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	<b>Klas:</b> 6W8	<b>Nr:</b> 6
	<b>Vak:</b> English	<b>Volgnr:</b> \
	<b>Datum:</b> 29/5/2017	

Puntentotaal:  /
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### Graduation Speech

Before I start off with my graduation speech, I would like to thank the school board and the teachers for giving me this opportunity to address you. It's one of those rare occasions that you're allowed to share truly personal insights in public. But don't be fooled, coming up with a commencement speech is not easy. Not even for a guy who has spent three years in a country where the current president is so simple-minded that the whole world is still left wondering how he got elected in the first place [joke]. The biggest problem with these kinds of speeches is to find the right message: what should I tell my peers on their important day? What is a valuable life lesson that they should know about? I mean, I am not the person to bore my audience with a 20-minute-long speech about my own life and then tell them to have a good life. That's just too cliché. And my life is also just not that interesting [joke].

However, I would like to start off by going back in time. Six years back to be exact. Yes, you all know what I'm talking about: our first day of high school. Joooyyy [sarcasm]!! Well, okay, not really [joke]. Most of us, for those who had at least slept that night [joke], woke up early to make sure we looked good and arrived on time. We didn't really know what to expect. Two months before, we were the biggest, strongest, smartest kids of our school, ready to take on the entire world. We weren't ready to be newbies again. It was a new start: new friends, new teachers, new everything. Let's just summarize it by saying that the first day was hell and that we were glad that we had survived. Barely [joke]. The rest of the week was pretty much the same. Then came the second week. We all started to be less shy and talk to each other, actually starting to bond. We were all victims going through the same troublesome times. But then, just as we were becoming a tight-knit group, the teachers had to spoil all of the fun. They came to us with the phrase 'you're not in elementary school anymore' and bombarded us with loads of homework. Great stuff [sarcasm]. Thanks for that, teachers [joke]! Anyways, as disciplined as we were, or at least most of us were [joke], we did what was asked of us. We quickly adapted to the new learning environment and before we even knew it our first year of high school was over. Five more to go.

The second year of high school was not much different, except for the fact we were not running around like a bunch of headless chickens the first week of September [joke]. The third year is probably the year that changed us the most. We looked down at the first graders and wondered if we were really that annoying two years ago. Childish games were not spoken of anymore, because, you know, we were starting to grow up, becoming more mature. Where old friendships were broken, new ones were made. Or at least that's what I assume.

I know that I promised you at the beginning not to bore you with a 20-minute speech about my own life, so I won't. I will for about 19 minutes [joke]. Alright, I'm just pulling your leg.

But as the third high school year signified a major turning point in my life, I will shortly talk about the next three years from my point of view. You see, in the spring of 2013 my dad came to me with the news that we would be moving to America. As any normal kid would be, I was heartbroken. What kind of selfish joke was this? What about my life, my friends? Those were the two important questions which instantly popped into my mind. Stuff like school didn't really matter at the time. I mean, it's not like it ever did [joke]. As much as I dreaded leaving home, there was nothing I could do about it and so eventually I just resigned myself to the harsh reality. That summer I moved with my family to the strange country on the other side of the ocean which we knew so well from the movies.

The first day of high school there was like my first day of high school in Belgium all over again: new friends, new teachers, new things in general ... like the ride in the well-known yellow school bus. It was a flashback. People viewed me as a stranger, an 'alien' as they would literally put it. Soon I decided to no longer be E.T. and to open my mind in exploration of my new home and culture. That's when they started accepting me as a person, albeit a Belgian. I never grew as close to them as I did to my Belgian friends, but that's okay because they taught me valuable life lessons like how not to hold grudges; how to wake up with a smile every day; how to wish everybody, even a stranger, a 'good morning;' how to stand up to the first notes of the national anthem; how to wear the class ring with pride. Those three years had changed me in many different ways. Although I graduated from Grassfield High School, my parents allowed me to enjoy the last year of high school for a second time. Aren't parents great [sarcasm]? This time, however, in Belgium, at my old school. This way, they thought, I would have a good basis for the Belgian universities. Of course, I gladly accepted their offer. Who wouldn't [sarcasm]? I would be able to go on school trip to Italy and spend one last year with my old friends. Or that's what I was hoping for.

The first few weeks were really tough on me. Once more I felt like a first grader who was clueless about every little thing during the initial week. People had changed and bonded with other classmates, formed close groups. I thought it would be easy to reconnect with my old buddies, but I was completely mistaken. I was telling myself that they had changed. But later on, I realized they weren't the only ones; I had changed too. As tough as it was, I didn't want to be an outsider for a second time. I held my head high, hoping it would eventually pay off. And it did. People started reconnecting with the new me. Old friends tried to draw me into their activities as much as possible. Heck, I even met new people. I may have encountered many setbacks, but there were always some people to fall back on when times were hard.

Now I'm standing here, still kind of surprised that I made it this far in life, telling you my view on life. Of course, I'm not standing here solely to entertain you, luckily because I failed my test as stand-up comedian [joke], but also to teach you a valuable life lesson. So, what is this lesson? Don't panic, this isn't a final exam question [joke].

When we look back at those past six years, it feels as though we didn't have to be afraid of everything that crossed our path. Neither do we have to be of what the future will throw at us. How much frightening the future might look, remember what we already went through. Because when we look back at the past years, all our fears seem unwarranted. The future is no different. Of course, there will be times where we will be insecure and unsure, but hey, we will always pull ourselves through. You might find yourself to be in a similar situation as I was in. You might look at it as something stupid, something that will ruin your happy life. But trust me, when you will look back at

it, you will be grateful for the opportunity because it will define you. So, open up your mind and accept the challenge wholeheartedly. You are special and unique. Trust me when I say that you will be fine. Look at me, everything turned out okay for me, right? Well, for the most part [joke]. Believe that you can do it too. Yes, you can!

You sitting here is solid proof that there's no reason to be afraid of the future. You will be alright. Take the president of the USA for example: it just goes to show that you can make it anywhere in the world, even if you have a terrible-looking haircut, are socially incapable, or both [joke]. Have the courage to step outside of your comfort zone, learn, and not be scared of the consequences. Remember the slogan of the SAS: Who dares wins. Look forward to your future. Every day is an opportunity. Don't waste it because you are not willing to have an open mind or because you don't like the work.

I will keep my promise not to end this speech with the phrase 'have a good life.'

Directors, teachers, parents, and caretakers, thank you for your efforts to raise us, to teach us, to turn us into adolescents, even though we didn't always appreciate your efforts when we should have. Thanks.

So, friends and classmates, you leave here with all the knowledge you've gathered in and outside these classrooms. Put it to good use. Use it to make a difference. Be changed by it, and let it change the way you look at the world. It doesn't matter what you all go off and do in the future. You will all be successful in one way or another. Even if you think you are a complete failure here, you can always emigrate to some big, overseas country and become president [joke].

Fellow graduates, class of 2017, congratulations!

Thank you.