**[EZ Speech Writers No. 15511]**

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Remarks by Mr. David Spero at the commencement of the 2016 graduating class at [name of high school].

esteemed administrators . . . teachers . . . graduates . . . ALUMNI . . . all you wonderful parents and families WHO’VE COME TO JOIN US THIS [MORNING/AFTERNOON/EVENING]: IT’S a great honor and terrific privilege FOR ME to HAVE BEEN ASKED to address you today: the graduating Class of 2016!

It’s often been said that graduation is the end of one chapter of your life, and the beginning of another, so i think it’s entirely fitting and proper that we recognize and celebrate what you all have accomplished here in the last four years. i hope you feel that your education’s been a great ride so far, and that you’re looking forward to the next chapter of your life — however you plan to write it — with joy, enthusiasm and, i hope, some measure of gratitude for the education you’ve received here at [first name of school].

for my own part, i’m tremendously grateful for being given the opportunity to be transformed by the many wonderful experiences I’ve had as a teacher here, working with such a

gifted staff and SUCH dedicated admnistrators. YOU STUDENTS . . . YOU GRADUATES . . . HAVE MADE ME A BETTER TEACHER AND HAVE LEFT [NAME OF SCHOOL] A BETTER PLACE; and FOR THAT, I THANK YOU FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART.

 [brief pause.]

THE FAMOUS AMERICAN AUTHOR, EDUCATOR, AND ORATOR, booker t. washington, ONCE OBSERVED: *“success is to be measured not so much by the position we have reached in life, but rather by the things which we have had to overcome while trying to succeed.”*

So if you were born with THAT proverbial “silver spoon in your mouth” . . . if everything that’s come your way HAS SIMPLY BEEN simply given to you . . . if you’ve never had to fight OR scrape OR struggle to reach some goal . . . then your success is not truly earned. it was inherited, and inherited success isN’T *your* success, it’s your daddy’s success our your grandpappy’s success, or your rich uncle phil’s success.

UNTIL you’ve had to deal with adversity some time in your life . . . UNTIL you’ve been knocked down a couple of times only to rise again . . . until you’ve failed . . . : you cannot truly succeed.

coach vince lombardi once said — though he might’ve been quoing someone else — that *“diversity does not build character, it reveals it.”* AND I ASSURE you THAT YOU’LL not meet a single truly successful person in your life who, if he or she’s being honest WITH YOU, hasn’t had to overcome a tremendous amount of adversity, OFTEN fighting against the most horendous odds, IN ORDER TO SUCCEED.

AND YOU KNOW WHAT ELSE THEy’LL ALSO TELL YOU . . . ? they’ll TELL you that in every walk of life, in every industry, in every profession, successful people know that they couldn’t POSSIBLY have done it without the help of others.

now most of you graduates probably already realize this. you’ve probably already had one or two mentors in your life — a parent, a teacher, a minister, a friend — someone’s who’s

helped you to reach a goal, someone who’s encouraged you even when you’ve lost all hope, someone who’s been willing to share with you his or her knowledge or experience, hoping to help you avoid the same mistakes THAT mentor might have made in his or her own life. we never get through this life on our own.

I’D LIKE TO tell you a story. IT’S A TRUE STORY. IT’S A STORY ABOUT MENTORS.

THIS story IS about a 10-year-old boy who grew up in paterson, new jersey, TO PARENTS WHO WEREN’T WEALTHY AND HAD NOT even graduated from high school. This boy was not a good student in school, and was even considered “troubled” by some of his teachers. his mother sought the guidance of a “radical” young minister by the name of John purnell, who was WORKING AT THE [denomination of church] church in the inner city OF [PATERSON?]. for some reason, this troubled 10-year-old boy bonded almost immediately with minister parnell, who quietly and happily took on the role of BEING mentor TO this YOUNG boy. he told THE BOY that he was bright and capable of great things. he encouraged him, helped him, loved him.

THAT FIRST SUMMER, MINISTER PARNELL DROVE A LITTLE GROUP OF GRADE SCHOOLERS UP TO A BOY’S HOME IN MANCHESTER, VERMONT, TO SPEND EIGHT WEEKS AT A SUMMER CAMP RUN BY [NAME OF GROUP RUNNING THE BOY’S HOME]. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THE BOY HAD EVER BEEN OUT OF NEW JERSEY, AND THE BEAUTIFUL, MAJESTIC GREEN MOUNTAINS, THE VERDANT FORESTS, AND THE SHIMMERING LAKES HAD A MOST PROFOUND EFFECT ON HIM. HE LOVED IT THERE SO MUCH — AND THE EXPERIENCES HE HAD THERE MEANT SO MUCH TO HIM — THAT HE RETURNED TO THIS BOY’S HOME FOR THE NEXT SEVEN SUMMERS.

IT WAS DURING ONE OF THOSE SUMMERS THAT HE MET A MAN NAMED WILLIAM MARTIAN, WHO WAS THE NATURALIST ON STAFF AT THE CAMP. THROUGH MARTIAN, THE LITTLE BOY BECAME IMBUED WITH A LOVE OF NATURE, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE RESPONSIBILITIES ALL HUMANS HAVE TO PROTECT AND CHERISH THIS “SPACESHIT EARTH.” HE ALSO TAUGHT THE BOY THE VALUE OF DISCIPLINE, AND HELPED HIM DEVELOP A STRONG WORK ETHIC THAT NEVER LEFT HIM.

MARTIAN WAS THE BOY’S SECOND MENTOR.

