



# High School Graduation

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Speech by Eli Dvorkin, Class of 2004

If there's one thing I know about writing to meet a deadline -- instilled in me by many years at Georgetown Day School -- it's that you can usually use the Internet to cheat. So picture me, if you will, seated in front of my Mac (that was for you, Topher!) combing through Google in search of aid. I tried "graduation" and "speech" and "funny yet insightful" and I even went for "I'm Feeling Lucky" once or twice, but to no avail. That is, until I stumbled upon a pirate webpage hosted from an undisclosed offshore location that boasted of "immediate results" and, somewhat less promisingly, "more bigger size." Intrigued, I clicked on, and, after entering my credit card information for verification purposes only, I found myself staring at a concise guide to graduation speechwriting. You can imagine my relief. At last! Not only would I be receiving a free trial subscription to Guns and Ammo magazine and a refinanced home mortgage, but my graduation speech would virtually write itself. Thus, it was with great anticipation that I began to fill in the blanks.

1. Every graduation speech lives or dies by its quote, preferably from a popular musician to whom your audience can relate.

Easy, I thought to myself. A few lines from a troubadour for the ages, words that relate the essence of my feelings for the Class of 2004. Something sweet and inoffensive, that nevertheless befits the solemnity and grandeur of the occasion. So, in the words of Tom Jones,

It's not unusual, to be mad with anyone  
It's not unusual, to be sad with anyone  
but if I ever find that you've changed at anytime  
it's not unusual to find out that I'm in love with you  
Whoa-oh-oh-oh-oh

And check.

2. Choose an apt, timely metaphor for the graduating class.

This portion of the speech also seemed to write itself. I had to look no further than my own backyard. I refer, of course, to the cicadas. For, like Brood X, we are just now bursting from the muddy ground of our childhood, shedding the exoskeletons of our immaturity, and soaring into the trees of future possibility where we will have lots of sex and die. Fine, so the metaphor only goes so far. I'm satisfied. Check.

3. Decide whether you are speaking to your class, or on their behalf. Discuss the meaning of life and make someone's relative cry.

It was at this point in the, um, creative process, that I began to have some doubts. First of all, if I'm here to speak directly to my class, I need to radically alter my vocabulary. After all, we do not communicate among ourselves the way we communicate with others. For example: Is anybody here tryinachill, and if so, can we do dis? If the answer is yes, I'll meet you at Six-P in twenty. See where I'm going with that?

But what if my duty is not to speak to you, but to speak on your behalf? It was then that I realized the impossibility of the task. To speak for you is to assume that 111 individuals can be forced into a single mold. Thankfully, you prove that assumption incorrect. If you paint with us, you have at your fingertips not a single shade, but the entire spectrum. If you write the words in our mouths, your pen spills forth prose and poetry, lyrics and lines, in languages that span the globe. The ideas in our heads could fill an ocean. But I refuse to define you, because you refuse to define yourselves. We are the graduating class that melts the melting pot.

I have heard our class described again and again as "Old School GDS." Knowing this school's history, I believe we can take that as a profound compliment. Old School GDSers know that it's not all about points, no matter what Bobby Asher might say. Old School GDSers know that doing the right thing is not just the only option that allows us to make our opinions known and start a ruckus -- it's the only option, period. Old School GDSers know that it's not about graduating high school knowing who we are, it's about graduating high school with a burning desire to find out, or, at the very least, to ask a lot of questions, although preferably not during Town Meetings, because Old School GDSers value their mini-breaks. And, although I know this one might stir some controversy (and that's OK, because controversy is very Old School GDS),

Old School GDSers may read the Cliff Notes for the quiz, but Old School GDSers read the book, too.

And, of course, there would not be an Old School model -- to which we all aspire -- were it not for the teachers who shape this institution. We have been privileged to learn from some of the most wonderful people I ever hope to meet. I have been made to both think and laugh harder than I ever expected, and for that I can offer nothing more than my thanks, and this promise: despite renovations and departures, changes both physical and personal, even the farewell of our beloved Paul -- if the future of GDS is placed in the hands of the teachers, then we have nothing to worry about.

But enough of GDS. After all, we are gathered here, in part, to celebrate the ending of this chapter of our lives in order to focus squarely on that which lies ahead. So what are a bunch of multi-colored, multi-lingual, multi-talented, unpigeonholeable people to do? There are forces at work in our society that would have us continue to plan for a distant future until we suddenly find ourselves looking over our shoulders, wondering how, with all this talk of tomorrow, we managed to let the present slip away. All we know -- all we can ever know -- is that infinitesimal moment in time when what could be becomes what is before passing into memory. In shifting our gaze from the multitude of possible tomorrows to the single reality that is today, we can live for ourselves, realize our dreams, make a difference, do the right thing, and still want to dance all night. Now that's old school.