

Valedictorian Graduation Speech
by Zach Horrum
Mount Michael Benedictine School
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Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I can only hope that you feel that enthusiastic after the speech as well.

I vividly recall the exact moment when I was informed that I would be giving this speech: I had just finished my work-study in the kitchens, and was ready to go up to my room and relax before study hall when I ran into Sister Carolyn. You know that moment when you're sure something terrible is about to happen? Well, it did. She smiled at me, walked over, and like a deer in the headlights, my fate was sealed. As many of you know, I'm not much of a public speaker. Figuring out just what I wanted to say to sum up my class' four years here at the Mount was a daunting task, let alone trying to figure out how to motivate some of us to four more years of higher education. I agonized over what to say, and no matter what I tried, nothing seemed to come out right. I guess you could say that I was, quite literally, speechless.

"But as my frustration grew, I stopped and thought about my four years here at the Mount and everything came together....." Nah, I'm just kidding. If only it were that easy, right? But that sort of thing doesn't happen in real life. Easy solutions like that are all too often followed by "and they lived happily ever after." But the truth is, life is not a fairy tale, and not everyone gets a "happily ever after." Class of 2009, realize that we are very fortunate individuals.

We are fortunate in that we had the opportunity to attend Mount Michael. The school has provided us with an outstanding and unique education which will prepare us for college and the "real world." And at the center of this education were our gifted teachers. They not only taught us their subjects, but took the time to get to know us as individuals and impart valuable life lessons. After all, what better way to learn not to plagiarize than to watch a very angry Mr. Roshone tear up an essay in front of the

whole class? And could anyone reveal the dangers of trash cans in doorways like the Colonel? And lo and behold, Ms. Sullivan taught us that our cheer, “Steeellllaaa!”, actually means something. Some were our coaches, who not only worked with us in the classrooms but sacrificed their free time to give us the opportunity to compete in sports, perform in speech and drama, and express our knowledge in science and math competitions. Our coaches even provided deep insight into other, unexpected areas of life, including the proper time and place to wear a matching track suit. These people were not just our teachers, though they taught their material well; they were also our mentors, and for that we should be immensely grateful.

And lest we forget, Mount Michael is a Benedictine school, and we owe a great deal to the monks. It is through their generosity that the school exists at all. Some have taught us in the classroom, from Theology to Art to Senior AP Physics. But all have been involved in the spiritual guidance of the students. Through their dedication to the Benedictine values, they have provided an example of moral grounding in an oftentimes chaotic world. Their devotion to their lifestyle and faith is an inspiration to us all.

We are fortunate in that we have families which love us. While their love is incredibly vast, the scope it can partially be understood when looking at the sacrifices made in order to send us to the Mount. While the simplest option would have been to send us to public schools, our parents weighed the pros and cons of having to budget and save to send us to Mount Michael, and felt that the cost was worth it. Beyond the significant financial investment our families put into the school, we should realize that our parents have also paid a greater price: They have given up their sons for weeks on end so that we may have the best education possible. Even though at times, between sports practices and games, parties and work, our families may have only seen us for a few hours a week, know that they loved us immeasurably and cherished each and every moment they had with us. Their giving did not stop there, either. They willingly took time out of their lives to be our staunchest supporters in everything from academics to sports, and almost all of them shared their homes with various members of the class at one time or another. Many of our parents were also involved

with the school itself through the Men's, Women's, and Booster Clubs. They helped organize events such as dances, the Fall Festival and Night of Knights and bought various items which have improved our lives at the Mount.

We are fortunate to have bright futures ahead us. Thanks to our education here at the Mount, the support of our teachers and the love our parents gave us, we have a chance relatively few people share: we have the opportunity to further our education in college. After years of following a curriculum set down for us by others, we will now have the opportunity and responsibility to plan our own education based upon what we want to do with our lives. The opportunities which await us are limitless. We will be going across the city, state, nation and the world, to schools large and small, in order to pursue our various interests which range from computer science to psychology to business. Chances are many of those interests will change; the future is an uncertain thing, but there is one thing we can be sure of: we have prepared as best we can and are ready and excited for it.

The last thing I would like to say to you today, fellow graduates, is that while today is our day, we need to accept the responsibilities of tomorrow. We have received a great education. Now we must go out and use it to make the world a better place. We have had loving families. Now we must emulate them in our relationships. We have an opportunity to learn and grow even more in college, and we must not squander it. Finally, we have each other, as classmates and brothers. Carry that same dedication you have to one another wherever you go, share it with everyone you meet, and know that we will always be there for you.

Thank you.