

***Delivered on Tuesday, June 16, 2009,
On the occasion of the Class of 2013's Moving Up.***

We are surrounded today by dreams and wishes. And nowhere are these dreams more clearly embodied than in the dream flags that hang above us. Presiding over us in this auditorium are the dreams and wishes of previous eighth graders who have moved up before you. These dreams and wishes are captured in their beautiful dream flags, which have graced our hallways throughout the year and that now bear witness to your moving up. Behind you are the dream flags that you have created that now join this important collective of hopes, aspirations and advice.

So I choose to address you on this occasion, as I have with other eighth grade classes, with your own words. Hidden in your dream flags is a story, your story, and my humble task is to find a way into that narrative. At first glance, the flags and the sentiments they express seem to have no internal coherence; they are just a collection of random thoughts. But after thoughtful reflection, a flag will always emerge to reveal a thread that connects all of the flags together. So it is with this flag that we begin, but first a quick aside.

Many of you are familiar with the Middle School archives. If not, then know that the archives are that slightly mythical realm in which reside great deeds of middle school daring and accomplishment. This first flag gains a storied place in the archives for being the first flag to provide the inspiration for a Moving Up speech that quotes a line from Mel Brooks' irreverent *Star Wars* send-up *Spaceballs*. And what is that line?

Ludicrous speed engaged

What could this possibly mean and how could it have any relevance to the members of the Class of 2013? Of the many things that impress me about this class, one that stands out is your fierce devotion to each other. You have had your ups and down, but there is an essential goodness that binds you together as a collective group. Perhaps it is true that

*Each friend represents a world in us, possibly born until they arrive
and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.ⁱ*

And maybe it is true that

In a friend you find a second self.ⁱⁱ

In your own interactions with each other, you have clearly demonstrated that

A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.ⁱⁱⁱ

You understand that a community is an interdependent entity. In communities driven by caring and compassion, the one gives without regard to self because she knows that the community will be there for her in her time of need. As you sang and as captured on one of the flags,

*Lean on me, when you're not strong I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on,
for it won't be long 'til I'm going to need somebody to lean on.^{iv}*

What gets us to this understanding where as one of you observes

I will shed a tear of my own to prevent a few of yours.

Maybe you already understand the essential truth that it is as simple as

Hearts that give and take and break and heal and grow.^v

And you know that

You're not alone. Together we stand. I'll be by your side. You know I'll take your hand.^{vi}

You only get this moment once so take a look around and

See your friends. See the sights. Feel alright.^{vii}

What makes this community of individuals so strong? Perhaps you've taken to heart Oscar Wilde's admonition to

Be yourself, everyone else is taken.

Or, as the good Dr. Suess opines

*Today you are you, that is truer than true.
There is no one alive YOUER than you.*

But you have not allowed yourself to get lost in your "youness." Look to your right and to your left. These are the people who matter. So

*Be who you are and say what you feel because
those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind.^{viii}*

Your teachers and the school like to think that we also matter in your lives. You have challenged us to live our progressive mission as teachers and as a school because you have always understood that

*We can't always prepare the future for youth,
but we can always prepare our youth for the future.^{ix}*

It was true when FDR said it and is no less true today. Earlier this year, you sat in this room transfixed as we watched history unfold as the nation inaugurated Barack Obama as our first African American president who said,

*Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time.
We are the one's we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.*

So be that change, you have practiced for it everyday in the Middle School by taking risks in you thinking and in you actions towards each other. Despite the ample supports, these risks were real and you were courageous. And by courageous we mean something more than simply facing your fears; true courage touches on something deeper

Courage is the discovery that you may not win and trying when you know you can lose.^x

You have understood that facts and knowledge are important but not sufficient; they require a purpose, a driving force connected to our shared humanity. This is what Albert Einstein meant when he observed that

Imagination is more important than knowledge.

