

Graduation Speech

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, fellow students, fellow teachers and faculty, and everyone else who survived the deadly rumors from our senior year. It's been a long four years, but it's almost over. It's time to move forward. But first, I'd like to thank some of my teachers. Thank you Madame Wright, my beloved French teacher who has helped me even when she couldn't, has seen me in one way or another for almost four years. That's a long time. She knows more about me than anyone else in school, and that's for a reason. She is a great teacher, someone who truly values education, and it is like her that I someday wish to be. I'd also like to thank Mrs. Thomas, who has had the almost unfortunate pleasure of not only proofreading this speech but also listening to my daily ramblings. They've watched me, in a sense, grow up. Some would say they're like mothers to me, and honestly they both truly are, and they make a great team. There are others, of course, who've helped me along the way. I can never forget Mrs. Christian and all the effort she's put into making sure I succeed and complete everything I need to. What I'm trying to say, in an extended way, is that we've all built a community here, during high school. Our homes have merged with our education, but we'll soon be leaving it all behind to go out into the world and build another community. We're venturing out there on our own, but not without preparation. Through our experiences, our acquired knowledge, our failures and successes, we can form a future fit for ourselves in which each of us can be not just another cog in the machine but can develop into an individual.

I don't think I've introduced myself yet, although I don't know how necessary that might be. My name is Luis Perez, but many of you might just know me as "that really smart kid." Some of you have even asked for just a small piece of my brain, and even though I don't think it's possible to do that, I will gladly give you a piece of my mind.

I think we can all look at our high school careers, both in and out of school, and remember at least one event that will forever shape who we are as a person. Mine more than likely occurred just a few months ago when I realized I was going to attend a college about 2000 miles away from home and was, for the first time in my life, going to be completely alone. I was full of expectations and hopes, but also afraid, trembling at the idea. There's always such fear involved when taking a risk so large, when beginning a journey that will cross multiple years of our lives. None of us have any idea what's out there, after all, or what we should expect. Now, the event you are remembering might not have made you better, but whatever it was it definitely changed who you were and where you are going. For some that event will take them to an Ivy League school, for others, like Chasity Anders and Jeremy Britain, to the local state college, others it has already lead directly into the work force; some have decided to join the military, like Klinton Kenner and Ben Graham, some to take the year off, and others to start their own personal adventures, from missions in China, to travelling around the world, to building their own families, and all of that is what makes each of us unique and what increases the risk of our chosen lives even more. We're all taking on the world in different ways, walking out of the darkened cave, some with shield and sword and others with a book in hand, and because of that it seems like we're being left all alone, but that is what life is about, in the end: facing challenges on our own, head on, taking a solid stance, standing rigidly but not blindly by our principles, and taking the step forward unto the lustrous woods. In the end we must all remember just one thing, which I don't think anyone has phrased better than Robert Frost. As he famously revealed,

In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on.

We don't have to be afraid.

But the future is nonetheless quite bleak for our generation. Global warming will be an issue that will be left for us to resolve and that no one else will magically fix. Same-sex marriage will be something that we as members of our society will have to discuss and openly debate. This is where measured risk comes in. We don't have to take our step forward blindly, nor do we have to wait until all the "i's" in our plan are dotted and the "t's" crossed. There exists much uncertainty, but we have been taught the tools necessary to overcome fear. I think we all know by now that high school isn't the end to the race; it's not even the beginning. High school is the preparation and the training that is necessary to even qualify into the big leagues and it is that preparation and training that has prepared us for what we must face. We have matured into people who know what they want and how to obtain it. That's where we are now. Each of us, no matter what path we have chosen or have yet to choose, is now an individual in the full sense of the word. Life will be difficult, one must understand. We can only prepare for it to a certain extent, and just like high school it will always be filled with ups and downs, with a myriad of different problems, but I know we can all work together to solve them and we can all take a little measured risk, venture a little further out. We are all people, after all, and even though we all come from disparate backgrounds, have slightly different tones of skins, speak with unequal tones, and are each unique, we still respect each other. That is one thing I've learned and will hold close to my heart as I begin my journey. People aren't bad, or ugly, or mean; they're a product of their circumstances, and each and everyone one of them is capable of being helpful. I, we, just have to show them that we are too. Although from here on there might not be a specific path to follow, all paths will lead us into personal and communal conflicts, and the best way to

overcome those conflicts is to go through them and learn. To work together and as a society measure out our risk and take that leap!

But we must also always, no matter what position in life we find ourselves in, we must always remain attentive to and aware of our surroundings. That is the only way we will be able to not only collaborate but also measure our successes and our failures. Many people have asked me how it is that I am so smart? What is it that's special about me? My only response is that there's nothing special. I am a product of my surroundings, as everyone else. I was blessed to have the parents I did, to have the opportunities they gave me, the doors an American education opened, and I thank my mom and dad for that, but what has benefitted me so much throughout my entire life, not just my high school career is my love of reading. Reading is a fundamental part to the never ending education of life, and reading a wide range of material is essential to understanding the problems we will face. To read, whether it is a news story or a romantic novel, a car manual or a reputable sports magazine, is to be an individual who is aware of the events and the world around him or her. We live in a polarized adult world that, as evidenced through many of the most recent events both locally and at the federal level, is unwilling to acknowledge that other people might have a point because people today have surrounded themselves with information that reinforces they're core beliefs; information that pleases them; information that keeps them comfortable. We will not act that way. We will admit our lack of knowledge because we will have the courage to read material beyond our comfort level. We will put down our novels and read a technical manual, put down our sports magazines and read the news, put down our Bibles and read the Quran. There is no knowledge that must be feared. We can all make compromises while still holding on to our core beliefs, because that is the only way the world

can peacefully move forward. We must risk being wrong, risk failing, risk our life axioms, in order to conquer the world that is today being handed down to us.

Today is a day many of us graduating will remember with strong emotion; today is a day many of our parents will forever mark in their minds as the date a great milestone was achieved. Today is the day we stand in celebration and solidarity, as one community, and honor the graduating class of 2012. Although not every student who has graduated today will go on to be a great leader of tomorrow, what matters the most is that they each have the potential to be one if they so wish. A high school education might no longer be a guarantee to better life, but it is the foundation to a successful future. I look out into faces of my fellow classmates: Olumide Sokumbi, Alma Rivera, Victoria Cook, Seth Reichert, Sarai, Jonathan, Elizabeth, the list goes on, and in them I see not leaders, not inventors, not famous celebrities, but people who like myself have worked hard to achieve what is rightfully theirs and are willing to keep an open mind. The path will be long and arduous, there is no question about that, but it is a path that none of us must walk alone because we will have Knowledge as our companion and as Deanne made clear our high school memories to propel us forward. We will all succeed because, in the words of Christophe Morley, "There is only one success - to be able to spend your life in your own way." We are the class of 2012. We are who we chose to be, and by extension our future is what we make of it, so make the best of what you've learned in high school, change the worst that's happened, and succeed at being an open and accepting person. 2012 is the class that will change the world by not being what everyone else wants it to be, but by being what each of us has always dreamed of being! I will miss all of you dearly and hope to stay in contact, but as Charles Dickens once said, "The pain of parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again." Goodnight, goodbye, and a good life to all of you.