

Philip Rinaldi

“Revised Copy”

[Oh, man. This is a lot worse than I thought it'd be. Before I start this thing, just a disclaimer- if at any point during this speech I sort of duck below the podium, it's ok. I'm just throwing up. But thankfully, Moira let me borrow her handy little handy little R2D2 lunchbox just in case.]

First off, I'd like to thank Dr. Stimmel, Dr. Criscione, and the Sayville Board of Education as well as acknowledge the many talented, intelligent, kind, and brave teachers we've been inspired by over the years, like Mr. Gittler, Mr. Shaw, Mr. Gittler, and Mr. Shaw, to name a few. I also can't forget about all of the dedicated parents and family members who are gathered here today, which includes a few lovely old ladies who I promised to mention this speech: Mrs. Martorello, Susan Scheck, and my amazing grandma LuLu. And I'd be remiss if I didn't extend thanks to all of you, my classmates, for your support, love, and friendship over the years. That's right, Snacc Pacc, I'm looking at you boys.

Well, the day has finally come, my friends, when we must grow into contributing adult members of society...and it's terrifying. We've come a long way since our worry-free days of elementary school, but somehow, today, I'm only about 3 inches taller and just a few curse words more articulate. So the task of preparing some advice to help propel you into your burgeoning independence was, to say the least, a bit daunting. All I believe I can offer you today is a perspective I developed quite a few years ago. A perspective which has helped me to understand our relationship to each other as human beings more clearly, and which has, consequently, guided my

interactions with all of you. But unfortunately, in order for you to understand this perspective, I'll have to take us back to (cue the band with Mrs. VB): middle school.

Though middle school was, all in all, a time we'd like to forget, one good thing did come out of it for me. In 2014, when we were all awkward little eighth graders, an informative TV series called "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey" debuted. Having taken the mandatory Astronomy elective just a year prior, which I know all of you were completely wide awake for, I had a fresh interest in the mysteries of the universe and was excited to learn more. But among all the mesmerizing depictions and animations of mind-boggling physical phenomena, among all the soothing commentary by Neil Degrasse Tyson that I soaked in every Sunday night, there was just one piece of information I learned from that series that enriched my life in more than an intellectual sense. In the first episode of the series, Dr. Tyson described that the very elements that make up our bones, muscles, and blood were created by fusion in the cores of hot, dense stars that died millions of years ago. In other words, to quote the nation's favorite science popularizer, "we are made of star stuff".

Now upon the utterance of that complex idea, the paradigm shifting information was just an astonishing fact, and it put me in quite the philosophical mood. I was all like "Woah...so... I AM the universe!! How sick is that?!" But I kept thinking about it...kept pondering. And soon enough it became apparent that that simple fact has a much broader, deeper significance. This idea, that we're all composed of star stuff...it helped me to understand how fundamentally united we are as human beings. The carbon and hydrogen elements that reside in all our bodies came from the same place: stars that have been carrying out their life cycles in our universe since virtually the beginning of time. That fact, I realized, is true no matter the color of your skin. It's true no matter where you're

born, what country you come from. It's true no matter how much money you have. You see, the universe doesn't care if you're gay, straight, or bisexual. The universe doesn't care if you're the star quarterback or a band nerd. It doesn't care about what clothes you wear, how you do your hair, or even how often you shower. To put it in our beloved classmate John Wells' terms... "We're all just, like, a bunch of particles, man."

I am lucky for having found this cosmic perspective through which to appreciate humanity and diversity as I entered this high school, as it made meeting new people and making new friends a lot easier. It is why I can pride myself of being able to hold a friendly conversation with the majority of you, or at least exchange greetings in the halls. But now I'm sure you're saying to yourselves, "great job Phil, you figured out some overly-complex way to make friends. What does this mean for us, in our lives?"

Well, the whole point of explaining this perspective is that perhaps some of you will be able to use it to navigate relationships with people outside of our Mayberry, Springfield, Scranton, Grover's Corners or Almost, Maine. Now, don't get me wrong, there's no doubt that we're all incredibly grateful for having been able to grow up in such a tightly-knit, nurturing community, but let's face it; Sayville is a pretty homogenous town. Generally speaking, the people here are of similar economic stature and there isn't much variety in opinions and viewpoints. And in a country that has recently been making great strides toward achieving true equality and fostering diversity among its citizens, it may be difficult for many of us to be comfortable in the larger, more complex social settings of college and, eventually, the workplace. But I hope that with this perspective under our belts, some of us might find that instead of spending our first big college lecture trying to figure

out whether the person who decided to sit next to us is a dude or a chick, a naive liberal or a heartless conservative, an atheist or a Jesus freak, it'll be easier just to flash them a smile, shake their hand, and introduce ourselves. You never know, that particular person who decided to sit there might just go on to become a lifelong friend, or dare I say it, spouse. It takes a lot less effort to open up and extend kindness to others unconditionally than to try to surround yourself solely with people who you can deem to be "normal" according to the beliefs and values you are accustomed to. Hopefully the astounding, elegant fact I've shared with you today will make this a bit easier.

As human beings, we are all, at the most fundamental level, star stuff. That's all. Star stuff that experiences the same pain and suffering, the same joy and beauty of life. And right now, you're all star stuff that's experiencing relief about this speech finally coming to an end. But seriously, I wish you all a happy, prosperous future filled with lots of friends, endless laughter, and great success. Always remember to be kind to one another and to everyone you meet. Thank you, and congratulations once again.