THEN, ALSO THROUGH THE CHURCH, THE BOY MET A VERY WEALTHY AND VERY EXCENTRIC WOMAN NAMED MARY ZABRISKIE, WHOSE DREAM IT WAS TO ORGANIZE AND FUND A STEEL-DRUM BAND FOR THE BOYS IN PATERSON. THE BOY SIGNED UP JUST BECAUSE IT SOUNDED LIKE FUN. AND LIKE ALL THE OTHER BAND MEMBERS, HE HAD NO IDEA THAT MARY ZABRISKIE WAS SECRETLY SETTING ASIDE ALL THE FEES THE BAND MADE FROM THEIR PERFORMANCES AND USING THEM IN PART TO FUND ALL THE BAND MEMBERS’ COLLEGE EDUCATIONS.

MARY ZABRISKIE WAS THE BOY’S THIRD MENTOR.

I WOULD GUESS BY NOW THAT YOU’VE PROBABLY FIGURED OUT THAT ***I*** WAS THAT LITTLE BOY. AND I’VE REALLY NO REASON TO PRETEND, HAVE I?

ANYWAY . . . I WAS UNSURE OF WHAT I WANTED TO DO AFTER GRADUATION, AND EVEN MORE UNSURE ABOUT WHETHER I HAD THE “STUFF” TO GET THROUGH COLLEGE. THAT’S WHEN I HAPPENED TO MEET DUDLEY ROGERS. HE OWNED A LARGE CONTRACTING COMPANY THAT HAD WON THE BID TO BUILD A [TYPE OF] BUILDING AT A LOCAL COLLEGE. YET DESPITE THE DEMANDS OF A MAJOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECT, MR. RODGERS TOOK TIME OUT OF HIS SCHEDULE TO DRIVE

 ME UP TO THE COLLEGE, INTRODUCE ME TO THE FOLKS IN CHARGE THERE, AND GET ME ENROLLED IN SOME NIGHT COURSES.

MR. DUDLEY WAS THE FOURTH BLESSED MENTOR IN MY LIFE.

ONE OF THE NIGHT COURSES I TOOK WAS CALLED [NAME OF COURSE, IF YOU CAN RECALL IT], TAUGHT BY DR. THEODORE SAUL, WHO TAUGHT SCHOOL AT [NAME OF COLLEGE] BY NIGHT, AND WAS AN EXPERIMENTAL PATHOLOGIST BY DAY AT THE CORNELL MEDICAL CENTER. GREAT TEACHERS HAVE THE POWER TO TURN LIVES AROUND, AND MY RELATIONSHIP WITH DR. SAUL CERTAINLY TURNED MINE AROUND! DON’T ASK ME HOW OR WHY, BUT THIS GREAT TEACHER HAD THE PROFOUNDEST INFLUENCE ON THE DIRECTION OF MY LIFE, FOR IT WAS LARGELY HIS ENTHUSIASM AND HIS ENCOURAGEMENT THAT DROVE ME ON TO GRADUATE SCHOOL AT [NAME/LOCATION OF GRADUATE SCHOOL], WHERE I ULTIMATELY EARNED A PH.D IN BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE.

DR. SAUL WAS MY FIFTH GREAT MENTOR.

NOW . . . IN THINKING BACK ON ALL THESE WONDERFUL MENTORS —STARTING AT AGE 10, NO LESS! — I WAS PUT IN MIND OF A QUOTE

FROM THE AMERICAN WRITER, DANI SHAPIRO. SHE WROTE THIS:  *“I’VE CERTAINLY BEEN BLESSED BY EXTRAORDINARY MENTORS. SOME OF HAVE BEEN HARD ON ME. SOME HAVE CHALLENGED ME TO BE BOLD AND BRAVE. OTHERS HAVE BEEN CHEERLEADERS. SOME HAVE OPENED DOORS; STILL OTHERS HAVE SIMPLY MADE ME FEEL LESS ALONE THE WORLD. THEY FORM AN INNER CHORUS AND ARE WITH ME [ALWAYS].”*

HAVING MENTORS IS A BLESSING IN YOUR LIFE. BUT YOU MUST DO YOUR PART TO BE WORTHY OF THAT BLESSING. AND THAT IS: YOU MUST BE AN OPEN AND WILLING “MENTEE” — YES, THAT’S THE REAL WORD FOR A PERSON BEING MENTORED — SOMEONE WHO ACCEPTS THE FACT THAT EVERYONE NEEDS HELP *SOMETIME* IN THIS LIFE . . . SOMEONE WHO REMAINS OPEN AND NON-DEFENSIVE IN THE FACE OF CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM . . . AND PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, SOMEONE WHO’S WILLING AND ABLE TO EXPRESS GRATITUDE.

AND INCIDENTALLY, IF YOU TRULY *ARE* THAT KIND OF PERSON, A MENTOR WILL FIND YOU, BELIEVE IT OR NOT! I CAN ALMOST GUARANTEE IT. REALLY . . . HONESTLY: MOST PEOPLE WHO’VE HAD THE BLESSING OF ONE OR MORE IMPACTFUL MENTORS IN THEIR LIVES,

 OFTEN SPEAK ABOUT THE MAGICAL, USUALLY ACCIDENTAL, WAY IN WHICH THEIR LIVES FIRST INTERSECTED — ALMOST AS IF THE MEETING WERE ORDAINED.

YOU WILL ALL FACE OBSTACLES IN YOUR FUTURE. YOU CAN BOTH UNDERSTAND AND OVERCOME THOSE OBSTACLES BETTER WITH THE AID OF A MENTOR. SO I BESEECH YOU: REMAIN READY TO BE FOUND. EVEN NOW, YOUR DESIGNATED MENTOR IS WAITING TO MEET YOU. AND WHEN HE OR SHE DOES APPEAR IN YOUR LIFE, APPRECIATE IT. FEEL BLESSED BY IT. AND REMAIN EVER GRATEFUL [TO GOD] FOR IT.

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