**14327, Brandon Pond – graduation**

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentleman,

I am honored today to speak to as the valedictorian for my class. I want to welcome all our family and friends, as well as the teachers and administrators of the school to this celebration of our graduation. Today is one of the most important days of our lives. I’m sure when we first stepped foot on this high school campus we thought today was in our distant future and yet here we are, ready or not. When we began this journey I’m not sure we all were convinced we’d make to today but here we stand. For the most part it was an uneventful four years, unless of course you county the bathroom fires. It really was an accident.

There are 500 of us who stand here today but there are a few of us who didn’t make it to today. We had some students who passed away before this day came and I want to be sure to honor them today because they would be here today if they could. Their names are: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. They are a part of all of us here. We began this race together and we finish it together.

High school is a time of growth in our lives that we will never experience in quite the same way again. We began as little more than children, still a little wild in our own ways, with great expectations for what the future might bring. We had no idea all the changes we would go through, all the growing we would experience. Some of us had no idea what we wanted to do with our lives. Some of us still don’t know that. But, others have known their destiny since they were young children. I heard one person say it was easy to know what you were going to do when you were only good at one thing. That was not at all true of that person but it gives you an idea of how sometimes you just know what you were meant to do by the very things you have the greatest talent for doing. It comes so natural to you that you couldn’t imagine doing anything else.

Most of us haven’t been that lucky though. Most of us have had to walk a path of discovery, trying first one thing and then another to discover our strengths and weaknesses as well as our likes and dislikes. I’ve heard older people say they weren’t given choices when they were young. They were told, this is the way you will walk and this is the way you will live and this is the work you will do. I am so thankful that we didn’t have this experience. We have been given so many different opportunities to learn and discover all the opportunities available to us as we graduate and enter the world at large.

We have so many different career paths to choose from and many of those careers exist because of the great advances in technology, some of which have happened right before our eyes as we grew up. Just think of the all the technology that didn’t even exist when we first entered high school, let alone what didn’t exist for our parents. But, all this technology is a two edged sword. There are also pitfalls to technology if we are careless about it. Social media is no longer just something that people do for fun; it is now something that employers search to find out things about current or possible employees do that they won’t admit to on a resume or in an interview. People have lost good jobs when they said one thing at work and said something different on social media.

If we learn to use social media wisely then it can be a wonderful tool for us. But, we have to remember not to post anything online that we wouldn’t want on the nightly news. We are all going to make mistakes in life but let us not make them in such a public forum that will never go away. Be certain that as you learn to use all the current and new technology that you learn how to use its safeguards as well as its benefits. Remember technology should be a tool that does what you intend it to do, not a toy that overtakes your good sense.

Today is the last day of one season of our lives, our childhood. But, today is the first day of the next season of our lives, adulthood. We have so much before us. That is not to say all the fun is behind us. But, it means that we will live life differently today. From this day forward we will think about how our actions will affect our future as never before. Today is the jumping off point into the great unknown. Even if we know what our next step is, whether it is college or military or starting our career right away, there are still so many unknown factors that we will face moving forward.

Leaving childhood behind and taking on adulthood is one of the greatest challenges we will ever face. There will be great and wonderful things to experience. We will face decisions, successes and sometimes even hardship. But, we will find a way to make those experiences a part of who we are and move forward from them. Each of us has a calling or a purpose in our lives, something we were born to do and living life to the fullest is the best way we can find that purpose and fulfill it. But, in order to do that we have to be committed and we have to be dedicated to giving our best and our all toward finding that purpose.

Some of us already know what we believe our purpose to be. That may well be true but it may also only be part of our purpose or our purpose for a season. I hope that as we grow and learn from life that we can be open to all the new lessons that life will teach us and be willing to take that leap of faith once in a while to try something new and different. We have no idea what great things may be waiting for us if we are willing to do that. There are people who live one kind of life and work in one kind of career for the first 30 years of their lives and then do a turn around and do something totally different for the rest of their lives. As you grow older be open to new learning experiences. You never know what wonders you may experience if you are watching for them.

During the last four years of high school we have studied and memorized lots of facts and figures and taken more tests than we thought existed. But, today, as we step out into a new phase of life we face a new set of rules. Life is more than wrote memory and spitting out what has been fed into us to prove we learned it. Life is about putting all those lessons into practice. Today and every day from now on we have to live out the life lessons we learned. Yes, we learned how to speak and how to write but now it is not just to get a grade, it’s to build a life filled with purpose and commitment. That will take dedication and determination.

Whatever career we decide to pursue we must give it our all. We must learn all we need to know and put all our lessons into practice. This isn’t a test we can get a make up on if we are absent. This is life. We can’t be absent from life. We have to get up every day with the express purpose of living life to its fullest. We have to get up every day and walk out our front door with an attitude of gratefulness for the opportunities we have been given and with a determination to succeed no matter what life throws our way.

No one can succeed for you. There is no one’s paper you can peek at to find the answers for your life. You have a purpose and a reason to go out there and be great. Being great doesn’t mean being famous or rich or notable. Being great means being the best you can be regardless of the circumstances. Some of us will have greater challenges than others. But all of us will faces challenges and all of us will be tested to see if we have what it takes to not only survive but thrive. I am confident, as I look out over my graduating class today, that each and every one of us has what it takes to thrive and succeed at whatever we set our minds to do. And, if for some reason we find we have taken a wrong road, then I believe we have the skills and talents, and the wisdom to turn ourselves around and take the right road. We will succeed because we have the will to do what is necessary to succeed. We will take it one day at a time, one test at a time, one challenge at a time, and we will each succeed in our own way.

Good luck to all of us today as we move forward and step out into our future.

Thank you