

I am a somewhat improbable selection for the honor of speaking today. Many of The White Mountain School parents are more accomplished and have more interesting stories than mine. A review of my high school and college transcripts will confirm that I was not scholar (likely more a matter of effort more than ability). My Marine Corps medals and ribbons confirm that I did my job and went where I was told. I have had moderate career success. My beautiful wife and lovely children are the most notable part of me. Overall, if you were looking for someone who deserved this honor, you could have done better. If you were looking for someone who would truly appreciate it, you are right on the money. But this occasion is not about me and I hope to reflect what I believe your parents guardians, and family are thinking as you complete this milestone.

Like other families, we came to White Mountain for the first time looking for something. Perhaps a chosen course of study that was better here. Perhaps the student needed the structure and change of venue that WMS offers. Maybe the school played well to the talents of the student for climbing, skiing, dance, or other activity. Regardless of why they came, the core reason you are here today is because someone loved you enough to try to find you the best opportunity. On that point, I hope my fellow parents, guardians and supporters will agree.

I recall leaving campus on our first visit, feeling that this is the perfect choice for us. I was immediately anxious that for some reason, my son would not be accepted. He was accepted at the school, but more importantly, he was accepted by his peers. We found a

school where the academics are strong, the environment is beautiful and opportunities for activity are abundant. Foremost, we saw a school where the student body is open, diverse, and welcoming. It will be a testimony to you graduates if incoming students and parents are still choosing WMS because of that strength.

In addition to pride in all that you have accomplished as students, it is right to express gratitude to the WMS faculty and staff who have shepherded you to this point. Life in our house will be a little emptier without Nate's weekend updates, the weekly report from Joanna and the spending report from Meglyn. We have often taken comfort in knowing that there is no question that Jessica cannot answer. Recognizing that I would personally last about a half hour in any of their roles, I appreciate the passion, commitment, and enthusiasm of the WMS staff even more. They have been with you from the start, encouraging you, correcting you, hearing you out, and always supporting you. I hope that in your future destinations, we, as parents, can be sure that you are being guided by resources that are as caring and concerned.

In the next couple of days, you will leave WMS. As you leave, consider whether you have preserved the legacy of academic pursuit and social openness that was presented when you came. I have seen supportive and enthusiastic students who have pursued their passions and ideas with vigor. I know there have been times when you have questioned rules or decisions and I have seen civil discourse on those occasions. As a Marine, I consider that I share a connection with Marines that goes back over 240 years. It is part

of me. Similarly, you have a connection with WMS graduates that goes back over 130 years. Cherish that connection. Let it be part of your life and your decisions.

I make no pretense that I have developed some gem of wisdom that will carry you through life. There are thousands of years of scripture and writings and many better qualified sources of guidance. Your next step may be college or work or military service. Leave WMS knowing that you are prepared to succeed in whatever you choose. Realize that you can get a degree without getting an education. You can age without maturing. You can participate without being committed. Or you can make a difference. Use the passionate, kind, open mindset that WMS has nurtured and work to contribute as best you can. Maintain the honor, the effort, and the commitment that has been encouraged at WMS and you will be fine.

There are three pieces of wisdom that I consider almost daily. First from the 95<sup>th</sup> Psalm, "If today you hear His voice, harden not your heart". Be open to ideas, inspiration and the thought that there is something bigger than all of us, whatever you choose to call it. Next, from Satchel Paige, "Don't pray when it rains if you don't pray when the sun shines." Be grateful for the blessings in your life and accept that at times you will be challenged or discouraged. How you deal with it is up to you. Finally, from Mark Twain (arguably), "If the only tool you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." You are leaving WMS with many skills and you will add to them as you go through life. You are prepared. Be aware of situations and surroundings and be open to using the best tool for the job.

Congratulations on graduating. As you finish here, you start the next adventure. You get a reset and the chance to begin fresh. You are equipped to succeed. As parents, guardians, family and supporters, we are proud of you and eager to see you continue to grow.