

This is going to be hard. I'm probably going to cry. Please bear with me.

The second that I heard Chloe's "this I believe" earlier this semester, I knew what mine would be about. She spoke about her belief in interdependency, but how ever since she was a little child, she was fiercely independent.

I immediately thought of one of my own unusual traits that I have held since infancy. I hate socks. Like, I like fun patterns and brightly colored ones, but only because I have to wear them. In my perfect world though, I would be in flip-flops all the time, and socks would not exist. All through my adolescence and even now, I still take my socks off and leave them all over the house. Every time my mom would find a pair or two laying on the living room floor, she would frustratedly tell me about when I was in a crib, the first thing I would do is pull off my socks and throw them out. When I became a toddler, she would never be able to lose me, because as soon as I wandered off, there would be a trail of socks leading straight to me.

Which brings me to the belief I feel lead to share today. I believe in leaving trails. I could easily fill a book with the many Babcock-isms and words of wisdom that he's shared with this ensemble and me over the past 4 years, but one of them that has stood out to me is how "true leaders plant trees under whose shade they'll never get to sit." It's all about doing hard work and caring enough to put yourself into something that won't blossom until after you've gone. This may be doing something that will bless your grandchildren long after your death, or working hard for an organization from which you'll soon graduate. I have thought about this so often, but I think it's missing something. Leaders don't just plant seeds for future generations. Leaders are willing to plant seeds that are hard and sometimes even painful to plant, and to leave trails so others can find them.

I have been faced with this graduation for years. It may be cliché, but it is unbelievable how quickly it has come. This has lead me to think a lot about what trails and seeds I've left at Central.

I feel like I've done a million things in the past 4 years. I was an RA, an SOS leader, a work-study student in admissions, music, conference services, and student involvement. I was an InterVarsity VC

leader for a semester, I went to New Orleans with campus ministries, to London with Study Abroad, I was marketing coordinator and president at different times for Central One Iowa, and been on a half dozen search committees for Central admins.

My heart doesn't break, however, when I think about leaving any of these. My heart breaks when I think of leaving the A Cappella Choir. My freshman year I was Mr. Babcock's intern, music work-study, and choir manager all in one semester. I'll never forget the moment when Justin von Ahsen nominated me in St. Michael's, Maryland to be a choir officer at the end of that year. No matter how stressed I got, I adored every moment of the three Candlelight concerts that I got to spend hours in here decorating Christmas trees. I have made the best friends of my life on this stage, and moments ago, we seniors finished our last rehearsal on it.

I truly hope that I've planted seeds that will shade each of you underclassmen in the next few years. I can't think of any senior here who doesn't hope that they've done the same. There have been so many days when I just wanted to give up, when I wanted to hide from the world, and stepping onto this stage made

it easier to handle. There have been days when stepping on this stage has been difficult, but there were always good friends here to hold my hand through it. There are people here with whom I'll probably never be good friends. There are people here also that I'll be friends with until the day I die. But whether you were my best friend or not, I've still learned from you.

Each and every single one of you have planted seeds for me, in some way. Some of you have shown me who I want to be someday. Some of you have encouraged me when I struggled with how to be a good leader. Some of you have just been there to listen to me complain, or to tell me to suck it up and put it into perspective. Some of you taught me to laugh at myself and lighten up. Some of you have taught me how to appreciate interdependency, some of you have taught me how to just breathe. These are seeds that have grown and changed who I was and who I've become, and while you may never get to see that shade, you have planted the seed.

And some of you have planted the difficult seeds. I know there have been times when it felt like all I was doing was meaningless, but I pray and hope that that work will blossom under your continued care.

This ensemble has been my life. It has been my heart when I was too heartbroken to keep going, and it has been my soul when I was too numb to believe anything else. It was my legs when I couldn't stand any longer, and it was my voice so many times when I didn't know what to say.

Cherish this. Take care of it. Love it and remember that it is your own. This ensemble is a seed that was planted decades ago, and hundreds of men and women have continued leaving trails for us to find it. Be one of them. Leave a trail, and plant your own new seeds, the easy and the hard.

I have struggled with how to thank you all. How do you say thank you to something that's changed your life and made you a better person? I honestly don't know, but thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

I'm Cameron Van Kooten, I'm really sad, and I believe in planting seeds and leaving trails.