LAKEVIEW HIGH SCHOOL

COMMENCEMENT SPEECH FOR

GORDY OPITZ

Hello everyone and thank you for inviting me to speak to all of you today at this, the 2012 commencement exercises for Lakeview High School. I want to thank the faculty and staff here at Lakeview High for being so supportive to us as students. As you probably know, I graduated from this school in 1975, and the lessons I learned have stayed with me and inspired me for my entire adult life. As you also probably know, I love sports and my high school career gave me the opportunity to sharpen my game and play the sports I loved, and in the process, I learned. I learned to be part of a team. I learned to practice as well as study, and as I look back on those years, I see how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to prepare myself for my adult life thanks to the education I received at Lakeview High School.

I have some great memories of my high school years. (**Mention and briefly describe 3 events that happened in high school that might be interesting to the graduates**). Some of the memorable moments from those days are:

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What was life like in the world back then in those “ancient” times? We all hear of, and some of us who experienced life back then remember easier times and a simpler life, but the times were about to change. We also now know that simpler times also have their problems and issues to deal with. Even though gasoline was about 45 cents a GALLON, our country was about to experience the first “gas crisis.” Bic had just introduced its first disposable razor, and Bill Gates and Steve Jobs had both just begun their respective technology careers. The first personal computer was dreamed up that year, the laser printer was first invented back then and Motorola obtained the patent for the first mobile phone-yes people, there was a time when you had to stand or sit in one place to talk on the phone! (**Wait for the laugh**) and Angelina Jolie had just been born! I know it must seem like a weird world to all of you graduates, but think of all that we have experienced and seen come into existence since that time. And keep in mind that the more we learn, the more there is to learn. All of the innovations and inventions that the past 35 years have brought us could not have happened without the inventors and the innovators receiving an educational foundation first. Very simply, school teaches you **HOW** to think.

Our adult lives were just beginning for the members of my graduating class back in June of 1975, and your lives are just beginning for all of you graduates today. I remember that in high school, we all thought we “knew it all.” As I grew up, matured and learned more about life, I realized and believe more and more every single day, that “I don’t know what I don’t know!” But what I learned from my high school career is this-I learned that one of the most important assets in life is having an education and the curiosity to learn more and more. I learned how to learn. Some of you will be going off to college. Some of you will go directly into the work world. No matter the path you’ve chosen, the learning doesn’t stop. The entire world is our classroom and it is now your responsibility to do what is needed to learn the lessons you need to live your lives. High school graduation is a significant milestone. This commencement ceremony is an essential part of your high school education as well. Although it signifies the completion of your high school career, the last ceremony to celebrate the lives lived and the lessons learned for the past 4 years, it actually represents the beginning of the rest of your lives. Today is the day you throw your caps in the air, shake off the gowns, and ask your family or friends to hold your diploma while you Par-TAY! …. Some of you will have the next couple of months to breathe those last few moments of “freedom” right before the reality of college or the working world set in, so before we lose all of you completely to celebration and sun filled summer days of relaxing and dreaming, here are some thoughts to take with you. Plenty has been said about standing on the threshold of adulthood, and I would like to share some of those sentiments with you:

* The late, great Steve Jobs was a maverick. He was single minded as a young man. He had a vision and no one was going to stop him. Although he experienced wild success and his share of failure, ultimately, before his death last year, he managed to change the world. None of us would be the same without the products and lifestyle he envisioned for everyone. Here is what he had to say about growing up and fulfilling one’s personal potential. He said, “Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”
* The actor Alan Alda, believes in taking risks in order to grow and experience success. He said, “You have to leave the city of your comfort and go into the wilderness of your intuition. You can’t get there by bus, only by hard work and risk and by not quite knowing what you’re doing, but what you’ll discover will be wonderful. What you’ll discover will be **yourself**.”
* Most of you don’t know who Milton Berle is. Your parents might not know who he is either, but your grandparents probably would know him. He was a comedian who was popular in the 50’s and was one of the pioneers of early television-yes, there was a time when television didn’t exist! Although his job was to make people-a lot of people- laugh, he said something very serious and wise when he said, “If opportunity doesn’t knock, **build a door**.”

Those are all wise words from a variety of sources, but they all basically give the same advice. Learn to trust yourself. Dare to imagine and also dare to follow your dreams and goals. Remember-a bus can’t take you there. You have to search within and learn how to place one foot in front of the other in order to find your path in life. Remember what Milton Berle said. If opportunity doesn’t knock-then YOU go find a way to build that door, knock on it and walk through to a braver and newer world.

