



High School Graduation

June 12, 2011

Speech by Leah Sarbib, Class of 2011

Class of 2011, Families, Friends,

I got a lot of advice about how I should write this speech. The second I would tell anyone that I would be speaking at graduation they'd immediately tell me, "oh that's so wonderful you have to thank all your teachers and be sure to include funny anecdotes from your time at the school and in the end say something inspiring, but the most important part is that the speech is entirely your own and genuinely comes from you." I got particularly helpful advice from one teacher who told me that to keep my speech lively I should make some jokes that only the students would understand and poke some fun at the administration. So at first I thought I could mention something about what we realized after a couple of students got in trouble sophomore year: a certain administrator has impeccable taste in pipes. Then I thought maybe I'd say something about Russell, but really when your esteemed Head of School loves Dr. Seuss and sings songs while accompanying himself on the guitar during the Christmas assembly, what is there to make fun of? We have been so lucky to have had the privilege of being the first graduating class to have Russell Shaw as Head of School. But it's terrible for my speech because now I just feel robbed of the opportunity to say something about Peter Branch's glorious eyebrows. So I decided to try something different.

I'm good at giving advice. I learned that about myself in first grade when the kindergartners came to visit our class to learn about the perils that awaited them the next year. It was the end of a really tough week filled with stacks of optional homework that I obviously did, and my little first grade self was feeling pretty stressed out. So when one of the kindergartners asked for advice I raised my hand and dropped this bit of knowledge: Value your naptime. I had never felt so wise. So, I will once again say to you, Class of 2011, value your naptime. Because, the thing is, when I was in kindergarten, I hated naptime, I didn't want to be forced to lie down in the middle of the day when I wasn't tired and do nothing. I didn't realize how wonderful that bit of time that I'd taken for granted was until it was gone. But because I didn't realize how special it

was until it was too late, I did nothing to preserve my nap time, I didn't even fall asleep in class or during lunch time! I know that many of you are ready to leave. You're all antsy right now because you just want to snatch your diplomas and get out of high school. But GDS is a truly special place and it would be terrible to make the same mistake I made in kindergarten.

Here's an example of what I mean about what a special place GDS is: I have been a vegetarian for nine years now. Sharing this fact about myself elicits a wide variety of responses. When I would tell people at my summer camp, they'd be impressed by my will power. When I did a home-stay program in Spain, they couldn't understand why I didn't eat meat and kept trying to sneak it into my food. GDS students, without fail, always ask me the same question when they learn I'm a vegetarian: Do you eat animal crackers? This from what is supposed to be a group of some of the best-educated kids in the DC area. I know. When people began asking me this question in sixth grade I thought it was monumentally stupid, but the more often people asked me the more I came to realize what an unconventionally insightful question it was. Technically, a vegetarian is a person who does not eat animals and animal crackers are, in a way, animals. By asking this question, the GDS student challenges the preconceived notion of what a vegetarian is without assuming that he or she knows the answer. Only at GDS could a layered dough treat shaped like a lion inadvertently induce a heated argument about the meaning of words. And at another school, maybe a Quaker one down the road, I wonder if they'd have the sense of humor to ask.

Okay, now I'm going to shift paradigms a bit, that okay with you, Bobby? A work that I think truly epitomizes our grade at the moment, in all its delicacies and complexities, is one of the most heart-wrenching, thought-provoking movies of our generation: "Toy Story 3." For those of you who don't know, in the latest—the last—installment of the "Toy Story" series, Andy, the boy who owns all the toys, is going away to college. At the end of the movie, Andy decides to give his toys to his three-year-old neighbor. Andy cared for, taught, and helped these toys through three feature films and for those of you sitting in front of me—through our childhoods. So when I was watching the movie I had trouble understanding why he decides to give the toys away. It just felt so unfair that the toys must separate from the boy they love who has always been a part of their lives. But I realize now that what made the "Toy Story" movies so special was the adventures that the toys had together, and the bonds the toys formed with one another. Andy made those adventures possible by bringing all the toys together and teaching them everything they know.

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But after some time, it's just not right for the toys to stay with Andy, they have to venture out on their own. And though they'll never return back to Andy, though we'll probably never all be in the same place at the same time again, the toys will always have their friendships with one another, if they choose to preserve them. And no matter what, any time Woody looks on the underside of his boot, the name Andy will still be sketched there, not perfect with its backwards N and oversized D, but indelible.

Still, we will never exactly be able to return to how things are now. Our friends will move away, our teachers will think we're lame if we come back to visit before Thanksgiving break, and we will leave the homes we grew up in. In that way, for some of us graduation is a bit like dying. But, to quote the second greatest headmaster ever (after Russell, of course), Dumbledore says, "after all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." And GDS has certainly prepared us well for that adventure.

In fact, Russell asked us what we were going to take away with us from GDS. It's quite a daunting question, but, Russell, I'll try to answer it. What will I take from GDS? I will take my diploma, if all goes according to plan. I'll take *The Things They Carried*, a great book from a great English class. I'll take the scar on my knee from when I tripped during run-in. I'll take an extensive understanding of the perpendicular postulate. I'll take 4:00 AM conversations about the benefits of seizing the moment because you can sleep when you're dead. I'll take the memory of the first time I cursed, after a heated argument in fifth grade about Molly Pitcher and feminism in history. I'll take the knowledge of how not to walk like a victim. I'll take the bit of white cloth from when Aliza got married to Alexa Cerf's big toe. I'll take a tiny blue alarm clock. I'll take the erasers I got as bonuses from Anthony in third grade. I'll take a love for theater, and an answer to the question: "what show, what show?" I'll take my animal crackers (I do eat them). I'll take my sense of right and wrong, tried and tested by the current events forum. I'll take most of what I am and a lot of what I will become. I'll take great friendships and I won't let them go. Because what you take is not nearly as important as what you keep. As cheesy as it is, I want to let you all know that I'm glad to have grown up with you and nothing I can say in this speech can possibly do justice to this exceptional school, the incomparable Class of 2011 and the people who have helped shape who I am. And even though some friendships may fade and one or two of us might forget the words to "Passover All Our Houses," Russell, each one of us will take the indelible name, scrawled with care in black sharpie on the underside of our boot. So, Class of

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2011, congratulations, have a great adventure, and like our eighth grade sweatshirts said: We did it!