

IOI Closing Ceremony Speech 14th July

1. Dr Behnam, the President of the IOI and other distinguished members of the round table, Mr. Mike Butler and members of the IOI staff, distinguished guests, members of the host families, fellow participants, ladies and gentlemen.
2. It gives me a deep sense of satisfaction to be speaking to you today at the closing ceremony of the 2011 IOI training programme. I am also extremely honoured that my fellow class mates actually elected me through a secret ballot to be the speaker this evening – to put it bluntly, I am truly flattered.
3. When I was told that I have been chosen to speak today, my initial reaction was to say NO. I had two reasons for it. Firstly because by last Thursday, my brain had refused to function and Secondly, more important, because I am a lawyer – I don't speak unless I am paid!
4. Now that I am persuaded to speak today, I will speak on behalf of my fellow class mates about our two months in Halifax with the IOI.
5. Let me rewind this back to the 15th of May when it all began to happen. I arrived here on a wet and windy afternoon at Glengary at Edward Street, which was to be our home for the next two months. But Madeleine, our first real insight to IOI, had already warned me about the fickle weather. She had also warned me of something else. That I would be sharing an apartment with two men from the Caribbean. Ricardo Miux was a nice bloke and I took an immediate liking to him..... Then there was Iyva Gage.....Dr Iyva Gage was yet to arrive. After a 36-hour-journey I was fast asleep one night when a loud clatter of luggage woke me upIyva Gage had arrived. Next morning I was woken up by the sound of reggae music coming from his room.....then it happened.... I actually saw him.....trust me, he was the tallest thing I had ever seen next to giraffe!!!
6. In the coming days we got to know each **ONE** of us cautiously. I felt like a “fish out of water” but the others were no better, they were “all at sea”. There were participants from Trinidad & Tobago to Tanzania, Cuba to Cape Verde. Emergence China as a global super power was clearly manifest.....this time, IOI had got bullied into enrolling 3 participants from China.....a few days later a participant flew down from Germany.....she too was Chinese. !!! Soon I was to realize that all in the group were a truly awesome lot.

7. Here at IOI we met some truly wonderful people. Finally after months of exchanging e-mails we got to meet Madeleine. She turned out to be just the person we thought her to be....warm accommodating and ever so helpful. In the coming weeks I got know Scott and their two lovely kids Victoria and Thomas. I was also taught the rudiments of dissecting a cooked lobster in the true Canadian style. Madeleine..... Let me take this opportunity tell you how wonderful it was to be your guest.
8. Then there was Mike Butler, the affable Director of IOI. From what we gathered, Mike wasn't to be involved with the programme to the extent he was. Guess Mike was forced to do the job due to Dr Brown's inability to run this year's programme. Mike kept a close eye on all of us ensuring that there was 100% attendance at lectures and that we all attended lectures on time. Though elementary, it was still a marvelous lesson to learn even at this late stage of our lives. The walking encyclopedia he was, Mike taught us many things. He also made us believe in one thing; that..... there was only one Bay in the world..... and..... that was the Bay of Fundy!!! Mike was, however, vindicated when we actually saw the Bay of Fundy for ourselves.....it was truly awesome.
9. Fickle weather continued to greet us during our early days in Halifax. However in this pall of gloom there was a constant glow of sunshine around us. That came in the form of Lara Green, our programme coordinator of the IOI. Lara literally took us under her wings from the day one and looked into our needs with much efficiency. From early settling in period at Glengary to the programme related administrative work Lara was there in the thick of things. For habitually disorganized few like me, Lara Green was painfully methodical. We called her the Mother Hen.....that was only till she drove us in a big black car, quite rapidly to Digby ...She was christened the "Green Hornet" ever since. Let me on behalf of my fellows wish you Lara all the very best for your law degree you are starting in September, you have chosen wisely.

