depending upon your indifference. Therefore, do not place upon yourselves unexceptional expectations. Do not bow to the God of Playing It Safe. Do not spend your days as too many do waiting for their lives to change. Rather, declare loudly and without apology: "I am here, world! I have come to change you."

It's no small thing to change the world, but it is a small life that does not even try. Change does not need to make headlines. Most important changes do not. Change comes instead from the little things you do at home, at work or at worship. It comes from the letters you write to the paper, or the calls you make to your politicians. It comes from the way you treat the check-out clerk, the receptionist, and the drive-through teller. Live your life with the knowledge that your actions send forth ripples, and that it is a measure of our days whether or not those ripples change the world for the better.

Live your lives not as spectators on the sidelines, but as players on the field. Live your lives not as conformists, doing what others do and accepting what others say. Instead, live your lives out loud! Refuse to hang up your ideals, put away your enthusiasms, quiet your questioning spirit, or close the lid on your indignations. There are already enough people who've done so.

As you turn your thoughts to the future, know that your life's learning has not ended, only just begun. The truly educated, as someone wise once said, never graduate. So ask, and listen well. Use the voice that is great within you to raise uncomfortable questions, and speak uncomfortable truths. Rise to the responsibility given you as the class of 2005 and 9/11, and write a story that honors the victims of that terrible day, and grants their loss greater meaning.