

Class of 2020: Basalt High School Commencement Address

Mr. Ralph Smalley & Ms. Sofie Webb

Saturday, May 30th, 2020

RALPH SMALLEY (RS): Buenos dias!

SOFIE WEBB (SW): Mi nombre es Sofie Webb.

RS: Mi nombre es Ralph Smalley. Mi no hablas Espanol. Lo siento.

SW: Yo tampoco. Le pedimos perdón mientras le hablamos en inglés.

SW: On this day, your final day as a high school student, we would like to talk to you about perspective, responsibility, and time and we hope you take this final lesson with you as you move on to the next chapter of your lives.

RS: If the struggles we go through in life are a sign of the things we will accomplish, these seniors could drive our world to places we could never imagine. The BHS class of 2020 was born in the shadows of 9/11 and today they will graduate within the greatest health pandemic of our time. And Yet they stand tall or at least they are sitting up really straight in their cars. Their future is unclear as is the future of the world we live in. Yet they stand tall. We've watched them grow, and play, and learn, and cry, and change, and break, and we've watched them succeed and fail. And still, they stand tall.

Why are they so damn tall? I have a few theories. First, even the shortest of them stand up straight. They are confident and proud of who they are. They are stubborn and assume they know it all. That's ok, we are all life long learners.

Second, I think it's because they have lost. They lost Anna Cunningham, and Tyler Ribich, both of which would bring most to their knees. But the seniors rise up, and they stand tall for their lost

friends. They honor them, they remember them, and they continue to love them. We all miss Anna & Tyler, but these Seniors stand here for them, with them, tall and strong.

They have lost other things as well, from things much smaller to times much more meaningful. They have lost football games (although, not that many) a lot of volleyball games, and a few soccer games, and softball games, and games in every sport. They have lost their last chance to experience what it is to be a senior in high school. Like their senior prom, or Project Graduation, and their God-given right to suffer through Senioritis. Even then, they stand tall.

Learning and growing come from losing and failing. You see, the falls you have had, the losses you have experienced and the tears you've shed, gives you an edge in the world. You stand taller than others who have not had to grow. In these uncertain times, the world needs the unique perspective you've gained. You can see what others cannot from that high vantage point, so use it to your advantage & remember that you will suffer more losses and things will change, but you will also continue to grow.

SW: Losses are a part of life, and they are challenging. We can blame a myriad of people or events for those losses.. Sometimes, it makes us feel better to say, "It's the coach's fault that we lost the game," "It's Mom's fault that we were late to school", "It's the teacher's fault we failed that test," or, my favorite one - "Some guy in Wuhan, China decided to eat an infected bat & now we are living through a pandemic".

Laying blame & pointing fingers makes us feel better because we feel that with fault comes responsibility. If someone is to blame, then they must be responsible. But as the Fresh Prince of Bel Air, the one & only Will Smith put it, fault & responsibility are not the same thing. Sure, you can blame that guy for eating a bat, but he's not responsible for resolving the world-wide pandemic. He's not going to restore the entire fourth quarter of school we missed, bring back

Prom, the lost spring sports' seasons or any of the memories you would have made in your final months as a Basalt High School senior. That nameless man in China is not going to help you all make the most of your lives. That responsibility lies only with you.

That doesn't mean you assume blame. It doesn't mean you're guilty of the events that happen outside of your control. It means you have the power to change your life. It means you're not a victim but the victor. It means you have the ability to be the person you want to be - no matter what has happened to you before.

I can think of no greater example than Anna. Diagnosed with cancer, she was dealt an unfair & unjust card. Instead of enjoying her teen years, she endured months in & out of the hospital, undergoing treatment after treatment, and procedure after procedure. It would be a normal reaction for Anna to be angry. Afterall, cancer is the reason she couldn't attend school, go to all the dances, or play in the volleyball games. But Anna took ownership of her short time on this earth. When her health allowed her, she attended class, she worried about her grades, she joked with her friends, and, like so many of her classmates in psychology, she was also horrified by Freud's Oedipus theories.

But she was also an uncommonly kind & brave person. Even when it was confirmed that the cancer was terminal, Anna, together with Mr. Hayes & her best friend Lecsi, inspired our school to organize & participate in the Basalt Bold & Bald event; which raised over \$80,000 to support pediatric cancer research.

Anna did not cower under the weight of her diagnosis. Instead, she stood tall, she took responsibility, and she made the most of the time she had.

RS: Taking responsibility for using your time well is also a very important life skill.

They say that time flies when you're having fun. Do you guys ever lose track of it? I ask because it seems like I just met you not too long ago. I remember you walking into our gymnasium during your freshmen link crew orientation. I talked to you then about what I want to share with you now. It's the idea that time is kind of like money and how we choose to use it is up to us.

There are three ways you can use your money. You could invest it, you could spend it, or you can waste it. During the next few years of your life, you'll need to decide not only how to spend your money but also how to spend your time.

So just like when you were freshmen, I have this 1 dollar bill in my hand and I want you to think about it as if it was one day. What are you going to do with it? How are you going to use it? It's easy to spend a dollar, sometimes we do it without even knowing we did. We could go to the dollar store and buy one of anything, or we could buy something off the dollar menu at Taco Bell, or we could go down the hill to the Basalt Store and get a half gallon of gas. But let's be honest, we could probably get more gas at Taco Bell.

When we spend our money without thinking about it, we don't end up with much to show for it. In that way, we kind of waste it. (rip the dollar) Now, if that dollar was one day, it doesn't really affect us. Waste a day here, waste a day there, it's not a big deal. But what if we keep wasting days? (pull out the \$20 bill) (Maybe \$100 bill) This is a \$100 bill - do you think I should waste it? Go ahead, beep your horn if you think I should rip this one! (Pause and pretend to start to rip it.)

That's interesting - some people were thinking "rip it" or "do it". They beeped the horn because the money is not theirs.

You see, you'll encounter people in your life that will recognize your value and, because it's not theirs, they will want to diminish it.

Don't let them.

Keep your money,

Value your time,

Invest them both

Into your future.

None of us know how much time we have, so start spending it wisely today.

SW: Take a page from Tyler's book. He spent his time by investing it into his passions & his friends every day. Most of you knew Tyler as the performer, the comedian, & the musician. Who could forget his scene-stealing role as Jack Scott in the High School Musical? I still remember how he thrilled us with his Head Student speech; which he rapped from beginning to end. But some of you, like me, will remember Tyler most as a caring friend. I saw this nearly every day in my World History class. In fact, one of the main reasons I had a seating chart was because Tyler & Richie could never seem to sit a part. Knowing how distracting the duo could be, I deliberately put them on opposite ends of the room - as far a part as two students could be. But, like clockwork, every day, about 20 minutes into the lesson, there was suddenly far too much giggling coming from Tyler's table & there Richie would be. SMILE & LAUGH

It annoyed me then, but it makes me smile now because it's such an obvious sign of who Tyler was - a person who used his time & his talents to bring joy to others. None of us know how much time we have. Tyler spent it with the people he cared about & on the passions that drove him. He would want you to do the same.

RS: The teachers here, your families, and the friends you've made along the path to this moment want you to invest your time into what you love, what you desire, and what makes you happy. Leave this place knowing that the time you spent here was an investment into the adult you will soon become. It's your responsibility to make your life what you want it to be. The struggles you've battled through have made you taller and wiser and they have given you a perspective that many of us do not have. Look down and know that we are looking up to you, watching and waiting, for you to succeed.

RS: Thank you & Congratulations

SW: Gracias & Felicidades!