

You were not alone

Your time at Virginia Tech has been about more than the accumulation of academic credits. It has, I hope, prepared you to live a flourishing life intertwined with the well-being of others. That preparation has come from drawing lessons from all your experiences, happy and sad, fruitful and frustrating, sweet and bitter, including the experiences of that tragic day, April 16. One lesson I hope you will carry with you from that day and its aftermath is that you were not alone. Your family and friends worried about you. Virginia Tech was not alone. The concern of fellow universities, and the nation itself, was focused on Blacksburg. As individuals and as a hurting community, you were the recipients of our thoughts and prayers. Remember this, for in the future, you never will be truly alone. Those who love you will care. Even strangers will be kind. In the depths of misery, there will be cords of compassion to draw you back to others.

This is not to deny the presence of tragedy, hate, and evil in the world into which we send you. Life can be dangerous, full of risk. But to respond to life with fear is to diminish yourself. Resolve, rather, to treat every precious moment of your life as a bounty to be spent with generosity and joy. You have already learned that, with the help of others, you can be brave in confronting the challenges life will throw your way, and learn to ride out its storms. In word and deed, encourage one another. As others will be there for you, you in turn will be desperately needed by others. And you will have something to give them because of what others have given you.

In your years at Virginia Tech, you have accumulated knowledge, skills, and wisdom, not simply to make a living, but to make a life. Your experiences at this beloved university contributed to the fashioning of your best self. All the experiences, even those of that terrible day. Redeem the memory of that day by using it as a spur to live fully the gift of the life you have. The world awaits the hope and meaning that you will bring to it.

Bobby Fong

President of Butler University