I want to share with you some philosophical ideas. Not the ideas of Plato, Socrates or even Rachel Carson. No, I have in mind some concepts of Taoism as explained to my friend Winnie the Pooh by Oregon author Benjamin Hoff in his book *The Tao of Pooh*. To wit:

 . . . presents once opened are Not So Much Fun as they were while we were in the process of examining, lifting, shaking, thinking about, and opening them . . . later we try again and find that the same thing has happened. Each time the goal is reached, it becomes Not So Much Fun, and we're off to reach the next one, then the next one, then the next.

Hoff continues:

That doesn't mean that the goals we have don't count. They do, mostly because they cause us to go through the process and it's the process that makes us wise, happy, or whatever. If we do things in the wrong sort of way, it makes us miserable, angry, confused, and things like that. The goal has to be right for us, and it has to be beneficial, in order to ensure a beneficial process. But aside from that, it's really the process that's important.

**It’s really the process that’s important.**

While receiving your hood today is a crowning achievement, think back on the months and days and hours that brought you to this point.

Think about your wild field trip to the Olympic Peninsula—getting squished into white Evergreen vans with a bunch of people you hardly knew for hours on end. People you would later call friends. Exploring the dam removal site at the Elwha River, stomping around the ever-changing sandbar at the mouth of the river.

Don’t forget the sight of the Evergreen campus, a bunch of concrete buildings, certified to be environmentally sustainable, but none too pleasing to the eye.

Inside that maze of concrete you spent hours and hours learning about carbon cycling, wind turbines in Africa, old growth forests and spotted owls, writing persuasive and well-researched papers, making computer maps using polygons, and using JMP, Excel, and R to analyze columns of data. Along the way you grew as scholars.

Winnie the Pooh is not very fond of scholars. According to Pooh:

Now one rather annoying thing about scholars is that they are always using Big Words that some of us can't understand ... and one sometimes gets the impression that those intimidating words are there to keep us from understanding.

However, in MES you learned how to express yourselves and how to best present your ideas to people not familiar with your topic areas or your methods.

More importantly, you grew as individuals. You have learned to believe in yourselves and what you can do.

All of those things are part of the process that led you here today. They comprise the box shaking, wrapping paper examining precursors to this wonderful celebration.

We sit in an historic building, Olympia’s American Legion Hall, which opened in 1921. This place has been a center of the Olympia community for almost a century. It seems fitting that we gather here in iconic Heritage Hall for the MES hooding ceremony, applauding the accomplishments of this community of students, surrounded by an even larger community of family and friends, faculty and staff. Those communities have supported you through thick and thin, the good times and the bad. They too have been part of the process that has led you to this exciting day.

I have listened to a lot of graduation speeches over the past few weeks, and I really can’t recall much of what was said. If nothing else remember this: *Presents, once opened, are Not So Much Fun—it’s really the process that’s important.*