



High School Graduation

June 12, 2016

Speech by Will Anderson, Class of 2016

Class of 2016, we've all spent years and years sitting through the graduations of our siblings, our cousins and our upperclassmen friends thinking: "someday, that's gonna be me." Now that it is us, we're faced with all the wild expectations that we had about this moment. Maybe you always thought about doing a backflip after receiving your diploma, to which I respond with a few YouTube compilations to hopefully dissuade some of you. Maybe you always dreamed about tossing your cap into the air after graduating... well, maybe in college.

Graduations, to begin with, are somewhat of a strange phenomenon. The idea is that kids spend almost all their lives thinking about the day when they get out of their houses, and away from their parents, finally achieving some sort of "freedom" that they didn't have before. It kind of reminds me of the California Gold Rush, the college freshman assuming the role of the young 19th Century man, moving west to forge his own existence by panning for gold. Or, if your parents are on the stricter side, you're like the oppressed 17th Century Puritan, getting the hell out of England.

We're all ready, in some shape or form, to enter the "real world." These four years at the GDS high school have been a preparation. We've done great things: we've studied for tests, we've agonized over our senior papers, we've collectively completed however many hours of community service. Now it's time for our parents to push us out the door and let us fend for ourselves. It's time for us to pop the bubble and enter the "real world."

It's become a cliché at GDS to talk about the "GDS Bubble," and even more of a cliché to try and say something provocative and claim that the GDS Bubble doesn't really exist. Whether or not the bubble is real I'm ready to take a pin to it let the soap burn my eyes. I'm ready for the moment when I can't just Uber out of a situation; I'm ready for the moment when I realize that I'll only ever have to complete mandatory community service again if I'm indicted for a felony; I'm ready for the moment when I call my mom asking her for money and she just kind of laughs maniacally and hangs up the phone. Then again, I can always say that I'm not eating any vegetables and my door will immediately be broken down by a SWAT team wielding carrots and organic rutabagas.

I'm ready for these moments because GDS has spoiled me. It hasn't spoiled me in the way most people would think, with those classic GDS moments, like calling your teachers by their first names, or the traditional baptism of freshman in the pit by implements of safe sex. I've been spoiled in the past four years because GDS is really good at putting up the illusion that the students have some sort of say in the running of this place. Although it is difficult for many to accept, including myself, students do not make up the board of trustees. SSC deals with \$250 club funding decisions, not \$250,000 decisions about the school's next idea to fulfill its manifest destiny. It may be all an illusion, but I do thank GDS for the smoke and mirrors. Some might say

that it's about as good of an illusion as a street magician making a tiger disappear, but look at what happens at GDS. Anna Howe once told me that a school is doing its job when the students are trying to take it over. Our school has done such a good job at teaching us how to think critically and speak up for what we think is right, that rebellion is encouraged—even against GDS.

It's like GDS has given us the opportunity to look at the world and ourselves in a mirror that is not forgiving. You put on an outfit, look at it in the mirror, and try hard to find every ounce of good that's being reflected back at you. But in the end, there is an overwhelming sense that something is not right here. It's not quite the perfect look. So, you go back to your closet and try on a different shirt, and maybe you try on dozens until you see something you like. Maybe, in the course of it all, you realize that there is no such thing as a perfect outfit.

This opportunity that we've been given is unique; I do not think that the future boss of a GDS student would appreciate his cubicle worker rising up to dismantle the system. While we may be blocked in our future attempts at an uprising, the very thought of one is something that only a GDS student would have. Yes, no other school would cancel classes for two and a half days to examine itself, but more importantly, no other high school students would even have begun those two days.

There's a story about the GDS students who performed a "sit-in" on then principal Gladys Stern's office, back in the 70s when it was trendy. Gladys walks into her office and is greeted by a group of students blockading the door. Gladys could have responded like the university presidents who were recently faced with the same thing, by getting angry and calling security. But Gladys does not do this, and, even after realizing that the students didn't actually have a reason to occupy her office, she invites the students in and goes on with her day, leaving behind her a group of disappointed young activists.

I think Gladys was sort of pleased with what happened. The very students she taught to stand up for their beliefs and speak out against injustice were rebelling against an oppressive force in their own lives: her own self. So, Gladys doesn't get mad, realizing that this was inevitable. Instead, she invites them in and gives the students a place to live out their insubordinate dreams.

I guess it is safe to say that GDS is a bubble, but not for the reasons that are usually mentioned. GDS is not a utopia, and GDS is a bubble because we recognize this fact. So, as the 125 of us prepare to pop this bubble in a few moments, I hope we can stay connected by this penchant for critical thinking that is the mark of every single GDS student to ever have crossed this stage. So thanks, GDS, for these four years that have been an incredible preparation for the rest of our lives. I wish the best of luck to all my classmates in the Class of 2016; I hope we can reminisce and silently judge each other at many reunions to come. Yes, this is a goodbye, but also a hello... to the world of alumni giving, you can donate online now at GDS.org/Giving. On a more serious note, I truly do wish the best to all my classmates, and, because a speech by me would be incomplete without this, I would like to conclude with a quote from a personal idol of mine, the late Joan Rivers: "Life goes by fast. Enjoy it. Calm down. It's all funny." Thank you all, and Class of 2016, as I've been telling you since day one, just live.

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