I think of what life was like when I was your age, and I think of what my life experiences have brought me. I’ve been thinking, “What would I want to know or learn if our roles were reversed and I was graduating today and just beginning my adult journey. Of course, I can imagine based on the lessons I’ve already learned, but I have a feeling when I was your age, there might have been more than a few missed opportunities because I wanted to do things **MY** way. I have to acknowledge that somewhere along the line, my intuition told me of the value of nurturing and teaching the future leaders of tomorrow-students like you. I love to coach and mentor young people and I love to support people in attaining their goals. Here’s some wisdom-Gordy Opitz style:

* The good news is-you’re not alone. The bad news is-you’re not alone. What do I mean by that? Well, each one of you will meet challenges in life. Whether they’re intellectual, physical or emotional, there will be times when you may feel very alone in the world. You’re not. Thanks to the vast network of people and friends and connections we all have, no one ever needs to feel the stress of facing a challenge alone. The trick is to have the courage to reach out and ask for what you need. You may not face the response you expected, but you will have tried and that is very admirable. The bad news about not being alone? You have to be considerate, respectful and responsible for your words and actions-all the time-no exceptions. No matter what life places in your path, you are part of a team and we all know, “**There is no ‘I’ in team!”**
* I just mentioned expectations. I have a friend who believes that expectation is at the root of all disappointment. You can expect something to happen all you want, but expectation is a spectator sport. If you want something, set goals and make a plan to work to achieve that goal. Don’t just sit around and “expect” it to happen. Don’t just sit around “expecting” people to do things for you. Use your brain and your experience and your intuition and figure out a way to achieve those goals.
* Practice living a “sustainable” life. Be conscious of the world around you. Learn to conserve. Learn to respect life’s resources-both natural and man made, and I promise you that you will be all the richer for it. We live in a culture overwhelmed with consumerism**-“GIMME GIMME-I GOTTA HAVE IT!!**” We all take so much for granted. Think about how hard your parents work to give you what you have. Guess what? Soon it will be YOUR turn to take what you’ve learned to find your way in this world, and some day you’ll thank me for these bits of advice! While you remember that there is no “I” in team, you can also remember that none of us lives alone on this planet and it will be up to your generation to find more effective ways to sustain our lives in this world and to share all resources.
* My last bit of advice to all of you is simple. Do not fear making mistakes. Everyone makes them. Mistakes are a measure of something you’ve done. The only way to avoid making mistakes is to do nothing and that is not an option. Mistakes are an excellent means to learn-to learn how to do that thing correctly and to learn to take responsibility for the mistake that was made. Taking ownership of your actions is a wonderful sign that you’ve become an adult. I don’t mean that you should deliberately fudge something, but I do mean that if mistakes are made, acknowledge them, realize what you’ve done wrong, correct yourself and move on. Think positively, take criticism like an adult, and be there to support others who you observe have made their own mistakes. Someone once said, “What we call failure is not the falling down but the **staying down**.” Don’t forget to get up!!

In conclusion, I want to thank you all again for allowing me this time to speak with you. I want to leave you with just a little more inspiration, some of which I’ve already said. There is a legend that Bill Gates once delivered a speech to high school students about the “11 Things You **Did Not** and **Will Not** Learn in High School.” Whether he actually delivered this information is almost aside from the point. It’s still a great list and here are some of the valuable lessons to be learned:

* Life is not fair. **Get used to it**!
* You will **NOT** make $60,000 a year right out of high school. You won’t be a vice president with a fancy car until you **earn** both.
* If you think your teachers were tough, wait until you get a boss!!!
* Flipping burgers is not beneath your dignity. Your grandparents had a different word for burger flipping-they called it **opportunity**!
* Television is NOT real life. In real life, people actually have to leave the coffee shop and go to jobs.
* And finally….Be nice to nerds. Chances are you just might end up working for one!

I wish each one of you only the best. May you experience great success in your college and professional lives. May you appreciate your mistakes and achievements. May you always have the hunger to learn and grow and nurture your inner self, and may the world be a better place for the knowledge and accomplishments you will share, and the contributions you will make to your families, friends, neighbors, community and the world around you.

Congratulations and thank you all!