



NAROPA UNIVERSITY

Student Speaker

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A friend of mine told me once that if you want to learn about other people, live alone. And if you want to learn about yourself, be in relationship.

I kind of feel that's what we've all been doing.
And it's what we're going to continue to do.

My hope for today is that through coming together, we honor each other. We are able to acknowledge that we've worked so hard; that we've built relationships with people we've meditated with, adjusted in yoga class or read a poem to. With people we've sat across from in a warrior's exam, or complained to about how frustrating one of our seminars was. Today we are able to remember how much insight we've gained through relationship with one another.

While it was Naropa that offered a way of learning about relationship that no other school or experience could offer, I've wanted to feel connected to a community and learn from it from very early on. I think this began in kindergarten...

I remember having to bring home a slip of paper to get signed. Our teacher told us we would have a popcorn party the next day, but you had to return the signed piece of paper. So I get it signed and the next morning my mother was driving me to school. I was riding in the backseat, holding onto the paper because I was so excited; I didn't put it in my backpack because I wanted to make sure I turned it in. Somehow this made sense in my five-year-old mind. I was eating a piece of fruit or a pop-tart or something and set the paper down on the car's back console. Of course I forgot it altogether. My mom dropped me off at school and the day progressed. Towards the end of class my teacher said, "Ok, who has their paper to turn in?" I realized then where it was. Everyone who turned in a piece of paper was handed a little plastic baggie of popcorn. I started crying almost immediately. The other kids saw me crying and someone handed me my empty lunch bag. One by one my classmates took handfuls of popcorn from their bags and put it into mine. Soon my bag was completely full.

I learned from this that it's possible for us to all be there for one another. If a person is in need, you don't ignore that. My kindergarten class knew this at 5 years old, which tells me that human kindness is something we're all born knowing, it's not something that we learn. However, I do think it's something that we at times forget. Naropa, for me, has been a place to remember. Through this we develop a kind of trust in others and in ourselves.

In a way, I think I knew this about Naropa before I came.

I arrived in Boulder 5 ½ years ago thinking that I would study yoga. I moved here with a bag of clothes, \$300 in cash, and my guitar. Which to this day I still haven't learned how to play, except for one song. Which I made up. I found a job and a place to live. And basically just learned how to live on my own. When I got to Naropa I had read a lot about it and heard a lot of stories from living in Boulder. Orientation week came and I was afraid to wear leather boots to school because it's Naropa and I thought everyone would be scary anarchist vegetarians.

Now I'm a vegetarian.

I remember going to one of my first classes, Foundations of a Naropa Journey. There was a guest speaker one week—Lee Worley. She'd been working at a mental health center in town – I've forgotten what it's called—anyway she told us about working there. About how they'd gotten a lot of Naropa graduates (as employees, not patients). And how there's always something different about employees who came from Naropa and employees who came from elsewhere. She said she couldn't quite put her finger on it, but what she saw was while a lot of staff got burnt out on the job and frustrated with thinking that they weren't making a difference in people's lives, that through the course of several years, she noticed that people who had graduated from, who had come from Naropa, didn't burn out. That there was this, there was a quality about them that, that they sort of trusted the experiences, that they trusted the process. They had faith in it. Essentially, they had faith in what our founder would have called basic goodness. I don't mean faith in a religious sense, or even a higher, divine sense of the word. But I mean faith as recognizing something, or intuiting something that you can't always see but that you know is there.

That's something else I learned from being here, something that my peers helped me remember: there's a kind of mysterious faith necessary in relationship. You really have to believe in that moment in kindergarten, that things will still be okay even if you forget your mom's note.