



High School Graduation

June 10, 2018

Speech by Kevin Barr, High School Principal

Good Morning. As you are on the cusp of adulthood, I thought it might be appropriate to read to you what to my mind may well be the saddest picture of the leave-takings that must occur at this junction of your lives. The reading comes from the closing chapter of A.A. Milne's *The House at Pooh Corner*.

"What do you like doing best in the world, Pooh?"

"Well," said Pooh, "what I like best?" and then he had to stop and think. Because although Eating Honey was a very good thing to do, there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were, but he didn't know what it was called. And then he thought that being with Christopher Robin was a very good thing to do, and having Piglet near was a very friendly thing to have: and so, when he had thought it all out, he said, "What I like best in the whole world is Me and Piglet going to see You, and You saying 'What about a little something?' and Me saying, ' Well, I shouldn't mind a little something, should you, Piglet,' and it being a hummy sort of day outside, and birds singing."

"I like that too," said Christopher Robin, "but what I like doing best is Nothing." "How do you do Nothing?" asked Pooh, after he had wondered for a long time.

"Well, it's when people call out at you just as you're going off to do it 'What are you going to do, Christopher Robin?' and you say 'Oh, nothing,' and then you go and do it."

"Oh, I see," said Pooh.

"This is a nothing sort of thing that we're doing now."

"Oh, I see," said Pooh again.

"It means just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering."

"Oh!" said Pooh.

They walked on, thinking of This and That, and by-and-by they came to an enchanted place on the very top of the Forest called Galleons Lap. Sitting there they could see the whole world spread out until it reached the sky, and whatever there was all the world over was with them in Galleons Lap. Suddenly Christopher Robin began to tell Pooh about some of the things: People called Kings and Queens and something called Factors, and a place called Europe, and an island in the middle of the sea where no ships came, and how you make a Suction Pump (if you want to), and when Knights were Knighted, and what comes from Brazil. And Pooh, his back against a tree and his paws folded in front of him, said "Oh!" and "I didn't know," and thought how wonderful it would be to have a Real Brain which could tell you things. And by-and-by Christopher Robin came to an end of the things, and was silent, and he sat there looking out over the world, and wishing it wouldn't stop.

But Pooh was thinking too, and he said suddenly to Christopher Robin: "Is it a very Grand thing to be an Afternoon, what you said?"

"A what?" said Christopher Robin lazily, as he listened to something else.

"On a horse," explained Pooh.

"A Knight?"

"Oh, was that it?" said Pooh. "I thought it was a--Is it as Grand as a King and Factors and all the other things you said?"

"Well, it's not as grand as a King," said Christopher Robin, and then, as Pooh seemed disappointed, he added quickly, "but it's grander than Factors."

"Could a Bear be one?"

"Of course he could!" said Christopher Robin. "I'll make you one." And he took a stick and touched Pooh on the shoulder, and said, "Rise, Sir Pooh de Bear, most faithful of all my

Knights."

So Pooh rose and sat down and said "Thank you," which is a proper thing to say when you have been made a Knight, and he went into a dream again, in which he and Sir Pump and Sir Brazil and Factors lived together with a horse, and were faithful Knights (all except Factors, who looked after the horse) to Good King Christopher Robin . . . and every now and then he shook his head, and said to himself, "I'm not getting it right." Then he began to think of all the things Christopher Robin would want to tell him when he came back from wherever he was going to, and how muddling it would be for a Bear of Very Little Brain to try and get them right in his mind. "So, perhaps," he said sadly to himself, "Christopher Robin won't tell me any more," and he wondered if being a Faithful Knight meant that you just went on being faithful without being told things.

Then, suddenly again, Christopher Robin, who was Still looking at the world with his chin in his hands, called out "Pooh!"

"Yes?" said Pooh.

"When I'm--when-- Pooh!"

"Yes, Christopher Robin?"

"I'm not going to do Nothing any more."

"Never again?"

"Well, not so much. They don't let you."

Pooh waited for him to go on, but he was silent again.

"Yes, Christopher Robin?" said Pooh helpfully.

"Pooh, when I'm--you know--when I'm not doing Nothing, will you come up here sometimes?"

"Just Me?"

"Yes, Pooh."

"Will you be here too?"

"Yes, Pooh, I will be really. I promise I will be, Pooh."

"That's good," said Pooh.

"Pooh, promise you won't forget about me, ever. Not even when I'm a hundred."

Pooh thought for a little.

"How old shall I be then?"

"Ninety-nine."

Pooh nodded.

"I promise," he said.

Still with his eyes on the world Christopher Robin put out a hand and felt for Pooh's paw.

"Pooh," said Christopher Robin earnestly, "if I--if I'm not quite" he stopped and tried again --". Pooh, whatever happens, you will understand, won't you?"

"Understand what?"

"Oh, nothing." He laughed and jumped to his feet. "Come on!"

"Where?" said Pooh.

"Anywhere," said Christopher Robin.

So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.

Now given how much scrambling Elsa and I had to do these past two weeks to ensure that all of you had completed your community service requirement and could graduate, it might seem odd that with A.A. Milne I would extol the virtue of doing nothing but that is precisely what I would like to do. As Christopher Robin knew, this is a special kind of nothing, though, which is neither indolence nor indulgence. In fact for some of you to do nothing might require genuine effort. It might require unplugging the ipod, the cell phone, the computer, and the tv, to find or create a place of quiet, a place where one can, as Christopher says, "listen to all the things you can't hear."

To do nothing is to be alone with yourself, to move to your own natural rhythms, to be alert to your own deeper truths. What I wish for you this year and for all the years to come is for you to learn to carve out time for yourself each day to step outside the pulling and pushing of life, to close your ears to the clamor of the world and to listen to your own true self, a Self which is larger than the jobs you will hold, the clothes you wear, or the loves you will gain and lose. Your teachers and I have had the pleasure and privilege of catching glimpses of the real you these four years. We have seen it in the kindness you have shown to one another, in your willingness to get up after you have been knocked down by a loss on the sport court or a grade that didn't quite reflect what you knew you knew, in your struggles to own up to mistakes you have made. Some of us have known some of you for a very long time and have enormous faith and hope in the adults you are becoming. Save for those of us here today who are your parents as well as your teachers, our work in helping you on your quest to discover the value of doing nothing, so you can become the someone you are capable of being, has largely ended. We hope that you will return to us often, that you will let us know how you are faring on your journey. We love you now and will love you all the days of your life.