



High School Graduation

June 5, 2005

Speech by Zach Pilchen, Class of 2005

A lot of people thought that, because of my raging ADD, I would have trouble writing this speech. Well the fact that I'm up here today proves them wr-Ooooo! Look at this neat little flower! Hey there, little guy! Whoa, where am I? Ah, yes.

The late Ronald Reagan once said: "You can tell a lot about a fellow's character by his way of eating jellybeans." I share that quote with you not because it carries any deep meaning, nor because I hope it will inspire you, not even because it has any real relevance to today's theatricalities. I share that quote with you because it is absurd. It's absurd that, once upon a time, the President of the United States and leader of the free world used jellybean consumption to gauge character. For anyone to use as simple a criterion as jellybeans to understand such a complicated concept as "character," well, it's just madness. And there's something so wonderfully, beautifully, terrifying about the way people ignore that madness-the madness of "the world out there." Because after all, it is that world chock full of absurdities that we march into today.

For example: I was at McDonalds several days ago. I had ordered my number three meal (medium fries, small coke, Double Quarter Pounder with Cheese) and was just about to go play in the ball pit when I realized something: Double Quarter Pounder? Isn't that just a Half Pounder? And yet, Double Quarter Pounder somehow sounds less glutinous than "half pounder." In fact, Half Pounder just sounds plain gross. But then, if they're going to go that far-changing "half" into "double quarter"-why not just call it the Triple Sixth Pounder, or the Quadruple Eighth Pounder, or hell, the One-Fourthousandth of a Ton with Cheese? It doesn't make a difference because no matter what they call it, no matter what we call it, it's still just a half-pound of synthetic cow meat. No mere name change can repair the damage that fast food has wreaked on my hips.

It seems more and more that the world is peppered with these minor absurdities that no one takes the time to call out. The fact that the elegantly served Chilean sea bass is neither Chilean,

nor a sea bass, but is in fact an ugly little critter called the "Patagonian toothfish," doesn't keep it from being one of the finest seafood platters in the country. The fact that the Bush administration's "Healthy Forests Initiative" and "Clear Skies Act" actually allow for more deforestation and air pollution seems to slip by the average American citizen. All John Q. Public hears is "healthy forests!" and "clear skies!" and he believes it's true just like a freshmen believes it's true when you tell him he's cool.

It's a twisted, crazy world out there, full of potholes and molehills and windmills and polecats and all sorts of crazy stuff that may make it hard for us to handle. After all, we live in a country that everyday grows more ignorant and hostile to the guiding philosophy of GDS: Republicans are poopy heads. I mean, social responsibility.

Then again, I'm sure that we've all faced adversity before—some sort of obstruction to maneuver around. I was suspended from school for two weeks this year. There was a point in time when I doubted that I'd be anywhere near this auditorium today—much less that I'd be given an opportunity to speak to you.

During that time of uncertainty I genuinely considered just switching schools. I felt too much emotional turmoil. The crushing effect of betrayed trust made me feel like I didn't belong—that I should abandon my green Hoppers for the dull blue Generals of my local high school.

It would all be so easy, I remember thinking to myself.

So why did I stay? Perhaps it was a warped sense of duty I felt to mend the hole I had widened. Perhaps it was stubborn pride that made me want to suffer through what I had done. Perhaps it was because I had already completed my community service requirement. Or maybe, just maybe, I wanted to see Ian Yaffe raise that American flag one last time.

The fact of the matter is, I love this school too much to leave willingly. And now I've come to realize that I never have to. None of us ever has to.

Because every time we take a stand against inequality, we still attend GDS. Every time we refuse to take the easy way out of a conflict and instead choose the principled way, we still attend GDS. Every time we creatively approach the issues that will invariably arise in our hopefully long, happy, and healthy lives, we still attend GDS! Every time we do all that, every

time we endure our trials and tribulations and still manage to keep our sense of humor, we still attend GDS.

And as we all head off to Harvard University next fall, as each safety net drops out from beneath us and we find ourselves free-falling toward a hazy future, let us keep GDS's ideals close to our hearts. 'Cause when you get down to it, our morals, experiences, and intuition are the only things we have to guide us on our flight down.

And although the currents of time have pulled us through high school much too fast, this Ganges of Tenleytown has left an indelible mark on us-not as students, nor as athletes, nor as actors, Democrats, liberals, or even just non-Republicans, but as human beings. We'll never forget the wise teachers that shaped us. Or the Armand's pizza that sustained us. Or the senior prank that made us legendary. Or the optional mandatory assemblies that no one ever went to.

Let us never forget our shining high school on the hill. For GDS is a place where the best lessons aren't featured on the course syllabus, but are found in the interactions between teachers and students, or the rare moment of lucidity during a Current Events Forum debate.

So before you waltz up here onstage and eagerly snatch your diploma from Ralph Cunningham's hand, let me ask you this: Did you grow? Did you change? Can you hear the splendid symphony of the future calling out to you? Can you see your hopes and dreams as, like delicate tissue paper caught in the wind, they whirl around your brain-darting in and out of reality? The answer I hope you all reach is, "I don't know." And that's perfect.

Because now as we head out into the "real" world, the world outside the GDS bubble-a world so full of hatred, and greed, and Republicans, that we may at times our lives, I know we'll never fear for our values. And because of that, we're going to find out who we really are. We're going to roll with the punches, and we're going to throw some back of our own. We're going to use our minds to help those who've lost theirs. We're going to cut through the absurdities and call things Half Pounders when we see them as such. And we're going to triumph.

And when we triumph, desk chairs will spell out our dreams on the field-dreams that now may seem nebulous, but soon will be realized. And then whole world will hear us. We're mighty hoppers, dammit! And I love you for it. [Chariots of Fire fades out]

Thank you, Class of 2005, for one helluva trip.