Our imagination allows us to consider not simply what is, but what might be. And it is our inner life as expressed through our creativity that touches on what it means to be human. And so it is that

Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.^{xi}

And before us today sit artists of all sorts. But do not forget that the most important work of art that you will create is the one that is already in progress...your life, but heed John Gardener's advice that

Life is art without an eraser

And while it may be true as Shakespeare noted that

Love is blind

and that a common humanity cuts across our differences, one need only to look at the news to see that hate, anger, and intolerance are not blind. They actively seek to target others simply because they are different. So let

your love be blind, but do not be blinded. Be vocal and active where you see injustice, be an ally when one is needed. Do not be content with the status quo. Do not give up on your own capacity to constantly push the limits of your own thinking forward. Do not come to regret as Ozzy Osborne has that

Of all the things I've lost, I miss my mind the most

One of you reminded us to

Live on the edge.^{xii}

This idea of an “edge” speaks to possibilities and of being on the threshold of change. You are at one of these edge moments right now. Over the past four years, we have encouraged you to try even when the way was not always clear. This sentiment is captured in your own words on the flag that says

Try your hardest even if you don't know what you are doing

A wise teacher once told his Jedi student

Try not. Do, or do not. There is no try.^{xiii}

I think that what Jedi Master Yoda was getting at is that all action must have a purpose. To try is to not fully commit. To do is to commit purpose to action. So be purposeful in your efforts so that

What doesn't kill you will make you stronger.^{xiv}

But be cautious, mindful and fully awake to the world because while

*People occasionally stumble over the truth,
most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened.*^{xv}

Be vigilant, ask questions and don't always be satisfied by the first answer you hear. As Adlai Stevenson notes,

When you leave here, don't forget why you came.

So there is something today about journeys that is very present for all of us. One of you worries that

When we look back, will our jokes still be funny?^{xvi}

If it's true as one of you observes that

Life is like riding a bicycle, to keep your balance you must keep moving.^{xvii}

Then the question hinges on how you achieve that balance; another of you tells us

Don't cry because it's over....smile because it happened.^{xviii}

So maybe it's about knowing what to hold on to and what to let go of. All of you in this moment are tied together by memories. The idea of letting go of even one of these memories may seem inconceivable. But at the same time, none of you really want to live in a past that you have already traveled. You are ready to move up. As Christopher Columbus commented,

You can never cross the ocean until you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.

One of you suggests that

Life is like a road, you must move on to get somewhere

While another stresses the authentic journey. So ask yourself, whose journey are you really on? Is it yours or someone else's?

Don't go where the path may lead. Instead go your own way and leave a trail.^{xix}

Easy words "Go your own way," but harder to do. Mark Twain sums the challenge up best

Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the things you did. So throw away the bow lines, sail away from the safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

And where does all of this leave us? Right back where we started because you are going to have to do this in a world where "ludicrous speed" is engaged. It's literally true that information and ideas are flying around you at the speed of light. It's estimated that 40 exabytes (that's 4.0×10^{19} bytes) of unique new information will be generated worldwide this year. That's estimated to be more than in the previous 5,000 years. The amount of new technical information is doubling every 2 years. It's predicted to double every 72 hours by 2010.^{xx}

That's truly ludicrous. Your challenge will be to think about how we will use this new information to bring humans together and not divide us along lines of class, race, religion, and sexual orientation. That this information will be used to support peace, tolerance, and understanding. That we will use it to fully realize our human potential and capacity for goodness. These are not insignificant tasks, but we have faith and confidence in you. And to help you along the way, remember the immortal words of *Spaceballs*' Yoda-like sage Yogurt, "May the Schwartz be with you."

ⁱ Anis Nin

ⁱⁱ Isabelle Norton

ⁱⁱⁱ Walter Winchel

^{iv} Bill Withers

^v Jack Johnson

^{vi} Avril Lavigne

^{vii} Supergrass

^{viii} Dr. Suess

^{ix} Franklin D. Roosevelt

^x Tom Krause

^{xi} Scott Adams

^{xii} Quaz

^{xiii} Jedi Master Yoda

^{xiv} Friedrich Nietzsche

^{xv} Sir Winston Churchill

^{xvi} Vitamin C

^{xvii} Albert Einstein

^{xviii} Dr. Suess

^{xix} Ralph Waldo Emerson

^{xx} Ian Jukes