



High School Graduation

June 10, 2007

Speech by Annie Whatley, Parent Speaker

To the Board of Trustees; Board President, Joe Sellers; Head of School, Peter Branch; faculty; parents; and last, but not least, the graduates of the Georgetown Day School Class of 2007, I want to extend my sincere appreciation for this opportunity to speak on behalf of the parents. I must admit that when Peter invited me to speak, I was surprised but highly honored. I immediately thought of what my mother is thinking in heaven about this day—me standing here in front of such a distinguished class of graduates from a school like Georgetown Day School. Oh, what a day!

Over the past several weeks, I have given much thought to just how special this day is for our children, the graduates. The outstanding GDS faculty has prepared our children for a lifelong love of learning—for this we thank you! As proud parents, we have looked forward to this day—sometimes with joy and sometimes with sadness. For many of us, this day brings to mind the hazy, sometimes fuzzy, memories of our own graduations, which, according to most of our children, happened a long, long time ago.

This is a great class—generating only a few discipline concerns and notes from Kevin. You have formed a strong bond and demonstrated a genuine concern for each other. Many of you are GDS lifers—all have chosen to attend great colleges and have awesome dreams of a successful future—thank you Barbara, Chris, and Linda for your great counsel.

As parents now, and graduates ourselves only a few years ago—well, maybe slightly more than a few—we were determined to make our mark on the new world that was ahead of us. Fortunately, for most of us, the photos of that first independent thrust into the world are fading as they sit in the bottom of our memory boxes in the deep crevices of our attics. However, we still hold those memories close to our hearts. Those memories are invisible connectors which join us with you—our children—the graduates of the GDS Class of 2007.

The world in which we now live is much different and broader than we remember it when we

entered it at our graduations from high school.

Technology has provided a changed landscape in which you—our children—will be operating. Information resources are at your fingertips and communication is much more option-oriented than we, your parents, knew it—and based on our text messaging phone bills, certainly more expensive! We are forever grateful to the faculty for encouraging our children to continually expand their frames of references.

I must admit that sometimes it was difficult allowing my daughter Chrissy to fumble and explore options in her own time frame, when I wanted to quickly point her in the direction of the answer which I thought was most appropriate.

What I now realize is that my answer would have eliminated the self-learning process which allowed her to get to her answer. Her Dad, Steve, however, was much better at the hands-off approach—allowing for the mistakes and bumps along the road as she explored ideas and options of her own thinking. He was much more patient than I, and allowed the freedom of the process to produce the answer which was best for her learning experience. Thank you, Steve.

The education that she and all of her GDS classmates have received at this wonderful institution serves to support their inquisitive nature and allows them to determine what path and goals they will pursue.

I do not know what is in store for each of you. But I do know that you are fully prepared. Be fully who you are—let the world get used to you. You can be the trumpet for peace, a voice to end wars and genocide, racism, and prejudice, and the brains behind a cure for AIDS and a safe and clean environment. Throughout your lives, your best friends have been those who remind you that you are special, that you have great gifts to give to others throughout the world, that you have the power to realize your dreams and make real the dreams of others.

Pay close attention to your friends' emotions, and seek to help them if they seem troubled.

It is important to set standards for those who seek to lead you, politically. Support leaders who will promote peaceful solutions to global problems.

Accept only those leaders who lead through a better vision of a better future. Great leaders

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inspire, motivate, encourage, and empower. They possess integrity, honesty, fairness, dignity, and respect for themselves and others. They strive to live their lives through service to others. At GDS, you have been taught the importance of these characteristics. You have the foundation for what it takes to be a leader—go for it!

Take your role as a responsible citizen very seriously. Take full responsibility for mature self-governance.

We live in a world where the environment is making us sick, where the divide between the "haves" and "have-nots" is expanding, the poverty rate continues to increase, and the number of citizens without health insurance is rising to alarming levels. You have been empowered through your GDS education to address and take action on all of these issues. Many of which you have already taken on here at GDS through a comprehensive community service program, which strives to foster a lifetime concern for others. Thank you, Elsa.

At GDS, service to others is woven into its core values and is fully integrated into the curriculum at all levels of the school.

You are prepared to take on the next phase of life—college—where you will continue to learn, explore, and serve communities throughout the world.

I am sure we can count on you to always remember that your choices in life are circumscribed largely by arbitrary rules, and to always respect the value of the choices of others and your own shortcomings.

Look carefully at what other people are doing and try to understand the context of their actions before making unwarranted judgments.

Rightly or wrongly, everyone will not share your desires or your perceptions. You must never forget the GDS teachings of tolerance and freedom of thought, as they allow you to go outside the blinders imposed by your own culture.

I am sure that each of us here today thinks that you are the best of the best, and we know our world will become brighter with you in it as full participants.

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Do not let anyone steer you from those things which are close to your heart. Be not afraid, for you are always supported by those in this audience, especially your parents and the Georgetown Day School family. The world is waiting for you, and we will always be connected by the heartstrings of our love.

As you go forward in life, I want to leave you with a few words of wisdom, which have shaped my life:

Speak with integrity and say only what you mean in truth and love. Strive to not have to say, "I'm sorry".

What others say and do is a result of their own life experiences and reality. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you can never be a victim.

Trust your instincts—if it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't.

Always do your best. When you have done your best, you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret. Don't be attached to the outcomes.

Remember GDS: You have just been inducted into the GDS Alumni Association. It is important to continue your active membership, keep in touch with your classmates, and give back to GDS—through service and resources.

Call your parents, regularly—just to check in, not just for a check.

Make the most of your life's gifts to build a better life for yourself and others, full of love, respect, laughter, and strength to overcome sadness and obstacles.

This is your world. Each of you can bring about real and lasting changes in it.

The change begins with you: be the change you wish to see in the world.

Congratulations. We love you dearly!