

Edwin Krupp '66
Pomona College Commencement 2011
May 15, 2011

Thank you, Dr. Penprase. What a delight to be back in the mix again. I am honored and charmed to be here with all of you in a brief pause of maximum academic potential energy before we all accelerate into the next kinetic enterprise. I am beholden to President Oxtoby, the Board of Trustees, and the faculty for this honor, which provides me yet another opportunity to return to the scene of my undergraduate crimes.

I believe it's my responsibility this morning to say something that is brief and relevant to this moment we share on the brink of all of your next enterprises. Confounding that expectation—except for brevity—I am going to say something about Pomona College and astronomy. Astronomy may not seem to deliver a universally relevant theme, but it is why I first came to Pomona College, where the humanities and sciences are linked. So astronomy does infiltrate this 118th Pomona College Commencement.

Astronomy was actually part of the earliest fabric of Pomona. Frank P. Brackett was one of the first three professors on the Pomona College faculty. He taught astronomy, and by 1908, he had built an on-campus observatory. So, Pomona College, with cosmic perspective, always had its priorities right.

The observatory was subsequently named for Professor Brackett, and long after his tenure, I was privileged to live there. I was installed in the observatory by Dr. Bob Chambers, my advisor and Pomona College's astronomy professor. I am ever grateful to him.

Several responsibilities accompanied residence at Brackett Observatory. The six-inch refracting telescope atop the historic stone building had to be operated for public viewing for students and for anyone else who happened to come by at what was then the edge of civilization in Claremont. There was no moment of epiphany for me, but somehow I absorbed an essential concept: It's not about astronomy. It's about astronomy and people. That kind of experience—and everything else at Pomona College that humanizes knowledge and analysis—cultivates an informed framework for action in any subsequent endeavor.

Being the resident astronomical agent at Brackett Observatory, of course, added some glamour to my on-campus profile, but in fact, I was really a caretaker. Brackett Observatory had historic buildings and historic instruments and historic pictures and historic books and historic charts, and they had to be protected and maintained.

This sounds very mundane and obvious and even unpromising, but it resonates with something else I learned at Pomona College, from Professor Vincent Learnihan, in History of Western Civilization. Professor Learnihan was very quick, wickedly funny, and persuasively insistent on intellectual commitment. He said a lot of things, and in one of the discussion section sessions, he said, "Maintenance is the key to civilization." I hadn't thought much about maintenance before. It didn't sound very interesting, but I figured Professor Learnihan wouldn't say it if it weren't important. That thought continued to haunt me after I graduated from Pomona College. At Pomona College, I had become a fan of civilization, and as new



responsibilities emerged, taking care of things, reinforcing their foundations, enhancing their usefulness, and ensuring their survival for future users became fundamental priorities.

Maintenance now seems like a lofty vocation to me.

President Oxtoby's recent remarks about Pomona's "Daring Minds" Campaign prompted me to recall one more thing I learned at Pomona College. President Oxtoby spotlighted the essential function of the college: to provide the students with "a wealth of life-shaping opportunities for educational depth, cultural exposure, creative inspiration, and practical experience."

I didn't exactly realize it at the time, but Pomona College is a vehicle for opportunity. When I first arrived at Pomona, I instead imagined it would deliver knowledge and insight kind of like room service. That's a romantic, self-indulgent, and appealing notion, but in fact, Pomona College doesn't operate like room service.

What Pomona really offers instead—and you know this—is one chance after another to do stuff, really remarkable stuff. During my four years here, I saw many students—and faculty, too—seizing the day because they could.

Like my experience with Brackett Observatory, with Professor Learnihan, and with a whole catalog of personal Pomona experiences, the mechanism sticks with you. It sets you up to do the next thing, and that has always been my definition of success—getting to do the next thing.

So, I was grateful to inhabit Professor Brackett's observatory. I did not realize it at the time, but the experience colored my sensibilities about life, the universe, and everything. I hope you have gotten to do stuff while here. I hope the place has enlarged your vision and enriched your principles. It's your life, your universe, your everything. You get to seize the day. Get on it.

About Edwin Krupp

Edwin Krupp '66 is an astronomer and the director of the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles. He began his career at the iconic observatory as a planetarium lecturer, and in 1972 was appointed curator, with responsibility for the fabrication and design of major museum exhibits. As director, one of his early projects was to develop long-term strategy for the renovation and renewal of the facility, which opened in 1935. Ultimately, this led to the \$93 million renovation of the Griffith Observatory from 2002-2006. Throughout his career, Krupp has been known for his embrace of the latest technology to better serve the Observatory's audience, his promotion of astronomy to the general public, and his extensive publications on astronomical and science education topics. His award-winning books include *In Search of Ancient Astronomies and Archaeoastronomy and the Roots of Science*. He has also contributed to numerous other volumes, lectures frequently on astronomical topics, and has led dozens of field study and eclipse viewing tours around the globe. He holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. in Astronomy from UCLA. At Pomona College he majored in physics and astronomy, participated in cross-country, track, and soccer, and worked at KSPC Radio. For two years he lived in Brackett Observatory and served as its caretaker.