**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**SHABNAM KASHANI**

Ladies and gentlemen, family and friends, colleagues and graduates, I have been given the opportunity to share a few thoughts about one of our graduates and it is with great pride and respect that I acknowledge Dr. Meryl Davis. Meryl is a talented, dedicated, conscientious professional, but to stop there would not do any of us, or her, justice. Known as a consummate professional, she has high expectations of herself and those on her team. She is very focused and really is a great surgeon. She’s compassionate towards her patients and always keeps their best interests at the forefront of care. She is a beautiful, warm, compassionate and caring “transplanted” Texan who is truly a “citizen of the earth.” Every action, each capable and literally incisive gesture she makes, represents her genuine character and infinite respect for her patients, her fellow doctors, and the values and standards from her hometown upbringing that are rooted deep within her.

For those of you that may not know, those deep roots take us, and Meryl, back to McKinney, Texas, the place that has been home to generations on Meryl’s maternal side. While it’s not certain to whom to attribute the following paraphrased quote, it’s clear that if we take a look back at Meryl’s life, we will see and connect those early influences. From her childhood and her early education, we will see the “bulb” that “blossomed” into Dr. Meryl Davis.

“Give me the child when she is seven years old, and I will show you the adult.” While some may credit Aristotle and others may say that St. Ignatius Loyola made that observation, one thing is indisputable.... Meryl Davis is true to her heritage. She is a devoted daughter, an affectionate sibling, dedicated granddaughter, and a loyal and true “McKinnian.” Her soul is deeply embedded in her family, her friends, and her mission as a doctor. Meryl grew up as the middle child in a family of three siblings. From all accounts, she was a happy, inquisitive, intellectually gifted child. She was diligent when it came to her schoolwork and with her emphasis on her chemistry lessons, she naturally also excelled in biology. Add to that her devotion to her grandfather, McKinney’s pediatrician, and we can begin to see the road map that takes us on the route to Meryl’s character and adulthood.

Meryl... and her brother Austin and sister Abby, while growing up, were fortunate enough to spend lots of time with their grandparents... and while Grandma Anne developed a stellar reputation for her beautiful voice and love of music, which she happily shared with her granddaughter, it was Grandpa Mack that left another great impact... (**If you want to make a little joke you can say**)... especially when it was time for childhood vaccinations.... (**and wait for the laugh**). Of course I kid, but Dr. Mack Hill was a tremendous presence in the town of McKinney and had a profound effect on Meryl’s heart, aspirations, and patience.... He was a man of strong faith who loved his family and his community and he was thoroughly engaged in truly living his best life.... clearly Meryl had an incredible mentor.... oh... one other thing.... he was also interested in real estate.... I bet many of you may not have known that.... and I’m not speaking on a grand scale, capital “**R**” real estate.... but he and his grandchildren had a fairly famous practice.... **weeklong** Monopoly games....yes. I think **THAT** may have been where Meryl learned and earned her gift of patience.... and by way of explanation, just as a little side note... how many of you heard that the British royal family is forbidden to play Monopoly??? It’s true... rumor has it that games got too “**competitive**...” I think Buckingham Palace could have used some coaching from Dr. Hill!!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

As I said, Meryl is a Texan, through and through.... and while you might be able to get the girl out of Texas... I don’t think any of us would **ever** get the Texas out of our girl..... nor would we want to... and I’m fairly sure that if Dansko made there well known “Professional Oiled Clog shaped like a cowboy boot.... Meryl would be first in line for **THAT** hybrid!! Her love of her community and her home town brought with it a fascination for all facets nature and a sense of complete ease as long as she is one with the outdoors... That passion for the exploring nature probably began on those family trips to that remote cabin in Colorado. Meryl took to that simple, secluded life... free from electronic tethers, like a natural. Her adventurous spirit was clearly developed and honed on those trips and her sense of wonder and confidence in being able to adapt and handle her surroundings is a trait we see present in the doctor we honor today. She loves to birdwatch, scuba dive, sail, and on occasion, take that **road less travelled**.....

Speaking of which, I will never forget when Meryl took some time off from school and work. Upon her return, as we were making rounds, I asked her what she did. When I was told by Meryl that she went camping.... **ALONE**... at first it didn’t register... I really could not fathom that this beautiful, talented, intelligent person.... with **SO MUCH** to live for, would choose to go camping...**ALONE**.... all I could think of when I tried to place myself in that situation.... which is a little difficult... the elements!! The bugs!!! The solitude!!! The animals.... The **BUGS**!!! (**Wait for the laugh**) ... But to Meryl, being able to spend time in environments like that are truly golden moments.... we just looked at each other, shrugged, and simultaneously thought, .... **What**???? Let’s put it this way, in the Venn diagram that represents **TWO** lives... Meryl’s and mine.... although the overlapping portion of commonality is gratifyingly large, I **PROMISE** you... camping goes nowhere **NEAR** my circle!!

