



CCDS Commencement

June 7, 2019

Farewell Remarks by Head of School Anthony T. T. Jaccaci

Don't you hate finishing a good book? Perhaps you enjoyed the plot or identified with one of the characters. Maybe the story provided a thrilling sense of escape. And so, when you turned the final page, you felt a sense of loss.

It's not just books though. How many of you are missing Jon Snow or Cersei Lannister? OK, well maybe not Cersei Lannister.

Tonight, we are coming to the end of a series too—CCDS Class of 2019—the real Country Day! Some of you have appeared for the entire series while some were introduced in later seasons. Regardless, the school won't be the same without your 74 brilliant personalities next year.

That's OK. It's fitting for this series to come to an end. You are ready to leave Country Day for larger, more expansive opportunities. In fact, many of you were ready to leave around the new year. Senioritis! It's pernicious.

It's good that you are well prepared because the challenges ahead are considerable. The regular rhythms of life—what David Foster Wallace described as the “day in and the day out” of adult life—never come as you'd expect. Moreover, with our world in constant flux, your life as an adult will bear little resemblance to lives of earlier generations of adults. That's a fact.

So, let's think about the challenges ahead and consider guidance from another series that just ended—The Avengers. In a way, life in a comic book world is pretty straightforward. Daily routines are often reduced to the basic battle of good versus evil—moral struggles of the human condition fought while dressed in tights.

In this corner, wearing a ridiculously amazing iron suit, he's saving humanity while making witty quips. It's Iron Man! And in this corner, he's big, he's ugly, and eliminating half of life throughout the galaxy with the snap of a finger. It's Thanos!

As you know, a comic book fight would never begin without a deep dive into the origin stories of these characters. We must understand the motivations that drive heroes and villains before they clash.

One of the best origin stories in my mind? Spiderman.

I spoke about webs of significance this fall at convocation, but Peter Parker takes this analogy to a whole new level.

When the story begins, Peter is a geeky, teenage orphan who struggles with confidence, coordination, and social connections. He has a heart of gold but is an outsider in more ways than one. After a bite from a radioactive spider, however, a change begins.

Peter gains incredible strength and the ability to shoot spider webs out of his wrists. But it is Peter's early failure as a crime stopper that leads him to change far more fully than any effect from a spider bite. For those unfamiliar, Peter allows a thief to escape his clutches and eventually that thief murders the uncle who raised Peter. This tragedy leads Peter to understand that "with great power comes great responsibility," and while he is not the perfect superhero, he never again wavers when it comes to doing the right thing.

Origin stories are not found in comic books alone. They have been part of the human narrative for eons. The Bible tells us that heaven and earth were created in a week. The Shawnee tribe who passed over this land - right where we are sitting - believed that people came to this world on an island carried by a huge turtle. Even our school has an origin story. In 1926, a group of leaders within Cincinnati wanted to create a school offering a healthy and rigorous "Country Day" education so they went to the city limits and then went "5 miles farther."

The origin story—for a people or a person—is a foundation point that helps anchor beliefs and give guidance in the bright moments of triumph but also in the darker moments of adversity.

And that is what I'd like you, Class of 2019, to think about when we conclude our ceremony. How will your Country Day origin story guide you in your life ahead as you leave your home here on Given Road? Well, at least when 73 of you leave your home here on Given Road.

Your origin story does not include glowing arachnids unless Mrs. Butler has something to tell us about experiments at the MIT Science Olympiad this year? Mrs. Butler? Any usual activity from Boston to report?

No, your origin story is not the stuff of fantasy but rather the result of a body of work you built here at Country Day: the hours spent hitting the books, countless practices on the fields and courts, works of creativity you have honed and presented in galleries and on stages, days spent volunteering throughout the Queen City, conversations shared with classmates and teachers building the collective spirit of your class.

No, your Country Day origin story has, in my mind, been crafted in answer to questions posed by Rabbi Hillel the Elder who taught more than 2,000 years ago. In seeking an understanding what we are to do in the world, Rabbi Hillel asked three important questions:

1. If I am not for myself alone, then who will be for me?
2. If I inform myself alone, what am I?
3. If not now, then when?

How have you answered these questions soon-to-be graduates?

First, If I am not for myself alone, then who will be for me?

Tonight, you sit before us as 74 individuals. As Ms. Weinheimer's testimonials demonstrated a moment ago, you each bring to your class unique skills, talents, and passions. While your identities may continue to change, you could each answer the following prompt "This I believe..." with a compelling explanation about your deepest convictions. And when you do, I know much of what you'd say would be influenced by your time at Country Day. I've seen you living our school's guiding virtues – compassion, courage, integrity, respect, and responsibility – and have seen you embrace these attributes "for and of you alone." We, the faculty and staff, are very proud that you are heading into the world to do well but also to do good.

Second, if I inform myself alone, what am I?

Class of 2019, you also understand the statement that no man or woman is an island and that we, humanity, are a collective that can only thrive through relationship. When I think about the relationships you have formed among your class, I am deeply heartened. Watching you grow together these past four years, I have seen you care, love, and support each other through good times and bad. Every class has a chemistry and you, through kindness and compassion, have made strong and lasting bonds.

Finally, If not now, then when?

You, CCDS Class of 2019, are a class of action. You have not waited to be told how to make our school and community a better place - you have made it your job. The school year has been a fantastic one with superlative experiences for all of our students from 18 months and up, and I attribute much of this to your class saying: "this is our school, this is our year, and we're going to make it great." What truly makes an exceptional person—a real superhero—is this final step. To have the courage to act on your convictions. That is what you did this year and what you're prepared to do in the days, months, and years to come.

Your origin story has created a class of superheroes.

You are Country Day, and you are ready for the world—capas not included.

Thank you.