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***Commencement Speech at The College of William & Mary***

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I just wanted to say to the president, to the administration, five words which is:

*Thank you for this privilege.*

And to my teachers, my professors who I had then and to the professors here now, I say four words:

*I cherish your guidance.*

And to the graduating class of 2023, I say three words:

*You poor bastards.*

Thank you... okay...

Listen; don't think of me as your commencement speaker right now. Think of me as your shift manager at the Walmart alright? I'm your shift manager.



Now most days you come into work and before I send you out under the floor, I sling a little pep talk at you and I go:

*Hey, you know, let's get the Halloween stuff up in aisles four and five.*

Or:

*Oh someone dropped the bottle of ranch dressing near the sporting goods. Let's get that mopped up.*

Alright? Typical normal days with typical normal tasks that I know you or anyone can handle, alright?

And if I'd given this speech back in 2013, it would have been an equivalent of that pre-shift pep talk that I gave right now, right?

*Yeah, there's problems out there.*

*Nothing you can't handle. Up and at them.*

Today's pre-shift pep talk is going to be a little different because – first off, a tornado has ripped the roof off the store and, right after that, an 18-wheeler full of rabid possums crashed through the wall in the sporting goods section and now there are rabid possums with hockey sticks and air rifles and for some reason all the possums are white nationalists. I don't know how this is happening but that's what's going on, alright?

And in the face of all of this disaster, for some reason, I'm still giving you tasks like:



*There's two new flavors of potato chips so make sure they're visible when the shoppers enter the store.*

Or

*Stock the outdoor grill supplies because Fourth of July is right around the corner.*

Just aggressively ignoring the tornado and the white nationalist possums, just pretending like it's a normal day. And you can tell by the way that I'm talking to you that my brain has completely broken and I cannot handle it and I've retreated to:

*Potato chips and grill supplies will fix everything hahahaha.*

But we know it won't. Because here's the hard truth; the reason that the tornado was able to rip the roof off the store in the first place is because while I and the management before me was supposed to be scheduling roof inspections, we were metaphorically sucking the nitrous out of the ready whip cans in the grocery section. And the reason that the rabid raccoon, the rabid possums are loose and armed and [are] white supremacists are because over at the raccoon lab the scientists got bored and gave the raccoons rabies and guns because they thought it would be ironic.

Your concerns as you stumble out into reality tomorrow are massive. Democracy is crumbling. Truth is up for grabs. The planet's trying to kill us. And loneliness is driving everyone insane. Okay?

Let's hear it for the nihilists out there huh? Yeah!



To let you know how far we've come I want to give you a quick glimpse at what mattered to me my senior year in 1991. I took a class called Physics for Poets. Do they still have that class here? No?

Well they had a class called Physics for Poets and the class was offered to get dainty English majors like me our science credit and they made physics and mathematics very AP English friendly so all of us little poetry fans could go in there and go:

*Is the red planet Mars like the Crimson eye of Cerberus?*

*Yeah, whatever. Sit down let's just get you your C plus and get you out of here.*

And the professor that taught this class openly hated us, hated all of us. He was doing a favor for the school. He was not happy to be teaching us little daffodils but he soldiered through and got it done. For the finals, in an attempt to reach out to us, he sprinkled a little AP English dust on the final exam questions and one of them was a word problem and he wrote it on the board and the word problem was:

*The USS Enterprise is traveling through space. A Romulan ship is approaching the USS Enterprise. Kirk tells Chekhov to fire the phasers. If the phasers leave the Enterprise going at this speed and the Romulan ship is coming at this speed...*

It was basically a distance and motion problem in space.

So we're all in the auditorium and we're doing the exam and my friend who was sitting next to me, he remembers it to this day, he said:



*In the middle of the exam you stood up you walked down to the professor and you said – we couldn't hear what you were saying but it was very pointed and it was very angry and then you walk back to your seat and the professor's head just dropped. And then he stood up and he said:*

*I've just been informed that Sulu fires the phasers on the USS Enterprise. If this made the problem impossible to solve, I will change the name of the crew member. Please turn in your blue book so I'm going to go home and drink myself to death. I hate all of you. I hope you all die of whatever killed Lord Byron. Goodbye. I'm done.*

That's what I was concerned with. That was my biggest concern. I basically breezed into a world full of trivia and silliness and fun. You are about to enter a hellscape where you will have to fight for every scrap of your humanity and dignity. And I literally wrote down:

*Say something positive here*

[Laughs...]

