HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION SPEECH

FOR

SCARLET PRINCE

Hello everyone!! It’s great to be here at the commencement exercises for the graduating class of 2013 from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ High School. I want to extend a special hello and thank you to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for inviting me to speak here today. I am also thrilled to see so many students, graduates, family members, friends, and of course faculty and administrators of this fine school. To tell the truth, at this point in our collective lives, we’ve probably either gone to high school, graduated from high school, or someday will go to high school-shout out to all of you younger brothers and sisters here today! High school is a really important life experience for just about all of us-or at least it should be, so here we are, united in a common bond!

Let’s face it; high school is one of the most important times of a person’s life. It’s the time in life when young people transition to adulthood. High school graduation is a rite of passage that really means so much more than the graduation ceremony itself and going off to the rest of your life. The years spent in high school are spent building the foundation for the rest of the stages of your lives. We learn the lessons that carry us to the next steps in life-although, let’s face it-how many adults in this room actually use all of the wisdom they learned in algebra, on a daily basis?? Just curious!! (**Wait for the laugh**) Sorry, students-you STILL have to learn algebra!! We meet the friends and colleagues who will probably be with us for most of our lives-if we’re lucky. High school is the place where deep friendships are formed and where we learn how to communicate and interact with each other. It’s the place where athletes are born and trained and nurtured to bigger and better goals and greatness. It’s the place where each one truly gets tested on so many levels and **learns how to learn** from those tests. High school is an essential part of the backbone of our lives. In fact, it’s been said that high school is the “mouse race that prepares us for the rat race of adulthood.” Plenty of famous people have said some really unforgettable things about their high school years. After he was elected President of the United States, Ronald Reagan had this to say. “…But there are advantages to being elected President. The day after I was elected, I had my high school grades classified ‘**TOP SECRET**.’” (**Wait for the laugh**). There ya go!!! Something to aspire to!!! Now, who wants to be President!! There was a very famous comedian named George Carlin. His recollection of high school was this: “When I got out of high school, they retired my jersey…. Oh no. I wasn’t a great athlete. It was for hygiene and sanitary purposes!” Ew!! (**Wait for the laugh**) (**If you want, you can also say**) I want apologize to the parents, faculty and adults in the room for slipping in a “dirty” joke at this dignified ceremony! Christina Aguilera had her own perspective about high school friendships when she said; “I got along better with the guys than with the girls. Only two girls came up to talk to me. Later I found out they were telling their boyfriends, ‘If you talk to her, I’ll kill you.’ It’s always rough with that high school thing.’” Nice memories, Christina!! But let’s face it; you were mainly in school to learn anyway.

Yes, high school is a rite of passage and one that you will refer to for the rest of your lives. And now that you’re moving on from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ High School, you are going to get more advice than you would ever have been able to imagine that you might need, want or use. As I thought about what I wanted to say to you today to inspire you, or at the very least, keep you awake and interested (**wait for the laugh**), I tried to think of what might have kept my attention when I was your age. But then I remembered there are adults here today as well, so I’ll continue anyway!!

Some of you are off to college; some of you will join the workforce. **All of you** are about to get initiated into adulthood. You’ve done the hard work-up to now. Today is a day of celebration. And tomorrow, no matter which road you choose as your path in life, the **real work** begins. The first thing I want to let you know is that although you have worked hard in school and you’ve learned valuable lessons, and you know absolutely everything you know, in the words of a friend of mine, “**You don’t know what you don’t know**.” Believe me, no one does! So what do we do with that? I’ll tell you. Keep an open mind. Remember that we are all placed on this planet for one reason, and that is to learn. Sure, you graduate today, but as I said earlier, your high school career is just the foundation to build on for the rest of your lives! Be open to learning from everyone and every situation you experience. Even if you are positive that you are the smartest person in the room, there is something for you to learn. Remember what William Shakespeare said in “Hamlet.” “We know what we are but know not what we may be.” With an open mind, the possibilities of who you are and what you may be become limitless. Try not to fall into the trap of what some call, “the arrogance of youth.” Sure, I can say, “try,” and I can pretend you hear me. But I really do want you to learn how to listen and use what you’ve learned to keep that mind open.

You may think you know everything there is to know, bit one thing you naturally lack is experience, and experience really is the best teacher. Albert Einstein said, “The only source of knowledge is experience.” So let’s face it and keep it simple. Let your motto be, “**Know as You Go**.”

You’ve spent four years of your lives studying, learning, and practicing to perfect your knowledge and other skills. Good for you!! Guess what? Lighten up!! You’re going to make mistakes!! The measure of true maturity, integrity and professionalism is **not** perfection; it’s being **responsible** for your actions, knowing how to be accountable and do what is necessary to make the corrections in any given situation. If someone made a mistake at **YOUR** expense, you would want the same.

Always keep in mind that expectations are at the root of disappointment, and by that I mean, try not to feel so “entitled” to have things. Do not take for granted what it takes for someone else to give you something-ANYTHING. Until you have “walked a mile” in someone else’s shoes, you have no idea what that person may have to go through to attempt to meet your expectations, and this goes for every situation in life. Whether it’s school, work, family or friendships, stop expecting to get something just because you’re “you,” and learn to **earn** it. At the same time, think of what others expect from you. There are some natural agreements or “social contracts” we enter into with others, and when agreements are made, those expectations have to be fulfilled-remember about integrity and responsibility. It’s important to keep an open mind and maintain healthy conversation about any situation with friends, family, co-workers, and community.

