

## **BACCALAUREATE 2008 Kenneth Logan, English & History Teacher**

Thank you for the invitation to speak this evening. I promise not to keep you here too long. I realize that you're all looking forward to the tradition of blocking the street out front with family and friends, so don't worry—you'll be spilling out into the traffic soon enough.

When I first came to Vermont in 1995 to lead backpacking trips for Camp Lanakila over on Lake Morey, I somehow came to believe that Vermont children were always sweet, smiling and polite. You, the Class of 2008, have helped to strip me of that illusion. For that, I suppose I should be grateful. But now, here you all are, grinning and behaving yourselves in a picturesque white steepled New England church on a green hill. You're rekindling my romantic fantasies about Vermont just as we all prepare to move on. You're a confusing bunch, but this picture of you is one I'm sure many people here this evening will choose to remember.

Unfortunately, my position behind this pulpit makes it tough to disguise my address today as anything but a sermon. I could tell an allegorical story or cautionary tale and leave it to you to interpret, but it seems just as appropriate to offer you a few suggestions as you embark on new adventures. Again, one of my goals is brevity, but I think I can offer you five pieces of advice to keep in mind once you leave Thetford Academy behind. A couple of them demand some careful thought. The others are straightforward. So, here we go. Five pieces of advice.

Number One: Know that you're capable of evil. Some of you are more capable than others, it's true—I could name names—but none of us should be too confident in our own goodness. Remember that some of the worst crimes in history were committed by men and women absolutely convinced of their moral superiority. No one runs torture chambers, gulags or aerial bombing campaigns in the name of evil. Atrocities occur in the name of what the perpetrators believe is good. When we're too confident that we're good people, it can be difficult to see the blood on our own hands.

Number Two: Know the difference between a hobby, a job and a career. You have plenty of time to figure out what work you can do that you won't dread everyday, but be disciplined about how you explore your options so that they all stay open. Find something to do that you care about, something that makes you lose track of time. You're going to be doing it a lot. Keep in mind that you might like cooking leisurely in your own kitchen, but chopping, sautéing and garnishing at high speed while someone in a big white hat yells obscenities at you is an entirely different proposition, even if that someone turns out to be Zoe Sirjane. It's better for most of us to keep cooking as a hobby. In the same vein, and I hope this isn't a shock, many of you are not going to become professional athletes, rock musicians, artists or astronauts. That doesn't mean you should abandon your passion for sports, music, painting and astronomy. Take pleasure in doing what you love even if it doesn't make you rich or famous.

Number Three: Know whose criticism to care about. You may have noticed in high school that your biggest critics tend to be people you don't really know. Sometimes they're people you've never even met. When their unkind and unfair words reach you, practice ignoring them. That doesn't mean you should ignore criticism from people who care about you. But listen most to the people who listen to you.

These last two points may be even less profound, but I promise that of the five pieces of advice I'm offering you today, they're the most likely to maintain your freedom and happiness over the next ten years. Here we go.

Number Four: Limit what you own to what you can fit in your car. If you're looking at the next few years as an adventure—and I hope you are—don't tie yourself down with a lot of stuff. (It's cheap to mail books, by the way, so they don't actually count as stuff.) You should make a point of seeing as much of this beautiful world as possible. Travel light.

Number Five is actually a corollary to Number Four: Never, ever own a dog. This is coming from a dog owner. I realize I've just lost the friendship of some beloved colleagues—namely Barb, Robin, Judy, Cathy, Peter and Joe—but trust me on this one. I know of what I speak. At some point you'll be tempted to adopt a little friend and name it something cool, but the novelty wears off quickly. Especially when no one will rent to you and your dog and you end up living in a freezing old post office five feet off a busy road. Pet and play with your friends' mistakes. Keep your own life unleashed.

Keep your own life unleashed. Don't misinterpret that point. I'm not advocating that you avoid responsibilities altogether, but instead that you choose them wisely and unselfishly. Right now it's the *freedom* ahead that has you all smiling. I hope the next time we meet you'll be grinning because you've figured out how to enjoy the work that lies ahead and how to make it matter.

Thanks very much.