2014 commencement address by Sharon Rankin

“You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars, you have a right to be here.” - Desiderata

These words are taken from prose written in 1927 by Max Ehrmann. I was first introduced to this when I entered college at your age, many moons ago. Surprisingly, they still inspire after all this time.

Today, I am going to speak to you of what I have learned and observed about life since I came to Marianopolis College. I hope to leave you with some words that will cause you to reflect, to dream, and use to help you focus your life choices in the future.

You are about to enter a world which is both exhilarating and frightening. This world will be full of surprises and often you will be blindsided by the unexpected. But one thing is certain: in this world you will always need people. And the strength of your character will determine the people who will surround you, support you, love you and bring you peace. This, in turn, will allow you to be successful. However, your success in life will not only be measured by your occupation, but by the person you choose to become. For that reason it is important to remember that you have something to learn from everyone you meet and you also have something to teach to them as well. This may not immediately take root in your awareness but every word, phrase, gesture and hug will contribute and define who you are. This has been my experience, and proudly, outside of my family, I have relationships with people I met 35 years ago. They all bring me comfort and peace.

A very wise woman, who is also a Sister of the Congregation de Notre Dame, once told me that “Everyone has their own bit of the truth.” This, to me, meant the more we listen, the more we learn. Remember, two ears, one mouth? Become a good listener. Pay attention to what is being said and people will take comfort from your presence. Sometimes others can find a solution to what is troubling them, by verbalizing. Be a person who lets them do this and give advice if they ask because you have your bit of the truth as well.

Be gentle with yourself and others. At times, you will disappoint yourself and others. It really is part of human nature. And other people will disappoint you. When this happens, remember the next important step - forgiveness. Forgive yourself and
others. Accept your humanness and try to do better next time. Learn from mistakes. Along with this, be kind to yourself and others. Take the phrase “random acts of kindness” to heart - the opportunities for this will leave you and others happy and grateful.

You see, it takes more than one person to change the parts of the world we are not happy about. Sometimes the news can be very depressing. But if we work on our own world, perhaps others will be inspired to do the same. We can embrace global citizenship by being aware of the needs of others and doing something to help. We cannot all go to a distant country to help, so, yes, let us start at home and branch out as we are able. Our consciousness of, and efforts made towards alleviating the suffering of another will grow as time goes on from person to person. Our place in the world sometimes demands selfishness. However, we are not the center of the universe, humankind is, and the better we make life for others, the better our world will be.

At this point in my life, I am in a good space, only because of being loved, guided, and supported by family, friends, colleagues, the Sisters of the Congregation de Notre Dame and you graduates. Every student I have encountered has taught me something and helped complete the puzzle that is me, composed of many pieces. And, for this, I thank you.

Since I have been at Marianopolis, I have frequently said to my colleagues that there are two days of each year that I cherish and, no, it is not the beginning and the end. One is when we make our annual food delivery to St. Gabe’s in Pointe St. Charles. The generosity of our students, staff and faculty touches my heart each time and the gratitude of St. Gabe’s is so profound.

The second day is our annual Student Life Awards when we honour our students for their contribution to student life here at the College. The vibrancy of the student clubs and all the faculty and staff who work with them is evident in the smiling faces as they congratulate one another. At this time we also present special awards to specific students who have far exceeded their level of commitment and involvement in activities. These awards are always so joyful and humbling to us all.

In conclusion, I hope something of what I have shared resonates with each of you. And, if not, I hope you will meet others who will help you to become the “child of the universe” you are meant to be.

Here is a second quote from Desiderata to carry with you: “Therefore be at peace with your Creator, whatever you conceive him to be ... Keep peace in your soul. With all its sham and drudgery, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.”

Thank you and bless you all.