This is, wait a minute, this is the positive thing.

I'm a comedian I'll get out of this hole. Watch this. This will be amazing.

You do not have a choice but to be anything but extraordinary. Those are the times you're living in right now. And it's been amazing, it's been truly amazing to see how your generation has rebelled against every bad habit of mine and every generation that came before me. Everything that we let calcify you have kicked against and demolished. You've rejected that whole 24/7 no days off grind. You've



rejected apathy. You've rejected *ignoring your mental health cause you've got to muscle through it no matter what*. You've rejected alienation and cruelty. You've rejected not trying to include everyone and you've rejected not looking out for each other.

And those are hard things to reject because accepting them sometimes makes life way easier. If you just shut off yourself from the world, life is way easier. It's also way less colorful. It's way less complicated, way less nourishing and way less memorable and despite all of the callousness and violence that gets beamed out seemingly from every screen big and small every second of the day there are as many if not more people, and most of them are your age and younger, that are beaming out understanding and forgiveness and honesty. It's stunning to see it. It's truly stunning to see what you guys are standing up against.

Sometimes you guys are capable of a level of radical empathy that accepts people who have let loneliness poison them to the point where they've armored themselves with hatred and fear and you're the first generation that's truly grasped the Gerald Kirsch phrase:

There are certain men you despise until you glimpse through a crack in their armor something nailed down and writhing in pain

My generation, with a few amazing exceptions, wasn't really good at seeing through those cracks in the fear armor and the generation before us was even less adept. But you guys get it and you are passing it forward and again it is encouraging and it's amazing and it's energizing.

So thank you! Thank you every single day for what you stand against and for what you reject and when I say that I mean all of you and I meant that in the video.



I want to thank the administration for having a 2.8 GPA alumni come to speak this year, alright?

And I want to say something to the 4.0 students and by the way it's amazing the work that you've done but every now and then take a note from the 2.8s and the 3.1s, alright? Take a lead from the daydreamers and the confused and the seekers.

Obviously you should work hard and play hard but you should also wander easy, alright? And by the way, in the spirit of my 2.8 GPA, the last two pages of my speech I finished an hour before I gave this. I did this in my hotel room so...

Everything extraordinary in my life came from the wandering and that's not to say I didn't work hard and that you shouldn't work hard but don't work hard to acquire things. Work hard so that you can buy yourself the time to wander easy. Use whatever skills you have to carve out days of randomness and adventure because there are people out there and they've always been out there just these days they're louder and they have more toys to amplify their voice with; But there are people out there who want to manage every moment, they want to divvy up every dream and they want to commodify every crazy creative caprice that springs out of your cranium. Don't let them. Be human in all of its bedlam and beauty and madness and mercy for as long as you can and in any way you can.

I will now conclude my remarks with a quote from the movie Blade Runner. I assume most of you have seen the movie Blade Runner – wonderful 1982 film directed by Ridley Scott. It's about androids who crave life and crave humanity but only have four years to live. Harrison Ford plays a guy who hunts them down and kills them and at the end of the movie there's this amazing speech that's given by



the actor Rutger Hauer, the late actor Rutger Hauer where he's about to die – that his android's about to die and he says:

*I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. I've seen attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I've seen C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser gate. All of these moments will be lost in time like tears in rain. Time to die.*

And the reason that I brought that speech up is because it... trust me I will get out of this hole. Watch! Because in that movie, which at the time was the cutting edge of technology, was the cutting edge of inhumanity and over planning and over scheduling, every single word of dialogue was mapped out, that speech was thought up the day they were shooting it by the actor himself – they didn't know how to end the movie and they let chaos and creativity and humanity punch through and it made the most memorable scene in a movie about androids with no humanity. That is the wandering and the chaos and the madness that you have to seek out.

So what I say to all of you is that I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. I've seen porta-potties on fire from a helicopter above Woodstock 99. I've seen Charlize Theron glitter in the dark from the backstage wings of the Oscars.

All of these moments and far better ones are waiting to be experienced and marveled at by every one of you. It's time to live.

Thank you