

Valedictory Address 2005

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As I began to reminisce about how life has been here at Ridgeview Classical schools for the past four years, the words of Winston Churchill came to mind. Specifically when he said, "If you are going through hell, keep going!" From Archimedes' "eureka" to Xeno's paradox, Alcuin of York to Virgil, St. Augustine to Zarathustra, that is what the class of 2005, the first Ridgeview class, ever, to complete freshman through senior year, has done—we've kept going—or as we like to say at Ridgeview, we've "pressed on." When we thought we could only try and attempt, we have found that we could in fact succeed and shine with pride after doing so.

Today, that is where you have found us—basking in the glow of the light at the end of the tunnel-- and mixing metaphors. Yet, when it seems so easy to just throw our caps and leave, we are each taking one last look over our shoulder, and being profoundly thankful for the refining journey.

Over the past four years, we have struggled together and sometimes against each other—trying to pronounce Plutarch, Ptolemy and Pulcharia Ivandrovna. We've recited "hic, haec, hoc", learned the value of thumos and beheld the rage of Achilles. There has been a white whale for each of us to seek out and for some, the whale took the form of a basic skills examination. The question has been asked, was paradise really lost and can it be found again? Are we innately evil or beautifully humane? Together we've trudged through the heart of darkness and seen Dostoevsky's desolate St. Petersburg streets through the eyes of a murderer. We've interpreted Nietzsche in 17 exclusively different ways and, despite our numerous hours of debating, reached no finite, mutual conclusions. After four long, amazing years, we attempted to solidify our own philosophies in the form of 25 page senior theses. Then, we each deleted what we had thought others would have wanted to hear, wrote our true beliefs, and vigorously defended our personal statements before the elaborate questions of our classmates, teachers, and Dr. Moore.

If Ridgeview has given me one thing, besides my character, my tolerance and my love of learning, it has given me a sense of who I am.

Ridgeview opened up doors on which I never would have even knocked. As I entered in upon these new opportunities, I uncovered facets of myself that would have otherwise remained hidden and untapped. If Mrs. Faust- Frodl hadn't haphazardly given me a part in the first ever madrigal dinner skit, I never would have started acting. I wouldn't have continued pursuing that passion if Miss Sikora hadn't pestered me into trying out every year, despite my workload. Before Miss Weiss encouraged me, I had always thought that I had an atrocious lack of artistic ability and shuddered at the idea of excelling past stick figures. Most of all, I never would have never had confidence in my writing, which is now my greatest passion, if Dr. Moore and Mr. Hild hadn't informed me that I had a gift worthy of being confident in.

Graduation is the time when people ask us what we will go on to do after this, and because our teachers have already given us so many opportunities, our answer is that we will go everywhere and anywhere and we will do everything and anything.

At a bigger “real” school, like the one I so desperately wanted to attend in 9th grade, instead of Ridgeview, I would have been content with my over looked place in the shadows. Before I came here, I was as chameleon-like as teenage girls come and I wavered with every passing influence, never sure or strong enough to be myself. In the years before Ridgeview, no one ever seemed to know who I was because I myself did not know from one moment to the next. Only through lengthy discussions and unrelenting debates did I come to realize my own convictions. As a matter of fact, I never even knew I had convictions until I encountered the many different opinions of this class. By presenting new thoughts and demanding that I take a position on difficult questions, Ridgeview has let me draw my own conclusions, set my own defining limits, and has allowed me to become who I am. And then, Ridgeview recognized me for being my true self and expected nothing less of me.

Of course, then, the greatest thanks I owe, is to my parents, who, in freshman year, forced me, very much against my will, to stay at Ridgeview until I came to realize that what this place had to offer me—was me. For the first time, I stopped looking at everyone else for an example of whom I should imitate and therefore be. Instead, I held the works of great minds up to myself, like a mirror, and through my reactions to their astounding thoughts, and let myself be revealed.

To every teacher and every classmate, thank you for questioning me, listening to me, seeing me, and for just being here, because without you, I don’t think I ever would have left the shadows—it took all of you to lure me out.

After four years of knowing most of my classmates as brothers and sisters, I can say that I am not alone on this familiar stage. Whether we have been here for one year or four, we have each become something stronger and more defined than we ever were before. We have matured into our ideas, beliefs, aspirations and characters.

High school, in the grand scheme of things, is not all that important. But the sense of self and attainment of individual character are! We may not remember how to find the area underneath a sine curve or be able to explain what exactly an ablative is (I know I certainly won’t). But as we go out into the “real world”, the one that we hear so much about, we can each take with us the personal truths we acquired here. Then, no matter how the winds outside these walls seem to blow us, we will stand firm and rooted in our beliefs.

So, to all those hoplites, with the thesis and Nietzsche still before them, if you feel as if you are going through hell—please-- keep going, because at the end you don’t just receive a piece of paper—you receive a character, a personality, an opinion, a deliberate belief, a shield, a sword, the ability to think, to reason, to aspire, to question, to doubt, to wonder and to try. You will fall in love with learning, and then these gifts will be yours. The stress of the workload fades fast, but the gifts my teachers and class have given will carry me through the rest of my life. Because now, thanks to them, this life is truly my own.