



High School Graduation

June 9, 2019

Speech by William Goldberg, Class of 2019

Thank you, Russell, Katie, the administration, teachers, staff, all of the parents and family, and the class of 2019.

Just a few weeks ago, right after the D.C. State Track and Field Championship had ended, I was standing with William Miezan, one of our track coaches, a lower school p.e. teacher, and a mentor to many of us. We were on the track, waiting for the awards ceremony to begin. He turned to me, and said, “It wouldn’t be good if this wasn’t ending.”

It was ten at night, and I had no idea what he was talking about. We had been at Dunbar High School for nine hours already, mostly standing around in the boiling heat, and every so often throwing discus or running the four-by-eight.

I asked William what he meant.

“Your time on this team, at this school,” he said. “It’s good that it comes to an end.”

I’ve been thinking a lot about what he said. A stopping point gives time a certain value. GDS is a moment in our lives. It’s been a long moment-- maybe a four-year moment, or, for a few of us, a thirteen-year moment, and for even fewer of us, a fourteen-year moment. We can only assess how good it’s been because it’s all coming to an end. And it’s been good. Great, in fact, in large part because we are a very special class.

In fact this class is extraordinary-- for what we have already achieved, and for what we have the potential to still achieve. I’m sure every class at GDS thinks that it is special, but just trust me, this one is different. This is an ambitious class, whose ambition is matched only by its raw talent and capacity to create. We’ve produced so much over the past four years, leaving in our wake a plethora of clubs, art installations, and new school traditions.

The Class of 2019 is built different. What does that mean? This class is very conscious of its

legacy, which made us sure to leave a mark that would last. But while many of our accomplishments at Georgetown Day School were personal -- such as the person who hit a grand slam in the final at-bat of his high school career -- we are not technically self-made. We are community-made. An acute awareness of this, shared by most members of the Class of 2019, is what makes this class so special.

What do I mean by “community-made”? For starters, it’s the opposite of “self-made.” Last year, in Sue Ikenberry’s American History class, we learned about Horatio Alger who, during the Gilded Age, created a new genre of “rags-to-riches” literature in which boys from humble beginnings reached the middle class through honesty, perseverance, and sheer willpower.

With no help from anyone else, just their wits and strong morals, they grasped success. Of course, we dissected and examined Horatio Alger with scalpels and microscopes, like we did any writer studied at GDS. Thinking about it, I hope I’m never studied here. GDS students can be brutal.

We certainly respect people who make the most of themselves through grit and determination. We see that at GDS in our musicals and softball championships. We see that in students who memorize Shakespeare and who help senior citizens learn how to use technology. Cardboard Club took literal trash and turned it into, well, honestly I have no idea what Cardboard Club did all those years. But they were doing something.

Bootstrap ideology definitely has its place. But I think there’s something nobler: Acknowledging the role that other people, and institutions, play in shaping us.

Every one of us had help to achieve the things we’ve achieved. A lot of it. None of us can, or should, call ourselves self-made. We shouldn’t even want to invite that label. We accomplish what we do because there is a community of people behind us lifting us up. Which math teacher met with you after school the day before your stats quiz? (*Juan*) Which of your friends shared their Constitutional law study guide the day before the test? (*Shira*) Who are the people that ensured we would be here in the Lisner Auditorium today? That list gets long, quickly. Who in your life has enriched you by creating a community and having you be a part of it?

No one’s successes exist in a vacuum. Everyone gets inspiration, help, or opportunity from

someone. So why is it important to actively identify as “community-made?” Seeing ourselves as products of community has allowed and urged us to build communities of our own and provide community to others. Like with Allan Ebert, who has organized a school-wide March Madness bracket betting pool the past four years. Yeah, he’s a bookie. All grades are invited to join-- with usually around one hundred participants, and a ten dollar buy-in, the stakes are high, though I’m fairly sure Allan skims a few dollars off the prize pool every year; the money never adds up. What the competition does is bring people together, by giving the school a common goal, for a month, and common stories, forever. Or Ransom Miller, who always invites GDS students to join him in his family’s charity event, Project Giveback, every year around Thanksgiving, where we put together thousands of meal boxes to be delivered around the city to those in need. Bringing together the two communities--Project Giveback and GDS-- brings together the communities that are important to Ransom. Some of us have been running communities that are so intense that they are practically cults. Like Nina and Lucy are the heads of the Fata Morgana cult. People don’t know this, but every year they sacrifice a freshman in Dance 1 before the first performance. And what is the jazz program other than a weird cult of personality centered on Brad? And Zach.

These are people who see the whole of their communities. As a class, we’ve learned to embrace the people and institutions who shape us. Each of us, in our own unique ways, have very tangibly expanded, changed, and evolved the GDS community. The scholar Ibram X. Kendi recently wrote that, “We can’t be community-made if we are not making the community.” He wrote that in a certain magazine I’m required to read constantly.

The GDS experience is so unique because while the school changes the students, the students change the school. We made this community, and the community made us. To build, and to be built.

William Miezan was correct. It is good that our time at GDS is ending. It is good to go to college, to join new communities, to find new people. But while our time at GDS is ending, the community we’ve made goes on. The community we take with us, the community we leave for future students --these communities are not ending. The best piece of advice I’ve ever received, except for all the pearls of wisdom from my dad that you might be enlightened with in a few short minutes, my favorite advice is to invest in the relationships that add meaning to your life. It’s those relationships that have turned us into the community-built high school graduates we

are now.

I want to thank all of the teachers and administrators who brought us to this day. I want to thank my mom and and I want to thank my dad and I want to thank my two sisters. Thank you for building me. And I want to thank the amazing Class of 2019.

Congratulations to everyone!