10. One other thing that struck us about Halifax was the sheer number of people that had specialised in ocean sciences and ocean environment. The concentration of such men was simply astounding. We were fortunate to be taught by men of such knowledge, experience and integrity. One such person – a submariner - called David Griffiths is worthy of mention. During the programme we learnt about various types of vessels, oil tankers, ice breakers, frigates, corvettes and more. David does not agree with this classification of vessels. To him there are only two types: Submarines and Targets! With his charming smile he engaged us in this energy-sapping simulation exercise. We were made to really sweat in chilly Halifax. Perhaps David saw us as “targets” too.....but then it really didn’t matter because we had murderous thoughts about him too. Well...all that is history now.....But David did something marvelous; he showed us how much we were capable of achieving as a group.... a capacity which we didn’t realize we had. For that....thank you David for bringing out the best in each one of us.
11. Something that really made me think twice about coming for this programme was that event called the POT Luck dinner. Each participant was expected to cook a native dish. We were asked to bring along local ingredients well in advance. This really freaked me out. Men in Sri Lanka don’t cook – I was no exception. So, when that customs officer at Halifax Air Port asked me about the food stuff I was carrying, I was overjoyed. I was rather hoping that he would confiscate the ingredients....so that I could not cook and blame it on Canadian customs! Much to my horror I was allowed to pass through with the stuff.
12. In the next couple of days I tried every trick in the book to avoid cooking until that man, Iyva Gage said one day “you got to cook maaan” Things began to happen quite quickly...my wife sent me e-mails detailing step by step cooking and then there was the marvelous tool call the “you tube”.....today I stand here before you as an accomplished cook.....even if I say so myself. I will certainly include that in the enormous list of things I learnt here in Nov Scotia.....talk of empowerment!!
13. You may perhaps wonder why there is so much reference to Iyva Gage....I beg your pardon, Dr Iyva Gage! Let me tell you, since the day it was announced that I would be doing the honours this evening, Iyva was pestering me no end to mention him in my speech.....so there you go.

14. The Potluck party itself was awesome fun until it was abruptly cut short by the Lady in Charge at Glengary !! Such cruelty!
15. If I initially felt like a “fish out of water” and the others “all at sea” it all changed very rapidly. Soon we began to havea “whale of a time”..... How appropriate is that for an ocean policy programme?!!! My Chinese colleagues contributed significantly to the Canadian economy by indulging in some serious shopping. Irony of it was that everything they bought was “made in china”.
16. During the last couple of weeks we learnt about Sustainable Fishery to Marine Spatial planning. Ocean Sciences to Maritime Boundary delimitation. We learnt about Precautionary principle and Intergenerational Equity. Our communication skills were honed; we were taught how to be hard-nosed negotiators. We traveled to the magnificent Bay of Fundy, visited North America’s only tidal power station at Annapolis, that state-of-the art research facility – the Bedford Institute of Oceanography.
17. We can now speak with confidence about bottom trawling nets to wind powered turbines in the North Sea. We know much about lobster boats in Digby and the huge container vessels of Maersk Shipping in Denmark. On a sadder note we also know that your Cod stocks may never recover. I wouldn’t know which parts of Sri Lanka will go under water due to sea level rise in 100 years, but I know which parts of Halifax will go under water in 100 years. With all this wealth of knowledge and experience we gathered it was indeed time spent well...time spent very very well
18. We can also speak about the cultures of the Canadian first nations and we have been educated and sensitized not to call them Red Indians and Eskimos!!!!.....we also know what the Brits did to those poor Acadians!!! We also experienced that this country had everything, except, **LOCKS IN YOUR BATHROOMS !!!**.
19. All good things must come to an end and, sadly though, it’s goodbye time. It’s time to go home. Although we are excited to be reunited with our families, friends, loved ones and pets, we can’t help but feel a tinge of sadness in our hearts for Halifax. We will miss our home in Glengary, we will miss our class room at MaCaine Building, we will miss Mike doing a head count every morning to see everyone was in class, we will miss Lara slowly sneaking out of

class once everyone had settled down for the lecture.....and we will miss doing our weekly grocery shopping at Atlantic Super Store.

20. We take back the rich learning experience we were fortunate to have in these hallowed portals of Dalhousie. We are eager and excited to share that learning with our fellow countrymen back home. We also take back loads of fond memories of Halifax and the wonderful people we met and the experience we had. Visions of Bay of Fundy will never be erased from our minds.....Coconia, Didonia and Longa will linger in our thoughts for eternity. Thank you IOI, Thank you Halifax, Thank you Canada.

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