

## Mandolin and Chocolate

When thinking of the genre itself, I came to the conclusion that all graduation speeches are just variations of the “Everything I need to know, I learned in Kindergarten” model. You know the one I’m talking about, the one that sends you off into the world believing that everything you need for success you learn, not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but in the sand pile at Sunday school. The rules for this kind of success are as follows:

- \* Play fair
- \* Share your toys
- \* Don’t hit your friends
- \* Say you’re sorry if you hurt someone
- \* Clean up your messes
- \* Wash your hands before dinner
- \* Live a balanced life: work a little, learn a little, play a little, draw and paint a little, dance and sing a little every day.
- \* Take a siesta every day
- \* Hot cookies and cold milk are good for you
- \* Look both ways and hold hands before you cross the street
- \* Be aware of wonder

These are nice rules for a well-ordered, ordinary life. But you haven’t come this far to have an ordinary life. You have already crossed the street holding hands. Many of you have crossed the ocean, without holding hands, and most of you will, sooner or later, come to the realization that you want, not just to traverse the world, but to change it. And there will be times when, in order to do that, you will have to do it alone, and that will be scary. But to remain true to yourselves and to your dreams, you will have to do it. When I realized this, I sat down and

tried to figure out what the rules would be, not for a clean, well-ordered life, but for an extraordinary life, and I came up with a decalogue. The 10 rules I'm going to give you will not guarantee you success in the usual sense of the word, but I promise you that if you live by these rules, you will have an extraordinary life.

1. Defy the gods. Defy the gods of the university. Defy the gods of the corporation. Defy the gods of your family. Defy the gods of your generation. Defy the gods of your culture. For it is only in defying convention and the need for approval and security that we can become ourselves and forge an individual life.

2. Be unreasonable. Reasonable people follow convention and maintain the status quo. Reasonable people follow the rules of Kindergarten 101. It is only unreasonable people who question the status quo. It is only by being unreasonable that you will be able to change the world.

3. Embrace risk and ambiguity. The only certainty of life is change itself. And, as intelligent men and women, you know that there isn't only one truth--that life itself is ambiguous.

4. Honor Eros. Honor your intuition and your instinct, your aliveness.

Remember that materialism, domination over others, the search for security, unquestioned tradition, insularity, fear, and all centripetal forces are anti-life; they are the arms of Thanatos. Ignore them and honor Eros, the life force.

5. Respect your imagination and exercise your creativity. Adopt an attitude of playfulness and wonder.

6. Embrace the other. Embrace your beloved, your friend, your neighbor, your co-worker.

Embrace the foreigner and the stranger. See the divine in every person you meet, and treat

everybody with the love and respect of a *tú*.

7. Know your power. Power does not reside above you, below you, or next to you. It resides within you. You are powerful beyond measure. Know that power and enlarge it to its fullness.

8. Don't play small. Play to win. Do what you have to, even if you know that you are going to lose. Sometimes you will win, and sometimes you will lose. But don't play to keep from losing; play to win.

9. Don't have a cookies and milk kind of life. Thank God, puritanism is not part of our heritage. Work, paint, dance, sing, write, play the mandolin, and love with abandonment, without measure, freely, and passionately. Have a sensuous, 1000-calories-per-mouthful chocolate and champagne life, for nothing less is worthy of you.

10. Believe in magic. Have an extraordinary life.