

Baccalaureate Speech

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Parents, fellow faculty members, guests, and members of the Senior Class, I would like to welcome all of you to Thetford Academy's Baccalaureate Ceremony. I would also like to thank the Senior Class for inviting me to speak to you tonight.

In many ways I can identify with you since I feel that I am also graduating from Thetford Academy this year. So I know what it means to be wondering what you'll be doing in the future. Many of you have a clear idea of what you want to do, while others are still thinking. As I think back to the people who I went to high school with, I have seen some people wind up doing things that they thought they'd be doing, but many others wound up doing things that they had no idea that they'd be doing.

At the time of my high school graduation I had no idea that I would someday be here speaking to you as a history teacher. I wanted to be a basketball coach. I remember how I used to play basketball and attend games every chance I got. Then when I was in college I used to write basketball for the school newspaper. Then when I had to choose an academic area to major in and chose history, my advisor recommended against it. He said that there were too many people majoring in history and very few jobs. I didn't take his advice and majored in history anyway. However, I realized that I might not get a job teaching history, so I worked real hard at my sports writing, hoping that if I didn't get a job in history, I might get a job writing sports. Two of the people who wrote on that paper ended up getting jobs as sports writers, and one still writes sports for a Vermont newspaper.

However, as it turned out, I was able to find a job teaching history right here at Thetford Academy. So, if you're not sure tonight what you want to do, don't worry. If you think you're sure of what you want to do, it doesn't hurt to have a back up plan in case things don't work out.

What I'll always remember about this class are the heated discussions we often had in our classes, whether the topic was Supreme Court decisions, political candidates, U.S. foreign policy in different parts of the world, or the use of the filibuster in the Senate, it was always great to hear your opinions. It didn't matter if they were liberal or conservative or anywhere in between. It was just great to see people stand up for their convictions. As you go on and meet new people, you will most likely meet many people with different opinions than you have. I hope that you will continue to feel the confidence to express your own opinions but at the same time be willing to listen to what others have to say. One of the best ways to express your opinion is to vote. Earlier this year we saw many Iraqis risk their lives to vote for the first time, so hopefully all of you will appreciate your right to vote and start using it as soon as possible.

As you leave Thetford Academy and go out into the world, I know that all of you have the potential to be successful in different ways. But before you head down the path to success, I hope that you take a hard look at what success really means.

Sometimes when I am skiing, I run into people who are visiting Vermont from other states. Often I hear some of these people talk about all of the business deals that they have made, or all of the stocks that they own, their condominiums, or what great jobs they and their friends all have.

However, when I think of success these are not the people that I think of. Instead, I think of a girl that I went to high school with. She started off as a waitress and eventually got a job working in an office. A few years ago, she wanted to do something to beautify her town and create some spirit and bring people together. She organized a group and first they planted flowers at various places around town. Then there was a park that was almost never used. They got a lot of volunteers and built a bandstand so they could have a series of summer concerts. Then they organized Fourth of July and Fall Festivals in that same park.

I remember going back there and attending a couple of the concerts and I couldn't believe what a big crowd such a small town could draw.

There are many other examples of success right here such as a group of people in this Senior class who worked very hard to start a lacrosse program at TA, or it can be challenging yourself to do something that you don't think you can do, like struggling and being the last person to get to the top of the mountain on mountain day, or taking that difficult course and finding that you can do the work after all, or helping other people when things are not going well for them. I hope that each of you will find your own way to achieve success.

I realize that there is also a sad side of graduation, which is the fact that this is the last week that you will be together as a class. I remember the high school class that I was in. There were only 43 people and we seemed so close that we thought that we'd be together forever. But as the years pass, people go their separate ways and before you know it, you realize that 5, 10, 15 years or more have passed since you have seen a lot of your classmates. So enjoy your last week together as a class and hopefully you'll do whatever you can to stay in contact with each other in the future. In closing, I would like to wish all of you the best of success in whatever you may do.