



High School Graduation

June 4, 2006

Speech by Kate Kennedy, Class of 2006

As I sat down to prepare this talk, I considered the recent graduation ceremonies at Harvard and Columbia, where the class speakers abandoned their notes and denounced the distinguished commencement speakers, John McCain and Condolezza Rice. The students received great reviews from their fellow students for doing this, along with fantastic publicity in the national media.

So I thought, 'Perhaps I should denounce the commencement speaker.'

And then I remembered that I need a ride home after this.

So I decided instead to talk about values. What values have I been taught by my school? By my time so far on earth? By my parents?

Let's start with school.

High School is the last chapter before entering the "real world." It's a stepping-stone on the path to a higher education, a good career, and a successful life. At GDS, things are slightly more complicated.

You see, we are a school of values. Here we value moral and ethical fiber above the kind of fiber they use to make dollar bills. At the same time, GDS is a highly regarded private school that sets high expectations for its students. We are expected to achieve. We are expected to succeed. And though few would admit it, we are expected to go forth and make a pile of dough. At the same time, we are expected to look as though we wanted nothing to do with it.

Eduardo, my Spanish teacher, is a man of GDS values. "I hate money," he would tell our class. "I hate it! Chicos, chicos. Let me tell you this. Never do I carry money in my pocket. I cannot even look at it. When it's the time to do the bills, I say *Maribel! Take it away from me!*"

Bravo, Eduardo. Bravo. I salute you in your fierce rebellion against that green poison about which so many non-GDS-ers obsess.

But I ask you this: What should be the measurement of our accomplishments? If our success does not come in dollars and cents, then what coinage does it come in?

Perhaps it is love—beautiful love—that we should value most.

No, unfortunately, it's not love either. Another piece of Eduardian wisdom. "Oh Chicos. You will never find love. You should only have one love in the world, but probably he lives in China."

Success doesn't come from love. Success doesn't come from money. Perhaps success comes from service to others.

After the devastating Hurricane Katrina, our head of school, Peter Branch, inspired us to dedicate our lives to helping the outside world. "You know, kids. I've been thinking hard about all of these problems on the golf course—cough—I mean, Gulf Coast."

School has taught us a lot of mixed messages. They pressure us to succeed, but never really told us what real success consists of. Even so, our teachers have always been pretty supportive of us no matter what path we take. We got a little nervous when we found out GDS stuck the secret service on one of our own. But for the most part, GDS has been a source of comradery.

Luckily, we have other sources of values to look to. Our American society provides SO many role models. Let's examine the prevailing ones for my generation. Today, young women idolize Paris Hilton, whose acclaimed guidebook to life, entitled *Confessions of an Heiress* is today's answer to the *Confessions of St. Augustine*. This invaluable tome contains such invaluable advice as, "Always act like you're wearing an invisible crown."

How true.

Today, instead of Babe Ruth, we have Barry Bonds. We have corporate shills like Tom DeLay and Dick Cheney as political leaders, and Kenneth Lay and Donald Trump as the icons for our business values. They teach us that the whole point of life is to make yourself a big pile and

whoever dies with the most stuff wins!

When society's values seem empty and our school's values confuse us, it is our parents, the ones who raised us, to whom we look.

Like most GDS students, I love my parents. My father taught me many things: to skin dead animals, never to pass road kill without putting it in your car, to plunge yourself into any body of water before testing the temperature.

And my mother deserves quite a bit of credit for surviving my upbringing. However, I think it would help all of you if I give you a glimpse of the world from our perspective—yes, you—you baby boomers—baby boomers pretending to be adults, but still babies in so many ways. And yet you are our parents!

God help my generation.

You are so quick to point out when we make a mess and leave it for someone else to clean up. But look at the mess you guys have made of our world.

Indeed, as we graduate today, the consuming task of our lifetime is going to be dealing with the terrible fix you've gotten us into and paying off the astronomical debt you've run up on our account.

Your generation recently turned a \$5.6 trillion surplus into a \$10 trillion debt that our generation will have to pay. The kids from our generation are dying in a war that your generation created. Your generation has also trampled the constitution that was to have been our greatest inheritance. You've turned the land of the free into the land of the spied upon. Our government is torturing people, imprisoning Americans without rights, spying on our citizens, and listening to our phone calls. We are helping Iraq write a constitution. Why don't we just give them ours? We don't seem to need it anymore!

I know you think of your generation as idealistic, but when I think of yours, I think of the movie "Animal House." You were funny and endearing when you were guzzling beer and smoking pot. There was something sympathetic about your long, dirty hair, and your love beads and peace signs, tie-dyed T-shirts and your wild antics at Woodstock. But now you have bank accounts

and giant corporations and congressional committees and weapons systems and bunker busters and Bradley tanks and Humvees and, quite frankly, you're dangerous.

It's no wonder we're nervous about you running the country. Even the idea of you driving heavy machinery makes us anxious.

But despite everything, we love you.

And you should take a step back and be proud of us for what we've accomplished.

Despite the fact that most of us are probably acid babies because you were taking LSD while we were in our neonatal stages, the statistics show that we drink less alcohol, take fewer drugs and smoke fewer cigarettes than your generation.

Plus we have more sex.

So next time you tear your hair out—or what remains of it—and shake your head in exasperation when we get a tattoo, don't get home on time, or if we leave a beer can in the living room; next time you want to tell us that we're acting irresponsibly, that our bad behavior will affect our future, put yourself in our shoes. We don't always trust your judgment. We love you, but we don't always feel we can rely on you to do the right thing.

Sometimes you remind us that you are the ones paying the bills, so you have the right to make the rules. But you baby boomers are going to enjoy your Social Security and pension plans and we are going to have to pay for them.

Plus, we're virtually assured that there will be nothing left when our time comes to retire. So the reality is, we are the ones paying the bills.

Doesn't that mean, by your own logic, that we should be making the rules?

Here are a couple to start off with.

First, we shouldn't have to go to Montreal to get a beer. You didn't. You only went there to avoid Vietnam.

Second, the people who start a war should fight it.

Third, the money you're spending on our college educations is ours anyway, so stop using it to lord over us.

I know you think that you're smarter than us. But be grateful for some of the things we've taught you—the practical things that I taught my parents. For instance, even a small tree can stop and destroy a large SUV when you drive it backwards across the lawn; king-size waterbeds hold enough water to fill a 2000-square-foot house four inches deep. If you spray hairspray on dust bunnies and run over them with roller blades, they catch fire. If you hook a dog leash over a ceiling fan, the motor can rotate a thirty-pound baby brother wearing Batman underwear and a superman cape. Water-balloons are not glass-proof. Brake fluid mixed with Clorox makes smoke—lots of smoke. Super glue is forever. No matter how much Jell-O you put in a swimming pool, you still can't walk on water. Pool filters don't do well with Jell-O. Garbage bags do not make good parachutes. Marbles in gas tanks make lots of noise when driving. You can make a cat dizzy by putting him on spin cycle. Cats throw up twice their weight when dizzy.

This is the collected wisdom of my generation.

Each generation learns from the ones that went before it.

Mine has had to learn from yours. You left us some good lessons, and some not-good lessons. But the lesson you most left us is that whatever your faults, you loved us.

So we forgive you. Let the healing begin.

Thank you.