



High School Graduation
June 7, 2026
Henry Fragale, Class of 2026

Good afternoon, classmates, faculty, staff, siblings, parents, and most important of all, grandparents. I am honored to have been chosen by my classmates to speak with you. It is, after all, their hard work and dedication that have brought us together.

Two weeks ago, I visited Theodore Roosevelt Island for my Senior Quest. As I searched for birds in the pouring rain, I was somehow reminded of my greatest accomplishment from my four years as a cross-country runner: surviving a last-man-standing tag game called Foxes and Hounds on the island for a full thirty minutes.

Understand, in my freshman year, I only joined cross-country because I thought sports were mandatory. Don't worry, Coach Anthony eventually informed me they were not. Still, I did not think I would endure the preseason after I started running, that is, struggling to. But then Anthony announced a game where a group called Hounds would chase a group called Foxes, and everyone would run wild all over the island for 30 minutes. The game seemed majestic. I put off quitting until the end of the week.\

My excitement was short-lived. A horde of hounds caught me in just fifteen minutes. Though I was willing to scramble up rock faces and run out onto mudflats. That could have been the end. But as the veteran runners in the audience know, defeat is no way to end a season.\

My victory finally came in junior year. I donned my best quick-dry clothing and worst pair of sneakers, equipped for a guerrilla campaign in the dense woodland. When the words rang out, "Let the game begin!", we all scattered.

For those unaware, the island is a remnant of D.C's notorious former swampland. Beige vines curtain the paths; near-invisible cobwebs span thin trails; tall grasses interspersed in the mud

hide legions of ticks, and the red-winged blackbird's haunting song is only accompanied by the drone of the nearby thruway.

Some of us went to the wide-trailed Northern highlands, others to the boardwalk over the Eastern mudflats. I chose the wild, thickly forested South. Dodging under bramble like barbed wire, crawling through knee-deep mud, dashing through shining fields of poison ivy, I evaded the hounds at every turn.

At some point, somewhat trapped on a log sinking into the mud, I had this strange realization: no one was chasing me anymore. Of course, I wanted to be sure the 30 minutes had passed, so I waited. When I ever-so cautiously emerged victorious from the woods, I found I had surpassed my own expectations: I was so successful at hiding and running that the bus left without me.

Last month, standing in that same parking lot where I was once a castaway, I realized that experience encapsulated the essence of GDS.

I ended up in that parking lot because the wild thrill of the chase in Foxes and Hounds enticed me to join cross-country, just as we all were enticed with fun to try new things, time and time again.

When we stepped out into the booth-filled cul-de-sac for our first club fair, I had no idea what any of the clubs were. But at least the stands had candy.

A man in a suit said, "Ya wanna be on TV, kid?" I signed up for It's Academic and walked away with a tootsie pop. Someone said, "You look like a fellow who enjoys trivia." I nodded in agreement, dutifully scribbled my signature under Quizbowl Sign-Up, and even more dutifully took a doughnut. Of course, we plundered far more than we could have gotten by only signing up for clubs, but that's beside the point.

I ended up in that parking lot because we learned not to quit after getting caught, and instead to run faster next time. As my Quizbowl teammates and I can attest, we improved most after answering "Cincinnati" instead of "Cinnatus," and after long matches, hoping for just one question about battleships. As my former UL US classmates know, I learned a bit about teamwork and, perhaps, procrastination too, last year when a few of you worked with me to create our group presentation on Margaret Brent, a calm ten minutes before the deadline. I assure you we were a little more efficient the next time around.

Finally, I ended up in that parking lot because we were always driven to be our best with a horde of students, and maybe a few teachers, in hot pursuit. When it comes to what I've learned, I

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could talk about the economics of Weimar Germany, L'Hopital's rule, how HOMO and LUMO orbitals affect molecular geometry, Socratic rhetorical devices, and the perniciously contextual Spanish subjunctive tense. That is a lot of raw knowledge, but I cannot be sure how much of it I will retain.

What I will remember is how that knowledge was refined and who refined it. I will recall the contemporary accounts curated by Emily Landau. Those practically let me feel the uneasy cobblestones and tense air of hunger in a German bread line. I will remember the excitement as my group saw the pattern forming in the board work and engineered the formula for a Taylor-Maclaurin series in Tom Spilsbury's class. I will remember finally understanding the past imperfect subjunctive as I read the final pages of *Cien Años de Soledad*, unraveling my own manuscript alongside Aureliano Babilonia, excited to put my new vocabulary in the last of Nico Sheets' signature 5x5s. What I will take with me, in a word, is community.

I did not go into high school thinking that some of my favorite classes would be about European history or Spanish literature. Nor did I expect to encounter clubs suited to my penchant for factoids like Quizbowl. I especially did not think I would run four years of cross-country. For each, I had, as we all do, a seed of curiosity, which needed a community to cultivate it into something far more powerful: understanding. That is the best way I can summarize what GDS has given me: a better understanding of how the world works and a lasting memory of the people who helped me understand./

When you go out into the world, even if it seems like no one is chasing you anymore, that community, this community, will always be there. So thank you all, and if you ever find yourself abandoned in a parking lot, think about how you got there; GDS may just be liable.

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