

Graduation Address

by Izman Suhail and Anna Åsund to their fellow graduates.

23rd May, 2015

(Izman: Red text; Anna: Black text)

642 days ago, I was seated in one of the top seats in this room, next to a roommate whose name I could barely remember, surrounded by 200 strangers. I was scared, and lonely, and a little bit heartbroken to leave home for the first time. I was acutely aware of just how special everyone around me must be, and it made me feel out of place. I wondered why I had been chosen to come here.

Since then, I've had many moments in this room. Moments where suddenly I've stopped listening to whoever is speaking – sorry Larry – and instead turned around and looked at everyone. My heart beats a little bit faster, and I feel this strange lump in my stomach, climbing up my throat and pushing at my eyes. That is a UWC moment for me.

There are many UWC moments – moments where you get a sudden, abrupt reminder of where you are, and who is there with you. It's times like standing outside the stage getting ready to scream a 'haka'. It's the times you sit at a breakfast table and realize that despite your different backgrounds, you all watched teletubbies as children. It's meeting people in the sun and letting a smile do all the talking, because no one appreciates the sun like we do.

Not all UWC moments are the big, ground breaking things. It is also the little things, like late night tea times, spontaneous fjord jumps, hikes up Jarstadheia, dinner outside kantina in the sun – *when there's sun* – Birthday surprise parties, frantically looking for noodles in the middle of the night... the list goes on.

There are other moments too. Moments when us being so similar, strong-minded and guided by what we perceive to be right, creates issues. Those are the moments where you suddenly wish that people would stop taking everything so seriously, and accept things as they are. This thought lasts for just a second, because as soon as you had it you know that RCN would not be RCN without these passionate, and arguably useless fights. It's natural that we disagree from time to time, and isn't that the point of being here – to work with one another despite these different perspectives. Without solving our conflicts here – and sometimes that has been challenging – we have no chance of changing anything else.

It's difficult to explain life in the Flekke bubble to people who haven't lived here. It's like a bizarre social experiment where 200 people from all over the world are put together and expected to live in harmony. We attempt to juggle socializing with studying, and sports, and often one drops to the floor and is forgotten. With so much to fill our days, thoughts of the present replace those of the past and the future. Looking back, time has passed too quickly and now time's up.

Many of us may think that this is the end. We are leaving our beloved home and moving on to an uncertain future. We will never wake up at 7am to the sound of an alarm that one of our roommates set. We will never walk to breakfast at 8am and see the full moon illuminating the fjord that stretches before us. Never will we talk of EEs, IAs or our

unfinished CAS diaries. Never again will we be able to dine amongst people from all the corners of the world, - or accidentally end up with half the people Nordic or Latinos. We spent so much time getting used to the quirks of RCN, and now we have to learn to live without it again.

It's impossible to leave this place without feeling regret. There will be kayak trips we never made, mountains we never climbed and stories we never shared. We told ourselves that we had work to do, and postponed other plans until suddenly we were out of time. In these last few days we've become more aware of what's really important here. Sleep, study and sports have been side-lined as we've slowly realized what RCN truly means to us. In the end, it's not the shows, the hikes or the cold swims that tug at our hearts, but the people that have become our second family. That's what makes RCN so hard to leave. Perhaps two years are not enough to do everything we would have liked to do, but two years are more than enough to make leaving hurt.

642 days ago, we were seated in this room together, nervous about what the future had in store for us. I would have thought that today I would feel different. Yet again I find myself scared, and lonely, and a little bit heartbroken. Leaving home is never easy, and it's not easier this second time. I know that this is not the end of us. I know that 642 days from now, and 642 days later, and 642 days after that, we will still be family.

And maybe it is the end of life here, but it's not the end of this experience. Our two years here will continue to shape the decisions we make, the way we view the world, and the way we live our lives.

That's why we're not going to say goodbye.

This is not goodbye.

See you later and until then, **"ha de"**