In order to be successful in school, life and work, I have another really simple suggestion and I invite you to use it as often as needed. Do not use the word “FAIR.” **Life is not fair**. Unless you are going on a bus or you’re at a celebration in the country and there are rides and cotton candy and animals to pet, remove the word fair from your language. As I said, life is not fair and whining about it does not help any situation. Think of more effective ways to conduct your argument for equality and justice. You will be considered to be more mature, thoughtful, and effective. Try it-it just might work!

Since I’m “on a roll” here-giving you the “wake up” laundry list, I may as well through in some words about budgeting. It’s not just for accountants and bookkeepers anymore!! Oh no!!! You’re standing in the doorway of adulthood. Learning to deal with budgets at an early age will be life changing for you!! Show of hands-how many of you think your parents’ pockets are a bottomless pit? Guess what? They’re not!! Your revenue stream has a heart and organs and sometimes even needs to rest and relax. Now that you are approaching adulthood, familiarize yourselves with learning to budget time and resources as well as finances. We would all love to be given gifts all day long, but that’s just not possible. Now that you’ll be working or thinking of work, or at the very least being able bodied and sensible enough to work, think about how you will spend a little, save a lot, and maybe even contribute to your parents who have supported you the best way they knew how for the first part of your lives. I am sure many of you have had jobs, and whether after school, during the summer, or whenever possible that you had the opportunity to earn money, you began to appreciate what it takes to sustain yourself and the income you’ve earned. Part of being a responsible and viable adult is knowing how to take care of yourself, and others, financially. In a large way, financial freedom and accountability equals self-assurance and a sense of stability. Really-who doesn’t want that?

Another thing I want to point out is that although your high school career usually takes only four years of your lives, it is a time in life that you will never forget and probably never stop talking about. I read an article a while ago written by a young man named Sam Greenspan entitled “Eleven Things You Did in High School That You’ll Still Talk About at Age Thirty.” I won’t go through all eleven things, but I will point out some of them to give you a little perspective. And let’s not even discuss why he names eleven things, but I think its because he thought it was cooler than a ‘Top Ten” list and a lot more unique. He also mentions that this stuff really shouldn’t matter anymore by the time you reach thirty, but it does. And it will to you. Because high school is a really important time of your life, as I have been trying to tell you.

* First of all, you’ll be talking about the sports you played. Your illustrious high school football career may be overshadowed by your even more jaw dropping college football career, but it doesn’t matter. You’ll be reminiscing about all those moves you made when you were “too cool for school”… high school, that is.
* You’ll be talking about your senior yearbook-or have they gone all digital yet? By the time you’re thirty, there may be no more real hard covered yearbooks. Maybe facebook will have a virtual high school year book app and instead of having to make sure you’re all ready for the professional photographer to take your picture in that dorky pose, the generation after you may just have to post their favorite Instagram “Selfies ,” and won’t **THAT** make you feel old? Hey-by the time you’re all thirty, Instagram and Facebook will probably be “retro!!” Boy, I hope your hair looks cool in your high school picture because that image is going to follow you for the rest of your life!! Trust me!! You should see mine!! (**Wait for the laugh**).
* And speaking of dorky, wait until you look back on this time and think about all of the extracurricular activities you indulged in. Audio Visual Squad anyone? Student government? Band? Intramural crocheting? (Just kidding). (**Wait for the laugh**). Let’s face it; all those extra credit points are going to stick with you like glue for the rest of your adulthood!!
* And what about those SAT scores?? They’ll REALLY stick with you for life!! You’re probably discovering that right now. How have your SAT scores impacted your future plans for higher education or job prospects? Trust me, in twelve to fifteen years, even at the most sophisticated cocktail party; you just may whip out the old SAT scores as the perfect icebreaker to some stimulating conversation!! Consider that score branded onto your life and seared into your memory!!
* I also bet you’ll be talking about the kind of car you drove-or didn’t as the case may be, and even the color. I know I was “locked into” a 1963 Chevy Impala. It was taupe. I hated it. All I used to do was warm it up because I hated to drive it. It always stalled. Oh. Wait a minute-you didn’t know we used to have to “warm up” cars to make sure they drove if we didn’t use them for a couple of days? We did, and you will be sharing fond memories of the crappy cars you drove while in high school. Or, once again didn’t as the case may be.

There are many other memories you’ll carry with you as you move on in life and go through bigger and better experiences. They’ll be bigger and better, for sure, but they probably won’t be as meaningful. High school is experienced at a time in your development when you are open to being formed and informed. It’s a time when you are questioned-as in quizzes and tests, and you learn to question-as in not accept the status quo, and that is really healthy. High school has prepared you to think and react and to handle yourselves as adults. I’ve made some funny points today, but most of all, I hope I’ve given you food for thought.

And speaking of food, I want to leave you with this thought. If we were to compare life to a meal, then high school would be the appetizer. It comes first, whets your appetite for what’s to come in the future, and gives a taste of different areas of education and disciplines so that you can make more informed choices about the rest of your meal. Your adult life and career are your main course. Make sure you know enough and choose enough interesting challenges and avenues to feed and sustain your interests for a lifetime. There was a very famous movie called “Mame,” and the main character was a woman who loved life and wasn’t ashamed to live the biggest and boldest and most interesting life she could dream of. In the movie, that character, Mame, made a statement that outlives the movie and inspires people every day. (**Say this with enthusiasm**) She said, “Life is a banquet and most poor suckers are **starving**!!”

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all of you graduates. Your lives are waiting for you. Make each moment count. Remember the good times, learn from the challenges, and most importantly, go forth and indulge feast on the banquet of life. Have a taste of every dish-health, happiness, success, good friends, great lessons learned, and unforgettable memories. You **WILL** talk about this day and your high school careers in the years to come. Inspire people as they have inspired you and make us all proud!! Congratulations and thank you all!