



High School Graduation

June 10, 2012

Speech by Tom Yoder, High School Principal

Good afternoon parents, faculty, guests, and members of the Class of 2012.

In Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, the protagonist Jean Valjean faces a moral dilemma: to hide his identity and allow an innocent man to go to jail in his stead and thus be forever free or to reveal his true identity, save the innocent man, thereby putting himself back in prison. In the musical adaptation, this dilemma is played out in the song "Who Am I?" As you may know, Valjean reveals his true identity and as a result places himself once again in the clutches of Javert, his old jailer. Most of us will never face the kind of soul-testing moment Victor Hugo created for Valjean; however, I mention this fictional dilemma because I think there is great value in looking inward at various times during life's journey and asking: "Who am I?"

On this graduation day, the day you, the Class of 2012, are symbolically handed your ticket to your next destination, I ask you to consider what may help you answer the question: "Who am I?" You have just completed a foundational phase of your education at a school that values its commitment to social justice and diversity. The founding families of Georgetown Day School, in a sense, asked themselves "Who are we" as they bonded together to create an institution that stood four square against racism and segregation in a city and country steeped in inequality and injustice. They answered the question "Who are we" with a commitment to try to make the world more just and more equitable for their children and for children in generations to come. We have tried to imbue within you a sense of the urgency regarding issues of injustice and inequality, an urgency that we hope will compel you to challenge immoralities as you venture into the larger world.

As you move through college and into your adult life, I expect you will discover that your sense of who you are, what you value, how you live your life, what your goals are, and how you deal with the more challenging hurdles life places in your path is rooted, in part, in your academic experiences and in the social interactions you had while a student at GDS. In order to help you discover who you are, we gave you the time and freedom to make decisions, holding firmly to

the belief that adolescents learn to make appropriate decisions for themselves and for the community they are a part of when they are given the opportunity to do so. Ultimately, as you bound down life's path, who you are emerges from the decisions and choices you make and from the values that underpin those decisions. So, some time over the next eight weeks, certainly before you leave home for college, consider carefully the question "Who am I?" Take the time to reflect on what you have learned, especially about yourself, during your time at GDS. We happen to be very proud of who you are today.

At this point, I'd like the faculty to stand. And I would like you, the Class of 2012, to acknowledge your teachers for their inspiration and support in your educational journey thus far.