

A New Journey

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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. This June, valedictorians all across the nation are probably beginning their speeches with the same thought I am about to express: We are on the threshold of a new millennium. It is appropriate to reflect on the road we have traveled and to peer into the direction we are going, way into the next century. The future lies within the hands of today's young people, including our graduating class, the class of 1999.

In Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations*, as Pip, the protagonist, sets out to seek his fortune, he observes the mist rising solemnly, revealing the world spread out before him. Now we are preparing to seek our own fortunes. Naturally, we all wish that on a clear day we can see forever, but the fog sometimes rises and obscures the horizon. We march ahead with high anxiety and with great expectations.

In the coming fall, we will be scattered far and wide, from the Smoky Mountains to the snowy plains, from the Garden State to the Golden State. A few of us will travel together, but many of us will ride alone into the unknown. No matter where we go, the best preparation we have for the future is the past. In our years at Ranney we have forged the shining sword of wisdom and knowledge, and the bright armor of love and memory. Thus we proceed with high spirits and with great expectations.

During the past four years at Ranney School, we have had numerous opportunities to polish up our existing talents and to discover new ones with the help of our teachers, coaches, and advisors. Many of us have labored through long days and late nights to overcome hurdles and to advance our knowledge. Who can forget the courses in biology, chemistry, physics, and computer science? All of us have "sailed" through geometry, algebra, or calculus. We have carefully weighed which course to elect from the assortment of economics, psychology, European History, American History, and art history. Many of us have experienced love-hate relationships with French, Spanish, or Latin. Last but not least is, of course, English. We have written essays about topics ranging from Romanticism to Realism, from Shakespeare to the Theater of the Absurd.

Furthermore, some have perfected their coordination of mind and body by chasing, throwing, or hitting objects of various sizes and shapes. Some have exercised their muscles and lifted their souls in the water or in the air. A few have created enchanting sounds, colors, and hues to raise the spirits of all. To help others is the happiness of good Samaritans, and to push pawns

or to exchange knowledge are games of the mind. Actors perform on stage, while eloquent speakers present convincing arguments. For those still thirsty after rigorous science and math training, they can participate in leagues and olympiads. Torch and RSVP are for the writers, and Horizons is for those who reflect and then proceed. No matter which way we have taken, nothing has come easily, and the reward is especially sweet after much sweat and many tears.

Many years ago, I spent a summer vacation with my family in Utah. Among the many national parks we visited, Arches National Park stands out most in my mind. This park is especially well-known for the Delicate Arch, a strikingly beautiful and fragile creation of nature. To view the Delicate Arch, we had to make a long and arduous trek up the side of a small mountain. Before we were halfway through, I was exhausted. I had seen pictures of the Delicate Arch before, and it certainly was beautiful, but was the climb really worth it? After all, how much more beautiful could the real thing be than the pictures? As I was thinking these thoughts, returning tourists cheered us on: "It's just around the corner," "Not very far now," "It's definitely worth the effort." Suddenly, we rounded a sharp corner, and there was one of the most stunning vistas I have ever encountered. Before me stood the Delicate Arch, even more majestic and elegant than I had imagined. Like the trip to the Delicate Arch, life is full of uphill climbs, arduous treks, and winding paths. As we face college and the future, we will encounter many obstacles, but each obstacle we overcome strengthens us and becomes a part of who we are.

This past school year, each one of us made many decisions about college. I recall an often-quoted poem by Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken." In this poem, Frost writes:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

As we continue our lives, we will arrive at moments of indecision, when we will have to make tough choices. Whatever road we choose, we will meet unexpected obstacles, but we will also find unexpected fields of flowers around the bend of the road. Part of the beauty of life is the sense of mystery that pervades every aspect of existence. If all the fields of flowers were mapped out for us, life would have no adventure, no excitement.

Today, we are about to set out to seek our own arches and fields of flowers. Before we part, I would like to conclude my last written assignment at Ranney with another poem by Robert Frost, "Into My Own":

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,
Were not, as 'twere, the merest mask of gloom,
But stretched away unto the edge of doom.

I should not be withheld that some day
Into their vastness I should steal away,
Fearless of ever finding open land,

Or highway where the slow wheel pours the sand.
I do not see why I should e'er turn back,
Or those should not set forth upon my track
To overtake me, who should miss me here
And long to know if still I held them dear.
They would not find me changed from him they knew—
Only more sure of all I thought was true.

Like Robert Frost, we are embarking on a journey into the dark woods of the future. I hope that whatever path we choose, whether “the road not taken” or the one more “traveled by,” we will proceed with courage, faith, and confidence. Most important of all, I sincerely hope that we will remain true to ourselves.

Thank you, parents, teachers, and friends, for shaping us, the Class of 1999, into the young men and women we are today. Now let the journey begin. Bon voyage.