

Support from strangers
July 3, 2020

Dear Students,

Here's a quick story from my weekend a few days ago. I had the evening free, and a friend and I wanted to get out on the water to see the sunset over the sea. We rented a boat and left from a boat launch about 2 miles up the river and were paddling toward the ocean, going much faster than we would have normally because the river was flowing in the same direction. We got to the sea, watched the sunset, and then turned around to go home, knowing that it would get dark, so we had to paddle quickly.

Unfortunately, now the river was flowing against us, and it was much slower than it had been before. Lots of bugs started to come out and were biting us. Between the bugs, the darkness, and the slow speed, the whole thing was turning into an unpleasant experience. We made it about halfway back, and then saw a larger boat and asked them if they could tow us back home, which they did. They brought our canoe on board, and let us sit in the boat with them. It was a nice friendly moment from a group of strangers.

But the most memorable part of the story is what happened next. We got to talking with these people, asking each other where we lived and what we did for work. As we were getting off the boat, one of the older women took my hand and looked at me seriously. "I'm blessing your school and your students," she said. "I want them to succeed, like I would want my own children to succeed. They're doing great work."

It's not often that people say something like that to a stranger, although I find that it does happen a fair amount when I tell people about our school and what you all are doing. And they mean it sincerely.

The reason I'm telling you about this is because I know that all of you are currently at home, studying alone, and have been for weeks now. As you now know, that's a tough situation, and it's easy to start feeling down or unmotivated, or to forget that you're connected to something greater.

So I want you to know that the work you're doing is inspiring to a lot of people, even complete strangers. They hear about young people working to get an education that you can use to improve your own lives, and your families and communities, and they connect with your story. It's similar to the feeling that encourages strangers to donate to the school, because they believe in you and want to help us build something special here.

Think about that over the next few weeks as you're studying. You're almost to the end of individual studying, and then we'll all be back together at school. You'll also have a break from classes before you return, so your last day of online classes will be on July 17, and then you'll have about 10 days until you return on July 28.

For now, though, just keep focusing, keep working, and know that there are lots of people out there - both friends and complete strangers - who are hoping that you'll succeed.

Sincerely,
James