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Senior Class Speaker  
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Friends, faculty, staff, distinguished guests, distinguished people who have been here all along – good morning.

Today is an important day. Today is a day to hear important wisdom about important matters, when important people come up on this stage to honor this important occasion, but I'm not that important, so I'm going to talk about Batman.

Well, not exactly Batman, but superheroes in general. It's been a good decade for comic book nerds. We've gotten a handful of really excellent superhero movies – The Avengers, The Amazing Spider-Man, Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy – and any franchise that's made more than about six dollars has released an origin story for its hero, or team of heroes. Hollywood's current obsession, it seems, is back stories, those pivotal experiences that turn ordinary people into champions of truth and justice and spandex.

For most of us, it wasn't a radioactive spider-bite, or the surgical infusion of adamantium to our skeletons, or the tragic explosion of our home planet, though leaving home might have felt like that for some people. Our origin stories are usually more commonplace – the first time you solved an equation with more letters than numbers, reading Foucault and getting it, the time you got up on stage and realized you never wanted to leave. I like to think that my harrowing, greatness-triggering life experience was birth, explaining the epic force of nature I am today, but unless the next incarnation of Catwoman is to be Catlady, it seems my superhero destiny is yet unfulfilled.

Really, though, we all have our powers. Pomona College is filled –obnoxiously so – with people who have no right to be as awesome as they are. Daniel Contreras helped build an adaptive optics system to improve Pomona's telescope in the San Gabriel Mountains. What a visionary! Faye Wang ran our budget, completed a major in Gender and Women's Studies, was a bar trivia champ at the Press, and still found time to knit enough to keep eight sheep naked for four straight years. Shear genius! Juliette Walker made every one of us a cup. That's 373 cups, guys. She's kiln it.

Okay, getting a little serious, though, one of the weirdest things about being at Pomona is that you're so surrounded by all these highly capable, driven people – and yes, Mr. Neustadt, we are driven – that sometimes you mistake everyone else's superhero costumes for the civilian identity beneath. You start to feel like you're the only one who's struggling to balance everything, classes and work and sports and music and volunteering and vigilante justice and maybe even a social life.

Even when it's just classes, sometimes it feels like the end of the Avengers when the giant flying alien death turtles just keep coming and you can't zap them fast enough. And you look around, and everyone's talking about their all-nighters like they're yesterday's battle scars



instead of today's dark undereye circles and you start to wonder how everyone can be so chill all the time.

We pride ourselves on being chill, but can we be real for a second? Sometimes being chill is total bunk. Sometimes you're not in a position to laugh it off, or get over it, or be cool. One of the most useful things my mom ever told me was this – we always judge our insides by everyone else's outsides. We all have days when our laugh is more fake than real, but somehow we think everyone else is genuinely okay all the time, because that's the front they put up, and we buy it.

I think this is a waste of time. Even established superheroes have bad days – Batman didn't save Rachel. Thor dropped his brother off a bridge. Halle Berry starred in Catwoman. We spend a whole lot of energy pretending we've got it together that I think could be better spent recognizing the help we've had accomplishing the super things we've accomplished.

So on this, the occasion of our abandoning the sidekick gig and moving towards full-fledged superherodom, I'd like to recognize the forces directly behind our success. Our families – by blood or by love or by both – who've pushed us to push ourselves. Our professors, who offered us their wisdom and patience in and out of the classroom. Our friends, who called us out on our shenanigans and supported us when we couldn't support ourselves. Our resource centers, who helped us feel connected, valued, heard. Our wonderful staff, who kept our campus beautiful and our buildings clean and safe and our bellies full. Thank you. We don't say it enough. Thank you.

To wrap up here, I'd like to invoke the most fundamental tenet of superheroing, the one that's basically written on the back of our college gates – with great power comes great responsibility. Whether you're TheaterMan or ChemistryWoman or DismantlingtheGenderBinaryPerson, get out there, kick some butt, take some names. The world won't know what hit it. But we will.