



# High School Graduation

June 12, 2011

Speech by Sam Hecht, Class of 2011

Good afternoon Russell, Tom, my teachers, students, friends, parents, and family. My first draft of this speech was a spoken word poem that went a little something like this. My name is Sam and I'm here to say, I welcome you to graduation day. K through 12th, those were the years. Did first twice, now I'm older than my peers.

But that's as far as I got. So I began again. I thought about what I wanted to say. I know that as long as GDS has a Head of School like Russell Shaw and teachers like Laura Rosberg, Bill Wallace, John Burghardt, and Richard Avidon, who teach from their hearts and not from a playbook, that GDS will stay the same way it has always been, a place where weirdness reigns. I am here to celebrate that, but more important, I am here to celebrate what makes our class special.

In Lower/Middle School, the Class of 2011 was almost always in the spotlight. When someone vandalized the bathrooms in third grade, we were blamed. When Bar and Bat Mitzvah parties got out of hand, we were blamed. And when someone, or something, pulled that fire alarm in fifth grade, we were blamed. We were always known as the "bad" class.

During our 8th grade graduation, I talked about how that opinion of our class was incorrect. We weren't bad, we were just out of the ordinary. We had so many unique kids in our grade. What many people had mistaken for problematic was actually a very skilled and interesting, but quirky, group of people. I said we needed to celebrate who we are and keep ourselves weird.

Four years later, and I stand in front of an even larger group of skilled and quirky students. We have ping-pong champions, congressionally honored photographers, master debaters, Olympic-class skaters, a nationally ranked kayaker who has joined the Navy, and even a Croatian. However, our grade still has an undeserved reputation. When the name JMAZ was written all over the school, we got blamed. When someone had an innocent late night dentist appointment, we got blamed. And when a room was mysteriously filled with sand after our

senior prank, we got blamed. We rarely showed up for assemblies. We rarely participated in class votes. And we rarely went to the Haunted Forest together on Halloween. The word on the street was that our class was a bunch of slackers. A bunch of kids who came up short when compared to other classes.

But, they should never have compared us to other classes. They should have compared us to Charlie Sheen. "I'm different. I have a different constitution," the actor extraordinaire says, "I have a different brain, I have a different heart. I got tiger blood, man." Charlie Sheen is saying that he is a new and improved part of the human race. The same can be said for the Class of 2011. With our frequent barbecues in Rock Creek Park, our class used Facebook events and charcoal chimneys to build a grade community our own way. We are independently creative, starting things like the freestyle club, PAWS, and the Moustache Gazette. No past class has created more than we have, and that is because we are not like past classes. We are what future classes should aspire to be.

Justin Bieber, the bard and spokesman of our generation says, "I want my world to be fun. No parents, no rules, no nothing. Like, no one can stop me. No one can stop me." What I believe this miniature version of a human is saying, is that no one can stop him, and that is a feeling shared by not only the GDS grade of 2011, but by our entire generation. All over the world, our generation is quickly becoming known as "the Facebook Generation." Not because we do nothing but stalk other people's pictures all day, but because of our ability to use social media to create communities of strong individuals that refuse to be silenced. Across the Middle East, kids like us are rising up and throwing off the shackles of tyranny. In November, British students banded together to protest the raising of tuition fee caps and the reduction of public funding for higher education. In Spain, young men and women are demanding better living standards, more jobs, and a fairer system of democracy. Our grade's community is similarly independent, creative, and yes even sometimes disruptive, and that is why we are prepared to join our generation's great revolution.

If you leave here today remembering only one thing anyone has said, let it be this beautiful quotation from my dear friend and mentor, Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, more commonly known as Lady Gaga.

My mama told me when I was young

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We are all born superstars  
She rolled my hair and put my lipstick on  
In the glass of her boudoir  
"There's nothin wrong with lovin who you are" She said,  
"'cause he made you perfect, babe"  
"So hold your head up girl and you'll go far."