

2015 Valedictory Address by Alexi Skinner

Home

As I've grown up, and slowly developed into the person I am today, many questions about life and society have been answered for me: Why should I brush my teeth? What is the square root of 64? And what about Shakespeare; who even is he? Yes, many of my contemplative thoughts have found their resolutions, bringing with them an entirely new and resourceful approach to my being. There are, however, still inquiries to which I have yet to find a solution: What *is* the point of homework? Why won't Dad let me borrow the car? And most importantly, how will I ever execute the perfect tendu? I'm not so worried about these ones (well, maybe just the tendu), as I know that all in good time, I'll find the answers to these questions, just as I did with the others. With that said, there is still a query that I have left to resolve, a deep perplexity that has grasped my attention for a while now. It is a complex puzzle to which few have ever managed to pinpoint the exact meaning:

It is the enigma of the home.

What makes a home a home? Is home really a place, or is it purely a feeling? And finally, is there such a thing as having more than one home?

These are thoughts that have puzzled me for quite some time, and now as we reach the finish line of our education, have become more and more predominant in my daily life. In all honesty, I've considered them so much, that one day I simply thought to myself, "Why not just put my academic research skills to work one last time, and take a look at how the dictionary defines 'home?'" And so, I did. And with my findings, a whole new wave of emotions was brought to light:

Home *via the Oxford dictionary

"The place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household;"

"The family or social unit occupying a permanent residence;"

"The district or country where one was born or has settled on a long-term basis;"

And finally, my favourite:

"A place where something flourishes, is most typically found, or from which it originates;"

As you can imagine, I was pretty satisfied with the results. And as I reflected, it also became clearer to me how Canada's National Ballet School is, in fact, not too far

removed from these definitions. A place like no other, NBS has for many of us become a refuge, or a home of sorts. It has acted as our household, and its entire people, as our family. With that in mind, many thanks are needed to be given, on the behalf of the graduating class, to those who have enabled us to feel so welcomed and at home within the walls of this wonderful school.

To the maintenance, building and food services staff, I begin with you, as you are by far the most fundamental reason why we have felt and continue to feel so comfortable at NBS. Your hard work, though not always revealed, has never gone undetected or underappreciated. Like a well-oiled machine, you keep NBS, and all of us, running to perfection, and for that, we thank you.

To the administrative staff, thank you for keeping our daily lives on track. You really do run a tight ship, and we can only imagine how lost we would be without your hard work that always seems to produce effortless results.

To the marketing staff, thank you for letting dance live beyond the walls of NBS. Through your passion and excitement, Canada's National Ballet School continues to showcase its excellence and most importantly, its accessibility upon a worldwide platform. We are eternally indebted.

To the residence faculty, thank you for being our literal home away from home. Our adoptive nest, you have raised us and watched us grow into the people we are today, shaping us into all-round, well-versed individuals. To the administration and reception staff, thank you for keeping our everyday lives in order. Counselors, thank you for your unfaltering patience, warm smiles, and open hearts. Finally, to Susan Leslie Berkis, thank you for making Canada's National Ballet School's residence a wonderful abode, and a safe place for growth and development. It is only with appreciation and gratefulness that the graduating class shall think of its time at 105 Maitland St.

To our academic teachers and faculty, too few are the words to express our gratitude toward you and your devotion to our success. From dealing with our absences for rehearsals and fittings, all the way to understanding and accommodating our school-related anxieties and stresses, you have been heroic. Every day, you have touched us with your compassion and given us insight on what is possible outside of the realm of dance. Our supporters, you have prepared us for the future as well-rounded individuals and shown us firsthand how important education can and will be over a lifetime. We thank you and are forever indebted for your dedication toward our success.

To the artistic faculty, you have been shining lights for us in our development as artists. Not only have you taught us precious life lessons over the span of our time at NBS, in terms of working to the best of our abilities, but you have also shown us how to experience the joy of movement in all new, confident ways. Thank you for your kind

hearts and unwavering perseverance, for your encouragements and cherished advice, for your continuous support and unimaginable guidance, and finally, for believing in us when we didn't know how to believe in ourselves. We hope that you recognize how you are all at the root of our success and part of the reason we quickly found a home at NBS.

To our musicians, thank you for your talent and your patience. We are fortunate enough to be treated daily to your inspirational concertos, and it is with the utmost awe and veneration that we think of you always.

To Ms. Staines, gratefulness cannot even begin to describe the amount of admiration and respect we have for you as Artistic Director. The way you have led and continue to seamlessly lead Canada's National Ballet School is remarkable and deserves the utmost appreciation. Thank you for giving us the chance to develop our artistic independence at such a young age. Believe us when we say that from the moment we set foot into this wonderful school, and embarked on a journey like no other, it became apparent that we were joining something special. Blessed are we to have stumbled upon a gift like NBS, and blessed is anyone who ever gets the opportunity to feel this school's passion and drive. Thank you for crafting such a beautiful domicile for hopeful dancers. A dwelling for our dreams, Canada's National Ballet School has truly been a life-changing home for us, and because of this, our gratitude floods.

To our families, thank you for giving us the chance to spread our wings and dive into something as amazing as NBS. It must have taken an unimaginable amount of courage and faith to see your children leave home at such a young age and step into a world that is unusual to most. Know that we are eternally thankful for your love and support, without which we would've never experienced the wonders of Canada's National Ballet School. Thank you for allowing us to take the leap of faith into this great, big, world, for being our unfaltering support systems, for being our #1 fans, and for being our nests. To our families, our love for you is infinite.

So what *does* qualify a home as a home? Having to look back at my researched findings, I would agree that a home is a place where something flourishes; a community that becomes a family, in which every member can excel knowing that they are supported by loved ones and admirers.

Classmates, you have become my home. And together, we have become a family. I have for myself been so honoured to watch all of us flourish over our time at NBS, becoming day by day, more of the artists and individuals we are destined to be. As we take our next steps onto the paths of our lives, know that I wish only the very best for every one of you, and that I am truly excited to see what the future holds for such talented individuals. Thank you for being such delightful friends, supportive admirers,

shoulders to cry on, and lights at the end of the tunnel. Our class has meant more to me than the world itself, and if I could leave you with one thing only, as we embark on our separate journeys, it is that if home is where the heart is, then I assure you that my heart will be left here, with every one of you.

The enigma of the home no longer stands as a puzzle to me. In fact, it's now become clear as day. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. once wrote that "[w]here we love is home - home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts." And with that, I now completely understand. We've all found a home at Canada's National Ballet School, one that shall never falter, for home is not a place, but merely a feeling. What truly makes a house a home is not itself but the people and the memories experienced within it. With that in mind, I'm glad to say I've never felt more at home than within these walls, and with all of these people. To the graduating class of 2015, I thank you for being my home. May this family remain the family it has flourished into for years to come.