

Chapel Talk, Graduation
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Wilson Everhart

I want to begin by telling you how honored I am to speak to you this morning. My first year at St. Andrew's as a teacher was also the year that many of you showed up as III formers, and so I have always felt a special connection to this class. And I want to acknowledge what a wonderful job you all have done – especially as seniors. You may recall that 52 weeks ago there was some trepidation about the type of leadership that you all would offer the school, trepidation that was first felt by your III form RLs as they watched this wild-eyed, energetic, and spirited group of kids come barreling into St. Andrew's life. But the truth is that you all have done a wonderful job in leading the school this year. Sure, some of you are probably the first to attack the Front Lawn from a pirate ship, yes (and I might be alone in feeling anger at this) some of you did work hard to save one of those infernal panda bears, and it is probably your fault that the III form now studies in the dining hall; but you have also willingly shared your creativity, your optimism, and your passions. It is out of my gratitude for all that the Class of 2009 has offered the St. Andrew's community that I offer you this piece of advice: **Move on...sort of**

Inevitably there are two competing sentiments on Graduation Day. The first is a desire to leave and the second is a wish that your time with the people and the campus of St. Andrew's could last just a little bit longer. One of my advisees captured this tension well, though perhaps a bit cynically, when he said, "Whenever I get sad about leaving, I think about the alternative: returning...then I feel better." Now some of you might feel a stronger desire to return than my advisee does at this point; but to all of you, regardless of which sentiment you are feeling most strongly, I want to emphasize how important it is to "Move on." In many ways, the adults in the community have been trying to prepare you to do just this, and it is our hope that you will choose to "move on" by passionately throwing yourself into the life of whatever community awaits you next year. This is a lesson that I hope you have gleaned in part from the various speakers who we have heard in Engelhard. From doctors to politicians to scientists to historians to volunteers to world travelers to defenders of whales, I hope that the overall take away point has been that there is great joy to be found in passionate engagement, and I hope you find that.

I will admit that this is partly selfish, because without passionate engagement those conversations when you come back to campus – and I hope you do, often – can get a little formulaic and a bit stilted. For that first time when you return, I am sure I will immediately say to you, “Hello, Recent Alum it is great to see you. Welcome back.” At which point you will probably say something like, “thanks.” And when I ask, “How is everything going? What are you up to?” If your reply only consists of an indifferent “You know, college.” Well then at this point we are in trouble, because I am now out of conversation prompts. I’ve got nothing left to ask. So please, bring back stories of classes that you love or a community project you are excited about or a coach or a team that is helping you grow as an athlete or a summer job you are fired up about or a production you are in– you don’t have to do anything that will get you national news coverage – though that would be interesting – my hope for you is that you find activities into which you can fully throw yourself, that bring out a great side in you. That’s a wish I have for you, and that’s a conversation that every faculty member would love to have with you in the years to come.

Now, if you remember, there was a second part to my advice, as I am encouraging you to “Move on...sort of.” By “sort of” I mean to say that I also want to encourage you to stay in touch with St. Andrew’s and especially with your classmates. For, the members of the Class of 2009 will always be able to say something to you that future friends won’t be able to say right away, and that is that...“They knew you when...”

There is great power in those words, and do not underestimate the connection you have with those able to say them. The members of your class seated around you know much about you – both good and bad - and it is important that you stay in touch with them for that very reason.

They knew you when you first showed up at St. Andrew’s on an August afternoon, they know you today as you are preparing to graduate, and they know so much about what has happened in between. They knew you when you were young and nervous about going away to school. They knew you when you were homesick and shy. They knew you when you befriended them, and they knew you when your voice cracked. They knew you when you made them laugh, and they knew you when you were lonely or sad or just not quite yourself. They knew you when you earned well-deserved praise. They knew you when you excelled, accomplishing things as a person and as part of a group that you didn’t think possible, and they knew you when you when you fell just short of your goals. They knew you when you

struggled and grew distant and eventually bounced back. They knew you when you made a mistake, and they knew you when you were there for them, right when they needed you. They know how you carry yourself in the day to day, and they knew you when you went off on an adventure together, one that you still tell stories about. They knew you when you were short, scared, strong, inappropriate, happy, in charge, awkward, in love, down, tired, funny, kind, and in the process of making a tough decision. Truly, this Class of 2009 has known you when...and the fact that they do is one of the most important reasons to stay in touch, as it will offer a perspective that is difficult to come by otherwise.

In closing I want to point out that you are surrounded by other people who knew you when, your family, and they would want me to remind you that it is equally important that you stay in touch with them for similar reasons. And as you go through today, much of which will be a blur, take the time to thank them for all that they have given you. For their sacrifices and patience and generosity. It can be overwhelming to thank people for guiding you through childhood, it can be awkward to thank people for changing your diaper, and it is easy to forget just how much your families have done for you; but that doesn't mean it is not important to say thank you. For today is a day to celebrate friendship and families and achievement and growth and memories, and it is certainly an appropriate day to give thanks for all of these blessings.