

Good afternoon everyone. I am honored to be up here speaking in front of all of you and am truly humbled that you all spent several thousand dollars just to listen to me speak. I'm sure you all have heard enough of my voice over the last few weeks but unfortunately you asked for this so deal with it.

My classmates told me that they chose me to speak because they didn't think I would make them cry. Well, challenge accepted. In order to defeat my classmates and bring them to tears I considered showing puppy videos or military family reunion videos and as a last resort, give a 20 minute cooking demonstration on how to chop onions. But since the cooking demo would probably make me cry more than anyone else that was out. Instead, I decided to take this opportunity for what I hope it actually is. I am hopeful that my classmates actually followed the directions and selected me to be up here because they felt that I represented what it meant to be in Calisto.

For those of you who don't know, we were named Calisto after the butterfly and were named so because of the stages of a butterfly, from being a caterpillar and going through the evolution to becoming a butterfly. Ten weeks ago a cynical-Midtown-Uniform-Wearing Mike would have had no time for such a metaphor, but I must admit, it is a pretty spot on representation of what we went through. I'm not sure I really am the best representation of what it meant to be in Calisto but what I can do is tell you my story and what my transformation was like and what Calisto meant to me.

November 3, 2018, just about one year ago, on a typical College Football Saturday, my girlfriend and I were discussing what we were going to do that night. She

told me that a couple of her friends were getting together at a bar to watch the games and she asked if I wanted to go. At the time, I said the worst possible thing..."Nah, I'm good, you go ahead, I'll just hang here and watch at home." Oh man was that a mistake. We got into a big fight about me never wanting to go out or be with people and that I was constantly unhappy and my constant sour mood was bringing her, and us, down. At the time, it was the wrong thing to say but looking back, it was the best fight we've gotten into.

I was working a sales job I didn't particularly like for a company I *really* didn't like. But, I was making good money and I was successful so I stuck with it. I wasn't happy but I was comfortable. So that night we yelled back and forth a bit until she finally told me that something had to change, that I couldn't keep bringing her down like this. That I wasn't the same person that she had started dating. So I threw on my jacket, popped in my headphones (with no music playing) and I walked along Bedford Ave from where I live by the Williamsburg Bridge, all the way to the top of Greenpoint. As I got to the apex of my walk, I called her and asked her to come meet me for a beer at The Brew Inn. Over a beer, and eventually a delicious burger, we talked about what I'll call my self-diagnosed depression and that I wanted to take steps to get myself back on track. I told her that I would begin to meditate and journal, in hopes of getting my feelings out and making sense of them. So that what I did. I bought a journal and wrote in it...once. But I did start to meditate and it did help me to make sense of my feelings and release some of my stress with work and my life. And I started to look for different jobs in related fields like marketing but nothing really excited me. So for Christmas she bought

me a book called “Designing Your Life”, which I can only really describe as a self help book with activities that gets you thinking about your life and what will make you happy. I worked through this book in fits and starts while also combing job boards at companies that interested me. Throughout this, I started to think about my love of games and puzzles and problem solving and stumbled upon this field called UX. Unsure of what exactly it meant, I did research and some online modules and eventually found myself at a UX info session here at GA followed by a one day bootcamp, and finally after numerous conversations with my admissions producer, Eli, I enrolled in the immersive course here.

I share this with you because I know that it is similar to what many others have gone through to get here. Many of us had another career, and one we were successful in, before we got to a point where we either couldn’t take it any more or wanted a new challenge and direction with our lives. The fact that we were able to make that change and take control of our lives again is something that should not be taken for granted. That is a huge deal and I hope that everyone here, student or not, recognizes and appreciates that.

In our cohort we constantly talked about having a growth mindset and there is no better representation of having that mindset than all of the people who are sitting here. From day 1, my classmates and instructors made me feel comfortable in my surroundings and comfortable being vulnerable. Everyone in my class brought a new perspective to my life and challenged me to view things differently and step out of my comfort zone. I am fortunate that I was surrounded by 16 individuals with different

temperaments, talents, and convictions, who allowed me to be myself and to learn and grow alongside them. I am so proud of all of my friends sitting here who experienced this adventure with me.

Last year at the end of the year, my girlfriend and I did a year end reflective exercise one of the questions was “What are you most proud of from the last year?” At the time, I didn’t have an answer. I cannot tell you how much that hurt me.

So this year, I maybe overcompensated a bit and decided to run a 10 mile race, get engaged, and quit my job BUT I tell you this because on top of what I’ve done, I know that my classmates have a lot to be proud of too. Haiyin is a new mom, Phil, Danielle, Kate, and Katie all moved to NY for a new career, Babs moved in with her girlfriend, Soojin probably learned another new language while we were sitting here but most importantly, all of us took the first step in improving our lives and having a successful career in UX design, and that is something to be extremely proud of. Thank you.