



High School Graduation

June 8, 2003

Speech by Nick DeCell, Class of 2003

I just want to start by saying that it has been a privilege to be part of this community that, as Peter said, "values and celebrates difference." Now, I planned to be wearing a cap and gown, but I was told to celebrate my differences and individuality by wearing a suit like everyone else. So please just picture me in a long black gown like the Amish and a cardboard cap on my head.

There are ways to distinguish a GDS student from anyone else: If you hear someone complain about having to wear shoes in school, you know it's a GDS student. If you hear someone argue that a due date isn't going to work for him, it probably is a GDS student. If you ever hear of someone turning an assignment in early, it's definitely NOT a GDS student. But you know you're talking to a GDS student if he or she is ranting about the deep meaning of the movie *The Matrix*. Let's not kid ourselves, it's an entertaining movie but there is nothing deep about Keanu Reeves. But, you have to hand it to the GDS student for trying to find meaning in just about everything. Believe me, I used to scoff when someone would analyze the significance of, say, the font-size of a text, but I've curbed my cynicism ever since I invented a new game. Now some might criticize me for also over-analyzing things but I'm tired of only reading Plato and Socrates for my philosophical guidance and therefore, I've invented this new game. It's called *Searching for the Unlikely Philosopher*.

As some of you know, I am always looking for new life philosophies, little quotes or sayings here or there that have special meaning and that I can use as guidance throughout life. Last summer, I started playing this game when I met my first Unlikely Philosopher.

His name was Bob. I was in Denali National Park in Alaska, and Bob was the bus driver for our Denali tour. Now, at first, Bob seemed like a simple sort of guy. He was kind of quiet, very friendly, but looked as if he might have spent a little too much time in the mountains. Bob's job was to drive the bus through the park, pointing out animals and stopping for us to take entirely too many pictures. At first, I didn't think much about it, but after a while I noticed that after every stop, before Bob would start driving again he would say over the speaker, "Seatbelts. Here we

go."

Now, as I said, at first this meant nothing to me until I looked down and realized that there were no seatbelts. And yet, every time, "Seatbelts, here we go." What I realized was that Bob was not simply telling us to put our seatbelts on — that would have been impossible. No, Bob was in fact talking to us about life. You see, Bob was always on the move, ready to go, always ready to do something, and that was what made Bob exciting. However, no matter what, Bob was never unprepared, never too quick in action, for he was always taking appropriate precautions. Seatbelts first, then we go. Bob was telling us never to settle down too much, never stop living; never let your passions die, always be ready for adventure, but never be reckless. "Seatbelts. Here we go."

Bob was my first Unlikely Philosopher, but since him, there have been many more. For instance, my next Unlikely Philosopher was my Hellmann's mayonnaise jar.

If you're like me and you like to read the directions on the back of your condiments, you would recall that on the back of the Hellmann's mayonnaise jar it used to read, "Keep cool, but don't freeze." Now it just says "refrigerate," but that's because people didn't really understand "Keep cool, but don't freeze." You see, as we go off to college, we're going to be meeting new people, figuring ourselves out and where we fit. In this search for ourselves it is inevitable that we will get into some situations where our tempers may rise or we may get a little too excited and what the mayonnaise is saying is to keep calm, keep relaxed, don't over-react. Keep cool.

But the mayonnaise is also telling us not to become apathetic: Don't freeze! Especially when we leave college and are faced with more responsibilities and families and jobs, it can be easy to forget our passions and become too focused on the worries and stress of life. Listen to the mayonnaise, Don't Freeze. Stay passionate. Stay interested in life. Keep cool, but don't freeze.

I fell in love with my most recent Unlikely Philosopher, Jack Kerouac. I wrote my senior paper on Kerouac and during my research on him, I ran across this quote, "And God in his mercy gave me alcoholism, instead of leprosy."

Now, the simple mind might say, "Wait a minute, who gets leprosy these days?" But the thinking mind realizes that that's not at all what Kerouac is saying. Kerouac is reminding us that despite

the hardships we face, we all have things to be thankful for. Yes, we worked entirely too hard at GDS and there are many nights where I personally lost a lot of beauty sleep doing work. But, we were privileged enough to attend one of the finest high schools in the country. We may all consider Armand's cafeteria food, but just think how lucky we were to have food at GDS that we could grab while running from meeting to test to class to whatever. You see, we will face hardships and unfortunate situations. Just remember that things could be worse. It seems unlikely with today's medical technology, but you could get leprosy.

I know I haven't talked about the memories we've all shared at GDS and I haven't said those clichés we all expect to hear during graduation, like our futures await us. But I just wanted to share some of the unlikely philosophers that I've found helpful in guiding me so far through life, those that we don't get to read about in school. Also, I wanted to prove that reading the back of mayonnaise jars isn't a total waste of time. Really, it's just important that although we have finished the majority of our schooling, our education doesn't have to end. Everyone you meet is his own philosopher, his own scholar, his own theologian. And just because he or she may not be famous or whose work may not be taught in schools, doesn't mean that he or she can't teach you anything. And sometimes, the greatest wisdom comes from the most unlikely of sources.

Must I remind us of what our pillows and mattresses say? "Do not remove this tag under penalty of law." I mean, who would have thought there was a law against that? So aren't we glad we could read those tags before making a terrible mistake?

Anyway, I'd like to finish by reading read one last thing, a poem of sorts that I wrote while thinking of what I wanted to say here today.

Congratulations graduates of the class of 2003 you are ready to see that the world can be far greater than the great metropolitan DC area now don't let me scare ya when I tell you that life might not be quite so easy as GDS has been but I will contend that the preparation you've had from your mom and dad and teachers and friends will prove most effective as you pick and choose your new electives make and lose new friends and old but all told you've had an amazing trip through school they've signed that graduation slip proving you're no fool you can count and subtract, in fact, you might even be able to read with ease through Faulkner and Sophocles and now that you've put your time in handed all your assignments in relatively on time begin to look forward to next year, sure there'll be tears as we say good-bye to those who

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stood by as we had our low times and high but the memories will last forever so never hesitate to kiss fate and leave home, go to college all alone or with faces you've already known meet new people and pursue your passions in life take a stab when facing adversity with the metaphorical knife and go to your university or college with all your knowledge and morality, whatever it may be, and find your place make your mark, be a guiding light in the dark, and just try to be the best person you can stand up for those who can't and lend a hand when others need it and in the end you will make your best friends you won't even believe it and college will roll by and you'll look back and realize that it was GDS that gave you the great start in the first place and allowed you to set your own pace for the education that will eventually land you in whatever workplace you find most appealing and don't worry I'll only be stealing your time for a few more minutes just let me say that there are no limits to where your mind can go so feel the flow and let your passions reach inside you and never let go for a life without passion and meaning would be demeaning for those of us who nearly went nuts working as hard as we have to get here this day stand up here on this stage and get this diploma say thank god for graduation day.

Seat belts, here we go.