

BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS 2001

Graduation. It's hard for me to believe it's really almost here. Finally. And we've come here, tonight, to continue the formal process of saying good-bye and moving on to new beginnings.

I've thought a lot about saying good-bye this spring. Actually, as I've filled out my financial aide forms, which Brinck thoughtfully supplied to me, looked for graduate programs that seemed like they'd be a good fit, and grown nostalgic at every last, I've felt, in many ways, a lot like you. All of you, in one way or another, are moving on to a new adventure next year, work or a year off, college or other training, life, and I'm going with you.

And that is probably how a lot of us feel, like our life is getting ready to start, like it's been on hold these past years, but that now, finally, the curtain is about to rise and life, our real life, the one that we're meant for, is about to begin.

My own next step after high school was college, and I spent most of the car ride required to get there staring out the window, ignoring my parents, and day dreaming about my real life, which would start the moment I got out of the car and said good-bye to my mom and dad. In this fantasy life, I would be a cheer leader, and therefore THE most popular person at college. You have to understand that at Riverwood High School in Atlanta, Georgia, where I spent five years, cheerleaders, especially the football cheerleaders, were at the top of the heap, and I was ready to leave my geeky, math and academic team, brainiac image behind. I was tired of feeling like I was on the bottom, and I had the requisite fertile imagination to see myself performing a split, something I had never, and will never in this lifetime, perform. I imagined myself in this new life, pretty much non-stop, for the two days it took us to drive from Georgia to New Hampshire. I don't remember saying much of anything to my parents.

Imagine my delight when I realized I had chosen a school where making fun of the cheerleaders was an accepted part of the social order.

Fifteen years later, I'm a little sad that I spent that two-day trip in the car wrapped up in a silly day dream, without a single kind word for my mom. She grew up in a part of the South, and at a time, when women didn't get to go away to school, and after a year or two at a local community college, she married simply to get out of the house. She worked hard, all my life, to give me a choice she never had, and I wish, now, in that moment of transition, that I had taken the time to honor her dream for me, and all the love that went into it.

Because with hindsight, it's easy to see that my life didn't start the moment I stepped out of that car in New Hampshire, that it started with my mother's life, and her mother's, and her mother's before her, and that my life was happening all around me, all the time, and that those high school years shaped me in ways I am only just beginning to understand. Now of course, I realize that some of my best memories of high school

involve playing bridge in the van on the way to math competitions, and all that other geeky stuff I used to do with my high school friends.

And I feel that way, passionately, about my years here at TA, and I hope that you do too, or that you will, fifteen years down the road. I can think of no greater privilege than the opportunity to learn with you every day, no greater act of faith on the part of your parents than putting you on the school bus or watching you head out the driveway, on your own, to school. To be perfectly honest with you, I can't really understand why everyone doesn't want to be a teacher. What could be better than the detention I received from Jesse Cook for "being bad to students", seeing Jolin Maclay score her 1000th point, watching Molly Dugan-Sullivan take charge of a room full of first graders and their high school partners, going for a run with Sam Perry, or being a spectator at the staging of Sophie Wood's ten-minute play, "Thoughts on Dating". As far as I'm concerned, it simply doesn't get much better, or much more interesting, than that. And because I've gotten so much from you, all of you, over the years, I've come back, again, to saying good-bye.

I hope, in the busy week to come and during this summer of transition, you will give some thought, if you haven't already, to how you want to say good-bye. You will carry this place, and the people who have mattered to you here, with you -- no matter what the next step is, where you go, whom you meet. And because you carry them with you, saying good-bye is important. For my part, I'd like to thank you for your generosity, your willingness to forgive mistakes, and for simply letting me share this part of the journey with you. I've learned more than I can ever say about courage and kindness, more than I could ever pass on in a baccalaureate address, from you these past six years, and I am grateful for it.

Thank you.

-- Karen Heinzmann