



High School Graduation

June 5, 2005

Speech by Mia Henry, Class of 2005

Good morning Peter, Kevin, faculty, parents, siblings, grandparents, special friends and the class of 2005. It is a fantastic honor to be up here addressing all of you on this graduation day. This year I was privileged to wake up at quarter to six in the morning to be at school and hear author Sherman Alexi talk to my creative writing class. Among questions about story topics and public speaking, one person asked what kind of computer he used. At first, annoyed by the question—he could write on paper napkins, for all I cared—he found a total relevance to his writing that inspired me (it's a Mac by the way, Topher). Like me, he is a music fanatic, and he talked about how easy it is these days to make a mix CD. Click, click, click voila. But back in the day, it was all about the mix tape, spending hours choosing the perfect few songs to flow into one another seamlessly conveying a type of purpose and meaning, showing deep appreciation for each additional song. I too have experienced these euphoric moments in musical planning, and understood exactly what he was saying about technology rushing us. If you know me well, and most of you know me a little too well, you know that I can't live without my jams. So when I sat down to write this speech I was determined to make an excellent and thoughtful playlist that could be my muse to inspire me to write the way I feel about the hundred and eleven kids I have grown up with.

The first song I think of is the catchy little ditty by Vitamin C, "The Graduation Song," that I remember so fondly dancing to at eighth grade graduation. But no, that is just too easy. I must hone my GDS close reading skills and find deeper meaning in my selection.

Scrolling through the A section, I stop at The Animals, "We Gotta Get Out of This Place." Sure, seems obvious, certainly fits the criteria of the minds of any high school senior, but what is its connection to the Bible? Is there a fall? Is he talking about Jesus? The answer, as any GDS English teacher would say, is yes. And they would be right, because though GDS is not perfect, by leaving it we have taken a huge bite from the apple of knowledge and now can share our perfectionist idealism, making a better place wherever we go.

We gotta get out of this place
If it's the last thing we ever do
We gotta get out of this place
Girl, there's a better life for me and you

So, continuing to scroll through my itunes, I skip over The Beatles, Beta Band, and Blink 182, and rest my pointer on Bob Dylan, "The Times They Are A Changin'." The world that we seniors have grown up in may be very different from that of our parents, many of whom listened to the songs of Bob Dylan, but his words and melodies still ring true to a generation that is facing change. This class of seniors started out freshmen year with probably the most devastating national event that we have witnessed in our lives. With days off from school and extracurricular events postponed that September, we all tried to gather together courage and grow stronger as a school and a class. Whether it was bake sales, blood drives, or jokes at assemblies about emergency phone numbers, we saw crisis and refused to be discouraged. Since that year, our class has become dedicated to serving our community and the greater world from efforts for Sudan, to helping DC public schools. In our independent endeavors or with school, we are trying to transform the world for the better. And so the times really are a changin'.

Come mothers and fathers throughout the land
And don't criticize what you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command
Your old road is rapidly aging

Each one of us is leaving the life we grew up in to become our own person. Whether going to college across the city or moving across the country, we are staking a claim on who we want to be. And it's funny because we buy books on taking the SATs and research colleges and get help filling out our applications, but the college counselors could never prepare us enough for the change we will all feel that first five minutes when our parents leave the dorm room.

The song is about to end and with the last few strums of Bob's guitar I frantically search through to find that perfect song to leave my speech with. It has to be expressive of all of the last fourteen years at GDS. It must capture the essence of every different personality in the senior class. It should reach out to all of the parents, teachers, and administration who made our education possible. In short, it must be the Greatest Song In The World. But who am I to choose

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such a thing. Sure I do carry around a bit of musical pretension with my iPod, but I am but a little mind, a small insignificant spec in the great musical universe. This last song must be decided by a higher power, the "shuffle." In times of crisis such as these, I must give over my faith to a deciding force greater than my own. Yes, it was my hard work and persistence that got me up here today, but at some point we must all give in to the fate that guides us in times of need. It's the close your eyes and point, eenie-meenie-minie-moe, coin-toss approach that lets us blame our not-so-hot decisions on bad luck and our triumphant ones on good. It is a foolproof method if you believe in it and at this moment I choose to employ it. I patiently await what shuffle's song choice will be. Is it something hardcore and intense, or instrumental and pensive? Does it have a funky, funky beat, or is the chorus horribly catchy? And in that moment of doubt, when I think I will be stuck with some song from a past musical, or that boy band phase I went through, there it is, exactly what I have been waiting for. That intro with the staccato bass and background snaps. And with two chords on a piano and a full drum pick up I am saved and all of my doubts and concerns are eased. Now if you haven't figured out just what song I am talking about, that's fine. Each of us seniors is going out on a different note. We have different minds and destinations, so it makes sense that our last songs may not be the same. But for me the tune is a familiar one. It has been anthem all year, especially through the hectic college process, but ends on a message that brings hope that we will all survive. And so soon to be graduated class of 2005, I leave you with these last lyrics from the immortal mind of David Bowie:

Cause love's such an old fashioned word
And love dares you to care for people on the edge of the night
And love dares you to change our way of caring about ourselves
This is our last dance
This is ourselves under pressure

Thank you.