



High School Graduation

June 6, 2004

Speech by John-Michael-d'Haviland, Faculty Speaker

Hello Everyone, I'd like to first thank all of the family, friends, faculty and loved ones who are joining us here in celebration. Your continued support means more than words can convey. To the graduates of the class of 2018, as though it hasn't been said enough, I am so incredibly proud of all of us, and what we have accomplished together.

You, my dear classmates, have tasked me with a difficult, albeit important, assignment. It is up to Alexander and I to utter those words of profound wisdom and inspiration that your parents will remember ten years from now. But do any of you out there in the audience actually even remember what your commencement speakers said at your high-school graduation? I asked my mother this very same question hoping for some words of inspiration, and she said to me, "of course I do! As vice president of the student body, I was the one who spoke!" But she said it almost too excitedly, like she'd been waiting impatiently, for the last eighteen years to spring that on me.

As the story goes, on that joyous spring afternoon in nineteen-I won't say the year-the only thing bigger than my mother's ridiculously permed hair, or her even more ridiculous shoulder pads, were her dreams and aspirations for the future. As she looked out onto the crowd all those years ago, she said to her classmates these words I'm about to say to you now:

"We are the vessels of change, each having the power to affect change locally, and nationally. The future is ours, to shape and influence, and to preserve. Be a positive force in your family, your community, and your nation, by voting for Jimmy Carter this November."

I'm just kidding, my mothers graduation didn't coincide with the Carter administration. It was Eisenhower. But with that said, even all those years ago my mother understood the one simple truth about commencement speaking, which is, about all a commencement speaker really can do is emphasize the things that she believes are truly important.

Now unlike my hippie mother, I won't use my graduation day to push any sort of political agenda, but rather to emphasize just how impactful the times we've spent together here at GDS have been. Georgetown Day School has formed us into the people we are today, that is leaders and change makers. We have contributed so much to the Georgetown Day School community, organizing walkouts against injustice, engaging in all school conversations on the topics of hate speech, police brutality, sexual assault and consent, and in every instance we have shown our unwavering commitment to social advocacy. Whether advocacy means marching down Pennsylvania avenue at two o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon in demand of policy change, or marching down to Quinn Killy's office in demand of chocolate milk in the vending machines, we have shown that there is a distinct quality about the class of 2018 that sets this group of people apart from the rest. Our willingness to invest in each other, our ability to assess and overcome adversity together, the unconditional support we have offered one another throughout every obstacle and hardship, our ability to mobilize and rise above in unity, is what makes me believe wholeheartedly in the limitless power of each of us to affect change.

This past year has forced us to reevaluate what it really means to belong to a mission driven institution such as Georgetown Day School. What it really means to do, and to live intentionally, given that GDS is the first intentionally integrated school in the district, the first to intentionally center and emphasize equity and justice in its pedagogy. No matter where life takes

us as we all embark on this next chapter of our lives, I implore you to remain faithful to the central philosophy that defines Georgetown Day School: that compassion and empathy are not just necessary aspects of existing within any intellectual or educational community, but essential to cultivating a world that cherishes the vibrancy of shared experiences as a means of promoting and nurturing strength of character and concern for others; that patience, diligence, and perseverance is what ensures that our capacity for greatness in any pursuit, is boundless, that the commitment to honoring the worth and integrity of every individual is one that is lifelong, and contingent upon the understanding that worth is something that is innate within all of us.

To all of the teachers, coaches, faculty and staff that have touched our lives, thank you for your unceasing encouragement and direction. To my mother, words have not yet been invented to assist me in articulating just how grateful I am for you and all you've done for me, so for now I'll just stick with thank you.

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To the class of 2018, I am so proud to call myself your classmate. I cannot thank you enough for changing my life in ways I never thought possible, for grounding me with each of your own individual strengths, for inspiring me with your creativity, your leadership, your candor, for inspiring me to walk boldly in who I am. Thank you, each of you, for showing me what it means to truly belong.

Congratulations.