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Good evening everyone. It's a pleasure to be here and have a chance to speak with all of you as you celebrate your graduation.

I feel very honoured to be selected to give a speech tonight. I have a personal attachment to the classes that are graduating this year, both in the undergrad and grad programs. I have only been at the school for a few years, but many of the students who have now finished their degrees were in the very first classes I taught at the school.

So, my first year at the school was in 2018. I had moved here from Toronto and was swept up into Carleton pretty quickly and trying to get my bearings. It was both exciting and nerve-wracking, and I felt new...very new. And there I was – in second-year studio with the lovely Janine Debanné looking at students I had never met before, in a program I admittedly knew very little about. That class, the one I will probably remember forever as my first cohort at the school, was all of you. And, I have to say, you were awesome. You were kind and supportive. You let me make mistakes. You joked with me. You showed me the school. You helped me understand the program. You were fun and thoughtful, and creative designers. You kept calling me your TA even though I was your professor, but I'm ok with that because it made me feel young. But you made me want to be here.

It was probably in October that fall that I really started to feel a part of the community. Certainly, I had started to get into the rhythm of things at the school. I knew more about campus, more about the faculty. I was getting to know more students in all the programs. I had spent time in different buildings and doing reviews for other classes. I had met more students, started working with grads and fourth-year undergrads (many who are graduating today too). But in the second-year studio, we were in a great rhythm. We were making and building, drawing and drafting, drafting, drafting. And of note was a Friday afternoon class that autumn. We had taken this beautiful fall field trip out towards Kanata. We had been sketching and drawing. We had walked. We had hiked. It was beautiful. But the moment that really changed things for me was probably when Landers almost had his finger eaten off by a raccoon in a sewer grate, with the class screaming and huddling around the critter that was seemingly innocent and very cute. Blood and panic are binding, but so are the inevitable laughter and tears from laughter that eventually followed. And yes, it makes a good story, and that's what stays with you forever. And for everyone here, don't worry, Landers was fine. He just needed 15 shots for rabies.

Ok, so jokes aside, it wasn't the raccoons that were binding, but it was the stories and humour, the excitement and enthusiasm you had for everything you encountered, EVEN including violent raccoons. It was the collective of the class I loved. It was your small and tight-knit community. And really, on a personal level, it was the fact that you made Carleton home for me. You opened its doors. You taught me as I taught you... and you all made it the place that I wanted to be. I saw your love and care for the school. I saw

your love and care for one another. This class cares a lot. This class has a lot of interest in the collective....this class is involved and engaged.... This class knows that we are only strong when we are together and when we build a home together.

This last year has had me reflecting a lot about home and where we live. We have had to adjust to a new normal of interaction through our computer screens, making our bedrooms into our architecture studios, in being resourceful with what we have on hand. I have become very well aquatinted with my small office – it has become a frantic mess of papers and new technology with a small clearing made, so my Zoom background looks clean. Home has changed. People have only been invited over through Zoom and online calls. We've all seen into each other's homes. You've welcomed me into yours through your computer screens. We've met each-others' pets. We've socialized and laughed and shared some pretty honest feelings about how complicated this year is. And although "home" has a warm connotation to it, it has been isolating and quiet. This year has required more effort from all of us to build relationships and keep relationships. You all have gracefully triumphed in the face of the pandemic and built a strong community despite it all (one that has also included us faculty and instructors). But the pandemic has been weird, and it's been a challenge. Home has been our environment, but also the feeling of home in our school community is one we have been longing for.

I was fortunate to have the fall this year again with you all in the housing studio. And what luck to have you all remind me what prevails even during a pandemic – our community. I loved teaching this studio and seeing so many of you grow from when we first met and getting to know more of you better. My cohort, honestly, felt like my family this year, and the theme of making "home" continued with the students as well as in the studio.

We spent the fall semester looking at housing and home, asking questions about dwelling, thinking about the way we live. After a year like we had, and after seeing the work you have all done, I want to encourage you all to continue your work. Home is a privilege, but home is also a necessity and a right, and you as architects, as new graduates from the program, have the responsibility and the ability to make community a priority. I tell you this because I have witnessed the communities you have made at Carleton, I have seen you design them, I have seen you build them with your peers and through extracurricular programs, and as cliché, as it is, it is so important you see the power of this profession. Many of you will continue in the field. You will continue to do an MArch and go work in offices and become practitioners. You are strong voices that can make change, that can consider architecture as an inclusive practice. We need that now more than ever. Architecture is culpable in the unjust and racist structures of society. Architecture is a tool that can be used (or abused) by anyone. So, make your intentions good. Continue to welcome people into space like you did with me, continue to fight for people who need advocates in space. Prioritize justice before aesthetics. Our profession is to give back to the world and shape the way we live. So, please, dream big, and fight hard.

I have been so wonderfully overwhelmed by the work you have done — and I mean work in the broadest sense of the word. Work can be academic, but it is real and emotional, and personal. I see incredible futures ahead for all of you. For our undergrads, thank you for bringing me with you and for letting me grow up in this school with you. I hope you'll come back for your next degree and continue to challenge us as faculty to do more and do better. For our grads, thank you for your voices, for being leaders and educators as much as students. To all of you: I ask you to build strong homes, continue to do it even when we are separated and isolated. Continue to do it for those who can't.

I often think back to one of my favourite quotes by Kurt Vonnegut – “What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities in which the terrible disease of loneliness can be cured.”

It can seem that architecture, on its surface, is about the arrangement of materials and systems and form. But really, at its core, it's about facilitating relationships and being the place where people carry out their lives. It's about including the voices of all those who are a part of space.

As Jane Jacobs said, “Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody.” You have shown an exceptional aptitude for that – I am so pleased you are the future of the profession.

Thank you all for such a wonderful year, regardless of how weird it has been. Take away the lessons you have left with me about living and justice, about care and space, about belonging and home, and certainly, about avoiding raccoons in sewage grates. Cheers and congratulations. There are a lot of great things ahead of you.