Well, Class of 2015, you made it. Congratulations. But before you leave I would like to go on a little time-travel trip with you. For starters, I would like to take you back to Union on the day of commencement day 53 years ago. Are you up for this?

Okay. Here's the scene. We are beamed into 1962. Your chairs are on the grass because the Robsion Arena hasn't yet been built and my commencement ceremony was held in the chapel. Behind me is the outdoor wall of the swimming pool building.

Beyond the east-facing windows are some small white frame buildings that will be razed to make way for the Student Center and parking lot.

A little past that is the Snack Shack, another white frame building where we can order sandwiches and drinks, and play the jukebox. That's where we hang out a lot. We walk over to Centennial Hall, and I take you down to the basement and show you the dining room. Dinner is served family style at one sitting, and I like that. It brings us together every weekday evening.

Outside, I introduce you to my mother, who is sitting on a bench near Speed Hall waiting for me. She has a warm Mississippi accent, and five years later she will be gone.

As for my future, all I know for sure is that in a few weeks I will be going into the newly formed program called the Peace Corps. I know that after a summer of training I will be flown with my fellow volunteers to teach in Sierra Leone, West Africa, a country I had never heard of.

I do not know that my next pets will be a mongoose, a royal python about three feet long, and a small monkey that thinks I am its father.

I do not know that, after having chosen education as my minor at Union in order to avoid the foreign language requirement, a minor that got me into the Peace Corps, I will end up having to learn an African language that no American school teaches.

I don't know that within a decade I will have sideburns, a moustache and wear bellbottom pants.

I don't know that I will marry a Mexican girl who is teaching my brother Spanish at the University of Kentucky, and that we will have two daughters who speak a mix of languages, none of which is the one I spoke in Sierra Leone.
At my graduation I only know that I will go to Africa and in two years I will come back home.

Now, instead of going backwards, let’s have you who are now getting your undergraduate degrees travel to the future. From what I experienced, and from what you probably already know deep down, let me guess some things you will have learned and achieved in 50 years.

So, imagine yourself coming back to Union College in 2065. You are in your seventies. I am not with you now.

You are entering the campus. Some buildings are new, but there are enough of the old ones to make you to feel at home again.

You walk slowly into the building where you had some classes. It is familiar, but with the magic of two dimensions, and only you and those who were with you long ago can see the hidden one.

As you wander through the classrooms you see and feel the difference. A treasure trove of multi-dimensional and interactive lectures, documentaries, and demonstrations can be pulled in for a lesson designed by the teacher and student together.

Some learning spaces are linked to the world. From anywhere you can be here, and in this southeastern Kentucky town you can be anywhere. But you see that it is with the mountains and streams and forests here, the outer classrooms, that Union College creates its distinctive offerings and still sets itself apart.

You know that Union is adapting to the shifting forces far beyond the mountains of Kentucky, because those same tides have risen and fallen on you and those around you, and you learned that you have to take in only what serves you and you have to let the rest go by.

You walk down the hall where a student in a Union sweatshirt is talking into some gadget, and the sweatshirt tells you that one thing hasn’t changed: Union’s colors are still orange and black. They still look like Halloween to you. You think that in the next 50 years somebody really ought to work on that.

You go outside and stroll here to this building and see that the doors are unlocked, so you wander into the gym that is no longer being used for commencement. You look around this large room and try as best you can to figure out where you sat on May the ninth, in the year 2015.

You recall your friendships, the social life, your relationships. College was a nice step up from high school. Maybe you married a schoolmate. Or maybe you just remember
one person especially, not brought to mind as a longing, but rather with gratitude for what was shared when you were young.

You see how Union prepared you for work, and though it took some years to find the job you wanted exactly, the journey was worth it because each job, even the ones you couldn’t wait to leave, prepared you for the next, and the next.

You remember some of your bright and expansive moments at Union, and now you see how they played beneath the surface of your life as encouragement, as confidence.

You remember times in your life when you had to make gut-wrenching choices and could not find the answer anywhere written or spoken, so you had to find it within yourself. And you did.

That’s the irony. Some of the hardest courses, so to speak, were the ones that taught you the most about yourself, the powers of the mind and heart—hidden, yes, but waiting for your call.

You remember the hurts you had to bear when people dear to you passed on. So many, after all these years.

But long ago you resolved to cherish the moments with those who were close to you. You are thankful that you realized what was most important, and what was less so, in this world of birth and death, all passing like a dream.

This you recall in the year 2065 as you make your way to the door to the lobby. You think of those who were with you at your commencement, the family members filled with pride, the friends, the faculty and staff who gathered on that last day in a college that gave you a special life within a life and sent you full grown into the world.

You know it’s not really possible, but you think of how nice it would be if you could just go back to that day and see them one more time, as they were. That’s all you really want, just to be with them, see them, hear their voices again, knowing what you know now.

And here, at this moment, the wish that you may someday make, that wish is granted.

You are here now.

This is your time.

The future will take care of itself. And to that end, we who are here with you, we wish you well.