

Peter McGillivray's
Valedictory Address
Convocation - 1995
Oct. 20

Valedictory Address

Good Evening ladies and gentlemen, fellow classmates, members of the faculty and honoured guests. It is with great honour that I stand before you as valedictorian of this past year's graduating class. On behalf of the graduates I would like to welcome all of you to this special night's ceremonies and to thank you for being with us now as you have been throughout our years at Huron Heights.

Let me begin with some definitions. According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary 9th ed., a valedictorian is a person who gives a valedictory. Again consulting the dictionary, a valedictory is an address that serves as a valediction. Using the dictionary as a reference once again, a valediction is the act or an instance of bidding farewell or, the words used in this. It is in this spirit that I took it upon myself to write the following poem:

Good bye and Farewell to old Huron Heights,
Prepared are we when reality bites.
Long were the days and short were the nights,
Now gone are the sights of old Huron Heights.

As I scoured through the rest of the "V" section of the dictionary searching desperately for inspiration to aid me in my task of writing a suitable valediction, I discovered two things. First: reading the dictionary is a thoroughly fascinating and entertaining way to waste an afternoon or two. Second: There are quite a few words that begin with the letter "V" that have a particular relevance at times like this. Of particular note are:

Vacation, vocation, varsity, vassal, voyage, verdict, veteran,
varicose, venture, visit, vulnerable, ventriloquism, vegetarian,
viennese schnitzel, and vomit

There is, however, one "V" word that I believe describes our situation as high school graduates very well and that is the word, verge.

We are all on the verge of something, what - we don't know for sure. As Gordon Downie of the Tragically Hip (who just happen to have a song of the same name) puts it, "Here we are now where are we, It's like nothing I've ever seen." I believe a good analogy is the image of all of us standing on an ever precarious ledge halfway up our very own tallest and steepest mountain in the universe. Each person's daunting peak is called Mount Life and the ledge is called "High School Graduation" ledge. Nobody knows what exactly lies at the top (except for select few "psychic friend's networks") and there are countless ways to tackle the climb. However, as we look downwards at how far we have come already, we realize the top is indeed attainable with a bit of effort and determination. We are all on the verge of starting to finish the rest of the climb but we must also give thanks for how we got to where we are.

As any good mountain climber or dictionary enthusiast knows, one cannot get anywhere without the proper training. Proper training includes a good venue (another "V" word) and a good guide. Our parents and teachers were (and still are) those guides who are in no small part due to our present level of success. Even though some days (or most days) we did not feel like getting out of bed, they constantly drove us forward so that we could attain new heights. They corrected our errors and always had words of encouragement when we became troubled about lack of progress. They were always making sacrifices of extra time and effort in order that our lives could be improved and enriched. They provided us with knowledge and skills we will need for

the rest of our lives, along with some useless trivia for use at parties. It is as if they were our own personal Johnnie Cochrans showing us ways around seemingly insurmountable obstacles. For this we thank you all wholeheartedly.

Of equal importance is our training ground and fellow climbers. Mount Huron provided a home away from home for us. Even though it was the place we dreaded on Mondays and longed to leave on Fridays, I am positive this place holds memories to last a lifetime for all of us. As Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give." I'm positive that most of would say that, apart from our classes, the time we gave to Huron Heights was time well spent. This is in no small part due to the lasting friendships we developed amongst our classmates. For although each of us has a different peak to climb and unique path to get there, our paths intertwine an infinite number of times. It is at these intersections that we stop, get to know each other, share a laugh, copy homework, and soothe other forms of teen angst.

We are the next generation of veteran mountain climbers. Will we use our skills to right wrongs, cure injustice and save the world? Will we teach what we have learned to others? Will we pull together to ease the strain of climbers facing more challenging rock formations than our own? Is it actually worth all the exertion and trouble to climb to the top of a mountain when we don't even know what is up there or when we'll arrive, if we'll arrive? One thing is certain and that is that everything is uncertain to us now. In fact we are one of the first generations in years to come to the realization that our climbs are going to be harder and more challenging than that of those who came before us. We cannot simply tread along the beaten paths anymore and we must attempt to use our creative skills to forge our own. As Dan Quayle once said, "If we do not succeed, we run the risk of failure."

However in spite of this uncertainty we must be proud of our accomplishments so far. We definitely know a lot more about climbing than we did before. We definitely know the value of fellow climbers and trainers to ease the strain of the long trek up the mountain. We definitely know that we have all the equipment and skills to make it all the way. It is up to us to get there. I believe the Italian renaissance poet, Petrarch, tells us of his decision to climb higher very well when he says:

"Today I ascended the highest mountain in this region... Nothing but the desire to see its conspicuous height was the reason for this undertaking. For many years I have been intending to make this expedition... as fate tossed around human affairs, I have been tossed around... and this mountain, visible far and wide from everywhere, is in my view. So I was at last seized by the impulse to accomplish what I had always wanted to do...and I was glad of the progress I had made."

We are on the verge of finishing the rest of our climb. I wish you all a pleasant and safe expedition. Thank you and Good Night.