

10 Spaces with Just Enough Green Lights

Welcome friends, family, trustees, and guests to the Class of 2016 Commencement ceremony! We are honored to have with us on one of our most special days.

As our Marietta careers come to close, many of us have spent time reflecting on things that brought us joy and excitement during our time at Marietta. Maybe things like Boston Crème Pie in Gilman or the words “take home exam” do this for some. While these is also true for me, I have also spent time considering things that I have enjoyed since I was young. Some of these were board games. Of these games, I always had a fondness for the Game of Life. For those who may not be familiar, Life is a board game where, as the name implies, you experience Life. Players pick one of 6 atrociously colored minivans as their game piece and throughout the game you will pick a career, get married, buy a house, and have anywhere between 0-7 children depending on your luck. With an obnoxious spinner ranging from 1-10, hideous little plastic buildings that never seem to fit just right into the board, and a money banking set-up so simple that most would do anything see in reality, the game of Life seems fairly straight forward. Right? Not exactly. At my house, many of these games ended with a large amount of frustration and swearing, making you want to throw the board and it’s accompanying little pieces across the room. Yet through all of this, I see things a little differently on that board, especially with the people in those little minivans.

I considered what the lives of each person in my little minivan game piece were like. Do they enjoy their career? Are they comfortable with their decrepit home? Do they have a big extended family? What if they didn't want the \$30,000 sailboat the card said they had to buy? Do they *really* appreciate the family portrait they just paid \$35,000 for? *Who does that?* All that aside, the question I ponder most: Are they happy?

Each member of the Class of 2016 piloted their own little minivan here as a first-year with diverse perspectives, but an unmatched sense of excitement about what Marietta would hold for us. In the Game of Life, there are only 10 spaces to land on for the "college section." These spaces include getting scholarships and then spending $\frac{1}{4}$ of that money on books, which couldn't feel more accurate, and a \$5,000 spring break that I am still trying to figure out how anyone could pay for. But 4 of these spaces are marked with a Life Tile, meaning something positive happens. Making friends, going abroad, making the Dean's List, and Graduating. Each of us has done some of these or is about to do all of these. However they don't cover everything.

So I took the liberty of suggesting some of my own, and in case you were wondering, yes, I just sent my recommendations to Hasbro for the next Edition. So here we go. I wish there were a space marked "Presenting at a Conference" where we proved that Marietta College is a force unrivaled around the country and around the world. I wish there were a space marked "Late Night Donut, McDonalds, and/or Walmart Run" where we built stronger friendships that will last long after our time at Marietta and had a few too many extra calories in the process. I wish there were a space marked

“Watched Netflix all day with Friends and Accomplished Nothing” which resulted in quickly figuring out how fast Marietta students could actually write a paper or complete a project that was due the next day. But... I also wish there were a space marked “Lost a close friend” where we all learned the strength of the Marietta College community and how important it is to hold closely the friends that you care about.

While there should be many more spaces included in the college section of the Game of Life, there are only 10. The entire game has a total of 148 possible spaces. Our time at Marietta has included countless moments where we felt like we were on top of the world, and moments where we felt like picking ourselves up off the ground would be almost impossible. But these experiences compose only 10 spaces. We still have 138 more spaces waiting for us after today! Not only are all of these spaces still waiting for us, but also we will each play them at different times, and in unique ways. Whether you choose to drive your little minivan and pay a ridiculous \$25,000 for a tennis camp or collect \$80,000 from that buried treasure you just happened to come across on vacation to the beach, know that the Long Blue Line is behind you on your journey.

I once had a faculty member tell me that not every light on your path from one place to another will always be green, but that does not mean that you should not take the journey. As we each prepare to take on our graduate schools, careers, and whatever direction life takes us in, we should understand not every light will always be green. Sometimes our Games of Life will have us charging full speed ahead with no traffic, but other times we will have to sit

and wait. Both scenarios will to happen, the key is just always to have some direction, some goal in mind, however big or small that may be.

One of my favorite quotes is by Spencer Johnson, a speaker, author, and consultant who asked the question, “What would you do if you weren’t afraid?” To me, this quote signifies limitless opportunities. You may not always know if all the lights are green, but the fear of a red or yellow light does not need to define your future experiences. We will all be excited, scared, nervous, and more about what space on the spinner will tell us to land on. But the most assuring thing is that all of those experiences happen with friends and family. They keep you calm in traffic, encourage you to not hesitate, and remind you to wear your seatbelt. We have been carpooling four years, but it time for our roads to split. Some of us will continue together in smaller packs, others will go their own route entirely, but that’s okay.

Sure not every light will be green, but if they were, it would all be over far too quickly. We’ve heard it’s not about the destination; it’s about the journey. And while I believe this is true, I would also argue that it’s about who’s in your minivan. In four short years, I have met amazing people who are with my in mine and sharing this experience with them means everything me. I am confident that my peers in this class can say something very similar about their journeys.

My wish for each of you is that you love what you do and can answer the earlier question, *Are you happy?*, with a simple yes. Even 138 remaining spaces on our Life Boards are not worth anything if you’re not happy with

what you do or who you are. We're only 10 spaces into our lives and in those short 10 spaces, Marietta College has given tools to succeed. Not only in our respective disciplines, but as critical thinkers, problem solvers, and agents for change. Marietta has given us connections to alumni, faculty and staff that will continue supporting us long after today. And finally, Marietta has given us great people to turn the spinner and play the Game of Life with us.

I never thought I would want a minivan, but all things considered, maybe having a one isn't so bad after all. Now appreciate your future paydays as they will seem far too infrequent, enjoy your Life Tile spaces, adopt a puppy, sponsor a highway, embrace that broken bone we're apparently all going to have in the next 5 years. Just listen to your parents and mentors, and try to be a little responsible along the way too.

Congratulations, Class of 2016. We're on our way. Thank you.