



President Lahey's Remarks for Formal Meal

January 21, 2026

For some of us, tonight started in the President's Lodge. It has been a pleasure over the past 10 years to share the lodge with our community and especially with so many of you and the students who came before you. Kathryn has been my partner in that and in everything else, really—when you live inside your workplace, there is, at best, a permeable line between work and home. I want you all to join me in acknowledging and thanking Kathryn for sharing her family's home with the King's community over the past 10 years.

Kathryn and I met in Ottawa in the early 1990s when we were living around the corner from each other in the ByWard Market. Canadian singer-songwriter Jane Siberry was a big part of our soundtrack as we fell in love. Her song, "Love is Everything," starts like this:

Maybe it was to learn how to love

Maybe it was to learn how to leave

Maybe it was for the games we played

Maybe it was to learn how to choose

Maybe it was to learn how to lose

Maybe it was for the love we made

Love is everything they said it would be

Love made sweet and sad the same

The line about love being "sweet and sad" has been playing on my mind lately as I prepare to leave King's. This is a special place in so many ways. We do not only study the humanities here—we learn how to be more fully human. That includes learning how to love, how to choose, and how to lose as we pursue success. I really think it includes the love we create here. King's can teach us that, with love, sweet and sad can be the same.

Recently, as I was driving, I let Apple CarPlay pick the music it knew I would like, as I often do. For those of you who have heard my playlist from any of the gatherings I host in the lodge, you might guess, correctly, the Apple algorithm was drawing heavily on the singer-songwriter music of the late '60s, '70s and '80s, as well as the music of later decades that owes its roots to musicians of those decades. Lots of Bob Dylan, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, Leonard Cohen, Johnny Cash, Emmylou Harris, Simon and Garfunkel, the Beatles and James Taylor, with a smattering of

Talking Heads, Blondie, Coldplay, Lana Del Ray, Billie Elish, Norah Jones, Ed Sheeran, and of course, Taylor Swift. Sometimes Apple gives me a lovely surprise, as it did the other day when it played “Know Better” by King’s student Eliza Rhinelander.

You will likely find in the years to come that the music you listen to in your teens and twenties will be the music—or the kind of music—that stays with you. That, at least, has been my experience and apparently, there is science about the open-earedness we have when we are younger that backs up my experience. So be choosy about what you are listening to! You are going to be listening to it for a long time!

Apple played two songs back-to-back which, together, captured the combination of emotions and perspectives I walk around with these days. The first was, in fact, “These Days”, written by Jackson Browne when he was 16 in either 1964 or ’65. It has been covered by Elliot Smith, Cat Power, St. Vincent, Drake and Miley Cyrus, among many others.

Because Browne wrote it at 16, “These Days” can’t be a song about either retirement or growing old. In the ’70s and across the intervening decades I listened to it as a song about accepting lost love. The kind of song a 16-year-old kid would write. But it now strikes me as a song that is definitely about retirement and growing old—an example of how songs, music, literature, poetry, ideas, age with us if we let them.

Then and now, “These Days” is melancholic—the kind of sad song that comforts, like the best sad songs do. I have always been a sucker for melancholy, a close cousin to my sentimentality. Kathryn, our daughter Elizabeth and I went to see *Hamnet* over the holidays. I could feel them looking towards me through the darkness of the theatre at the exact moment they both knew I would be crying. I am looking forward in the years to come to having a little more opportunity to indulge my melancholy.

The opening lines of “These Days” go like this:

*Well, I've been out walking
I don't do that much talking these days*

*These days I seem to think a lot
About the things that I forgot to do for you
And all the times I had the chance to*

Later, there are these lines:

*These days I'll sit on corner stones
And count the time in quarter tones to ten, my friend
Don't confront me with my failures
I had not forgotten them*

I often get asked “these days” about what I am going to “do next”. I have various noncommittal answers. But truth be told, I am going to be “out walking”, “sitting on corner stones”, talking less, a lot less and spending more time in quiet spaces. I will be remembering all the wonderful experiences of the last 10 years, as well as the challenging ones, and the changes we have made together, especially those that have made King’s a more inclusive and welcoming place and home for all of you.

I want you all to know I will also be thinking about you and all the students before you. And, along with all the wonderful times we’ve shared, I’ll no doubt ruminate on the “the things I forgot to do for you when I had the chance”, and my failures, which I will not forget. I will do so remembering something I have learned over life—that failure is not the opposite of success but its companion, and often the richer of the two in what it has to teach us. And I am not done learning.

That brings me full circle to that line by Jane Siberry, “Love makes sweet and sad the same.” It captures the alchemy of love, a bittersweet mix of success and failure. Ultimately, this is what “These Days” is about—love. And that is what my time at King’s has been—a time of love. Tonight, my heart is full of love.

And, of course, I will be watching life unfold here at King’s, deeply grateful for the part I had in it for a decade. That brings me to the second song played for me by Apple CarPlay, as if on cue. It was “Forever Young”, written in ’73 by the one and only, the great Bob Dylan.

I know there had to be a time in my life before Bob Dylan. But I cannot remember it. One of my favourite songs is the version of “Girl from the North Country” that Dylan and Cash sing on *Nashville Skyline*. It is a great song. But I love it especially because it is one of the few times these two icons of mine recorded together. I really hope Kathryn knows that one of the things I am going to be doing around our much smaller new home in the days to come is even more listening to Bob Dylan and Johnny Cash—but perhaps with headphones.

“Forever Young” is a song of the hopes of an older person for a much younger one. Dylan wrote it for his son. You could say it is a song about defying age. Dylan was 32 when he wrote it and may have already worried if his best days were not behind him, if only because his life up to then had been so extraordinary.

But the song is really about staying young in your mind and your heart as you age. And that is what my time at King’s, and at Dalhousie before that, has helped me do. That is what you have all helped me do. I feel I have been able to fulfill the hope of the final lines of the song because of this gift you, and all the other young people I have spent time with in my almost 30-year career in education, have given me. The lines I have in mind go like this:

*May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift*

*May your heart always be joyful
May your song always be sung*

And may you stay forever young

I head into retirement with a strong foundation, a heart full of joy and a song that I will keep singing because of you, and all the other students I have had the privilege to know as professor or president. These gifts that you have given me will abide with me and sustain me. I will stay forever young. Thank you.

And I hope being “forever young” comes true for you. For all of you, with Bob’s words, and all my heart, this is my parting wish for each of you:

*May God bless and keep you always
May your wishes all come true
May you always do for others
And let others do for you*

*May you build a ladder to the stars
And climb on every rung*

And may you stay forever young