

**Sewanee Valedictory Address**  
**Shaifer Jones**  
**May 13, 2019**

Chancellor Skirving, Vice-Chancellor McCardell, Provost Berner, Deans, Associate Deans, faculty, staff, family, and friends. *Thank you.*

This past week I went out to Lake Cheston with a few of my close friends. We lay in the grass on the lakeshore for hours while the stars swam by in the night sky. We watched the Gemini skinny dipping on the western horizon. We watched Cygnus the Swan gliding in from the East. And, as we lay there, a shooting star streaked across the sky.

There is something special about watching a shooting star. It comes in with a flash, but it is gone almost before you see it. What is left is a silver streak lingering in your eyes, a shout of joy, a sweet memory.

Sewanee is filled with shooting-star moments. And I am honored to have shared them with many of you:

The sun kissing our backs while we lay on the Dimmick dock.

The nutty aroma of a warm cup of coffee at Stirling's in the morning.

The flush in our cheeks as we streak across the Quad.

The pounding feet as we dance ourselves clean after a night of revelry.

And even a stroll around Spencer hall and a shared smile at 3 in the morning.

These shooting-star moments can pass almost before we know they are there. Almost before we recognize them as something special. But it is by paying attention to these moments, by learning from the people and the things around us, that we can find who we truly are. It is by appreciating these moments that we can build our community, find our purpose, and do good in the world.

These moments are what remain lingering in our memories—they are *my* Sewanee, and they are *our* Sewanee. As we spread out across the country and start new lives, I ask each of you to cherish your shooting-star moments.

It is easy for our generation to get drawn away from the present. We come from the age of social media. We think about our image. About how we will be perceived by others. About what others are doing with their lives.

This has also made us a generation of leaders. We are not afraid to call out the problems that we see, and demand change when necessary. I have been so impressed by your leadership, especially in provoking change in the climate of sexual assault on campus and in those who we chose to honor, and in confronting our lingering legacy of racism.

And, when I talk to you about your plans for the future, I feel confident that we will make the world a better place.

We are going on to fight wildland fires in the West.

We are going on to develop new, more sustainable ways to manage our waste.

We are going on to help our country heal from our traumatic and persistent history of racial injustice.

And we are going on, but, like me, not yet sure where or by what path.

But while we each strive for greatness and seek to make change in our communities, we must remember to take a step back and appreciate what we already have around us.

As we have seen in Sewanee, there is so much to learn from the shooting-star moments. From the small, quotidian experiences that streak by and are gone before we know it. In the words of the Bard, we can find “tongues in trees / books in the running brooks / sermons in stones / and good in everything.”

We can find *good* in everything.

By pausing, listening, and appreciating the beauty that is already around us, we can weave together a life from the silvery strands of the shooting stars. A life fulfilled by an intimate

understanding of who we are. A life fulfilled by friendship and a deep and abiding sense of purpose.

A life where we can look back and proudly proclaim, "I would not change it."