

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Thank you, Mr. Davis. Students, faculty, administration, trustees, parents, and friends: I consider it a very real privilege and honor to deliver on behalf of our class this commencement address. Commencement means "a beginning", but if the beginning is to succeed, it must have a sound basis; and I speak for all seniors in saying we are proud of the foundation given us at Gaston Day. My remarks are addressed then not to the future but to the past, for it is upon the past that the future is built and my theme carries with it a special "Thank You" to those who have made today possible.

As has been the case of every senior class of Gaston Day, all of us will attend college and we feel both proud and fortunate that the education received here has well prepared us for the rigorous work load of a college schedule. In our society it is becoming increasingly apparent that in order for the high school graduate to attain success he must be adequately prepared to excel on a competitive basis with other graduates. I read recently that a leading medical school accepted 100 students out of 1,800 applicants. Many are called, but few are chosen and yet we, of the senior class feel that the background received here gives us that competitive advantage needed to strive for a place among the chosen few.

Why do we feel so strongly about and take such pride in Gaston Day? The very atmosphere is conducive to learning. Since classes are small each student has a greater opportunity and is encouraged to express his ideas. In addition, the smaller classes give the teachers greater freedom and time to help each student on an individual basis. It is obviously easier for a student to speak out in a small group and to a teacher whom he or she knows well. And of course, it has practical advantages perhaps more related to the welfare of the student himself; for how could one teacher watch 40 new students pouring acid into 40 beakers?

The relationships that develop between students and their teachers here both inside and outside the class are firm and permanent. We will always cherish their friendship; we will always value their standards of respect and discipline. Inasmuch as a student may have the same teacher for more than one year, the relationship is not terminated upon promotion to a higher grade. Inside the class the relationship is one of seriousness--most of the time, and a friendly, respectful relationship outside the class. Our teachers have taught us well, not only academically, but also that all learning does not come from books. Albert Coates, retired professor of law at UNC, once told a graduating law class of congratulating an uneducated farmer on using initiative and resourcefulness in a difficult situation. The farmer replied, "Well, I'll tell you Mr. Coates, when you ain't got no education you got to use your head." Mr. Coates used this as an example in remarking to the graduates, "While you have been laying books end to end other people have been laying moments of experience end to end. I have lived to learn that my mother and father learned more about human beings and human behavior from raising nine children than I learned from all the books on psychology I ever read."

We feel that our teachers have taught us something about life that we couldn't have gotten from books in the classroom.

The relatively small size of Gaston Day allows each student to become involved in school activities. He or she may participate in one of five sports, work on the newspaper, join the staff of the school annual, become a cheerleader or join one or more of the various school clubs. The high percentage of participation may be illustrated by the fact that over half the boys in the upper school played football this year. This involvement is one of the main reasons Gaston Day is such a fine school academically, athletically and socially. We are closely-knit and the feelings and respect that faculty and students have for each other can only come from a pride developed in us for the school and its standing in the community.

Our training has made us increasingly aware that responsibility is a trademark of maturity. Because of the size of our school, each student must of necessity carry a greater share of responsibility than might be required in a larger school. For example, the cost of a Junior-Senior Dance is not relative to the size of the school because bands charge identical rates for all schools. This means that each member of the junior class must work harder to raise money for a successful dance. Based on the size of the class and the cost of the Junior-Senior this past year, each student was responsible for raising approximately \$35--and that is a lot of hotdogs sold and cars washed.

This then has been our past--a gift of the value of knowledge, pride in attainment, the necessity for responsibility, respect for ourselves and others and the worth of lasting friendships. At the beginning I expressed my theme to be one of appreciation and I would like at this time to thank the faculty and administration, especially Mr. Davis, the Board of Trustees, our parents, and the entire student body for making our years at Gaston Day so rewarding and enjoyable.

In closing, I would like to quote John Wooden's book, They Call Me Coach. I sincerely hope that we the class of '74 will recall this short poem as we prepare ourselves for college.

"Remember this your lifetime through--
Tomorrow there will be more to do...
And failure waits for all who stay
With some success made yesterday...
Tomorrow you must try once more
And even harder than before."

Thank you.

Billy Palmer
May 28, 1974