

## **Skidmore College's 100<sup>th</sup> Commencement May 21, 2011**

### **Address by Elizabeth Gronquist**

Four years ago the majority of us sat in the Williamson Sports Center fanning ourselves with Convocation programs trying to keep our cool wearing prison orange t-shirts in three thousand degree temperatures. I remember looking around thinking that we looked more like convicts than college freshman and that Skidmore wasn't really helping us out with this "start now" business that President Glotzbach was telling us about. This winning streak continued when – balling my eyes out – I said goodbye to my parents and sister and was forced to walk alone, crying, all the way from Scribner House back to my triple in Tower. Our four years ahead were uncertain, our path unknown. Yet each and every single one of us took up the challenge of being a Skidmore kid, and that is what has led us here today.

Today we are able to celebrate our 100<sup>th</sup> Commencement because of the vision of one incredible woman: Lucy Skidmore Scribner. Lucy had a very difficult early life: her mother died shortly after giving birth to her, she married but had two still-born children and her husband died suddenly in her presence after they were only married a year. When she came to visit relatives in Saratoga Springs in the 1890s she was widowed and childless, yet despite this profound personal pain this trip opened her eyes to a community need. Seeing the lack of formal activities available for women Lucy founded the Young Women's Industrial Club, the bylaws of which did not discriminate against skin colour or religious affiliation. In our earliest days, lead by a truly inspirational woman, we were committed to pushing the boundaries, teaching excellence of both mind and hand, and above all, equal access.

In the past century we have grown from a small vocational school to the college we know and love today. Skidmore has witnessed truly groundbreaking moments which have exemplified the imperative "Creative Thought Matters." Milestones such as being one of the first sites for a Higher Education Opportunity Program in 1969 or in 1975 when we began to confer our own bachelor's degree's on graduates from the University Without Walls, set us apart as a college committed to excellence, experimentation, and creativity.

And now today, the 100<sup>th</sup> Commencement, the Class of 2011 joins this relatively brief but storied history. During our four years here big things have happened: We created an entirely student run garden to provide the Dining Hall with our own produce, witnessed the opening of the breathtaking Zankel Music Center, started an Arts Administration program and broke ground to replace Scribner Village. We also got red and blue cups in the Dining Hall, saw North Broadway paved and survived a fire extinguisher in the microwave.

We have come to love the squirrel that sits on the green trashcan outside of Case, marveled at the snow sculptures which pop up after a storm, and survived tough winters to celebrate on Fun Day. We have taken classes that forced us to reexamine our worldview, found new interests and made what will become lifelong best friends. I found myself at Skidmore, as I believe many of you have: it has allowed us to become the people we are today: quirky, dedicated, driven, smart, people who will – no doubt – make a difference in the world in which we live.

All along our Skidmore journey, we have had people there to guide us on our way. The faculty, staff and administration have provided us with unfailing support in all our endeavors. Our friends have been there at the dining room table after a long days at school, and finally our parents have been there from the beginning, and on behalf of the Class of 2011, I thank you all for the support you have given us.

While we celebrate our many accomplishments and thank those who have helped us reach this point, we remember that we have not always been the best versions of ourselves, and that there are moments within our history where we have been less than the women – and I guess men – that Lucy wished we would be. Our success as a school should not be judged by where we have fallen, but how we carry ourselves after we fall. This year, we faced challenges that forced us to question who we are and what we believe in. But it is our strength of character, our courage of conviction and a commitment to making our community the place that we wish it to be that has seen us through.

I will treasure the memories of walking past Howe-Rounds to hear a guitar being played out into the night air and debating in class the ethics of sneaking into the D-hall. I will miss my extended family in the History department and long to once again put on the green and gold and compete as a Thoroughbred. In a lot of ways we are like trains on a track. We came to Skidmore from different paths and places. We stayed at Skidmore as long as we needed to and now are leaving on different tracks. But we will always, always carry with us on our journey the fact that we have passed through – and lingered – at this station. Skidmore is infectious: you can't help but be changed by the people and the place.

As you graduate today know that Skidmore will forever remain a part of the fabric of your identity. You have touched many with your generosity, kindness and compassion. As your life has been changed by Skidmore, so too have you changed lives.

Good luck Class of 2011! In the words of Lucy Skidmore Scribner : "Make no small plans." I'll see you soon.