Being a part of a strong, close knit family has always meant the world to Meryl, and we are happy to be joined in this celebration by Meryl’s parents... her father, Kelly, who is a real estate broker, and mother, Martha, a recently retired former office manager, as well as her brother, Austin... he runs Panther City disposal. Unfortunately Meryl’s sister, Abby, was unable to attend today with her two children, Mason and Reagan... you see, Abby is an air traffic control tower manager at Dallas Fort Worth Airport, and, well...... planes have to fly and that’s a busy airport! Rest assured, Abby and her kids are here in spirit!

Over the years, Meryl distinguished herself both in and out of school. When she wasn’t in school, Meryl had many activities that she found fascinating.... she’s been described as a “voracious reader” and from what I hear, has never passed a bookstore she didn’t love... actually, to the best of our knowledge, she never **passed** a bookstore... she just goes in. Meryl’s mother tells the story of when they were in the car, on the way to her brother Austin’s graduation in West Texas, and right there was something of a landmark.... it was known as “the largest used book store in Texas” and of course Meryl felt it her duty to go in... just to say she had been to that spot. Growing up, she also enjoyed physical activity and sports, and didn’t “play” favorites.... she loved to participate in soccer, which was her favorite, and also softball, baseball, running and lacrosse. You can see that her energy is boundless and her interests are almost limitless.

While Meryl’s curiosity was piqued by her grandfather’s medical profession, her love of music was nurtured by her grandmother, Anne. Anne had a wonderful soprano voice, and it’s fairly certain that Meryl has inherited that lyrical trait. And if all of **THIS** weren’t more than enough for one person, Meryl also loved to make random trips to Missouri to visit her other grandmother, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. The graduate we honor today sets the bar when it comes to being a caring person of integrity and compassion, for all of her friends and family. She’s both an exemplary aunt and a stellar godmother.

Meryl’s busy, active lifestyle didn’t deter her from her studies and throughout her academic career, She has continuously distinguished herself. Upon graduating from high school, Meryl went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree at Austin College in Sherman, Texas. It was at the Ross University School of Medicine in Portsmouth, Dominica, where she attained her Doctor of Medicine degree and of course, since 2014, she has been a resident physician in Obstetrics and Gynecology. Over the years, Meryl has dedicated herself to being a true student of the world and of life. I’m sure if we asked Meryl what appealed to her about each school, she would once again, find the “**not so beaten**” path, especially when she attended Ross University in Dominica... her sense of adventure and gut instinct to really listen to, and heed her surroundings, have gotten Meryl through some rare and wonderful adventures and explorations.

Throughout Meryl’s academic career and residency, she has also garnered acclaim and distinction each step of the way. (**Name 2 or 3 of Meryl’s most prestigious accomplishments... not sure which would be most effective to mention**) we are proud that Meryl has \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. These distinctions serve to make Meryl a very well rounded, caring, and compassionate physician and surgeon (**? Please adjust if necessary**)

Meryl is now off to the next chapters in life. As she goes on to begin the next chapters in her life, she will have her own practice. She and her significant other, Dr. Nikhiel Rau will be settling in North Carolina, and I cannot wait to learn of the positive impact these two dedicated doctors will have on their new community. I’m confident that with all of Meryl’s insights and experiences, her tools and training, she will bring a new level of understanding to her practice. Norman Cousins said, “The Human body experiences a powerful gravitational pull in the direction of hope. That is why patients’ hopes are the physician’s secret weapon. They are the hidden ingredients in any prescription.” Meryl, I know with your positive attitude, admirable skills, quest for excellence, and tremendous empathy, your patients will find all that they need within your arsenal of diagnosis, treatment, and healing. I know I speak for everyone here when I say we wish you the best of everything because you’ve really worked for it.

I think it’s adequate to say, “You can take the girl out of McKinney, Texas..... but you can’t take the values, intelligence, and genuine **goodness** out of the girl.” We will keep close by, memories of your wonderful smile, your dedication to your profession, and your appreciation of and respect for others, no matter their connection to you. It has been a privilege to work with you, teach you, and watch you fully become the physician you were meant to be. I just know that there’s a **VERY PROUD** pediatrician smiling down on us, and on **YOU** right now, happy to have his legacy and spirit live on through your good work.

I have one more point to offer.... maybe it’s more of a challenge.... only you will know... but as you find your way in North Carolina, as you explore nature and local offerings, perhaps there’s one more investigative research study in you.... that would be the comparison of Texas Barbecue to North Carolina barbecue..... both have ranked nationally on Top Ten lists.... I think we’d all be curious to have you scientific and cultural assessment.... until then, we wish you heartfelt and proud congratulations. You’ve made a difference in all our lives and we wish you the best! Congratulations!!