



High School Graduation

June 7, 2009

Speech by Kevin Barr, High School Principal

There is a moment in James Joyce's *Ulysses* when Stephen Dedalus, helping one of his students work math problems, is touched by the boy's vulnerability. In watching the boy puzzle out the problem, Stephen thinks, "Like him was I, these sloping shoulders, this gracelessness. My childhood bends beside me. Too far for me to lay a hand there once or lightly. Mine is far and his secret as our eyes."

For much of the novel Stephen is estranged from himself and others and yet like all of us he possesses a capacity for empathy, an ability to not only see ourselves in others but to recognize that in some deep way we are the other. The best teachers and the best parents carry their own childhoods with them and remember what it was like for the world to be new and for them to be graceless in it.

We have tried to teach you many lessons in your years with us. Sometimes it may have felt as if we were force feeding you; at other times we might have been accused of spoon feeding, but in our best moments we sat down together at the table and helped each other to the choicest of what was being served.

When Shakespeare and Toni Morrison, your history studies and your calculus, your grasp of photons and quarks, and your ability to just about dunk that basketball are starting to fade, I hope you will remember the most important lessons we strove to teach you: that you are lucky to be alive at such a moment in history, that the blessings you have received are to be shared, that joy runs deeper than grief, that there are multiple paths to the truth, that a flower is now and always an extraordinary miracle, that it isn't easy being green, and that a grasshopper may just be an insect but when provoked can lay waste an entire field.

You have been a great, great class. Now run on. Life is calling you.