**Stephen Speech [EZ Speech No. 16312]**

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Tomy Stephen’s valedictory address to the 2017 graduating class of West Hemstead West High School.

ladies and gentlemen . . . faculty and staff of west hemstead high . . . distinguished guests . . . fellow graduates and parents . . .

i am both honored and humbled to have been invited to give the valedictorian’s address at this year’s gradua-tion ceremonies. i’m sure there are at least hundreds of graduating seniors here today who are more deserving of this honor than i, but i’m nonetheless enormously grateful both for the honor and for this opportunity to address my schoolmates and friends at this auspi-cious moment in our lives.

now, when i was thinking about what i’d say here this [morning/ afternoon/evening], it occurred to me that the first thing i should say is, “thank you.” For if there’s one thing I’ve learned in my four years at West hemstead high it is that one of the most important aspects of living a good life is to foster and nurture and manifest in all things an *attitude of gratitude.*

my experience here has taught me that none of us gets through this life on our own. throughout our days, we’re helped along the way by our parents, our teachers, our church, our friends, and by the many mentors who’ve given us guidance and counsel through the years. we can achieve little on our own. we’re always going to need the help and support of others to achieve our goals in life. and for this, we’re going to “owe” them.

and how do we repay this debt? it’s simple. just say “thank you” — or better yet, “thank you; I’m very grateful.” but, it’s not good enough simply to *feel* grateful. no. you’ve got to *express* that gratitude straight out loud, and most importantly, you’ve got to *mean* it. you’ve got to make sure that anyone who helps you in any way, large or small, knows that you sincerely appreciate their effort or their help. from the cashier at mcdonald’s to the math teacher who took the extra time to explain quadratic equations when you just couldn’t wrap your head around the subject, you need to say “thank you” from the heart. you will find that an attitude of gratitude is one of the most attractive and endearing traits you can manifest.

now, i’m pretty sure that, for most of us graudates, our parents are the people to whom we owe the greatest debt of gratitude. that’s certainly true for me. just think of all the things our parents have done for us. think of the sacrifices they might have had to make to keep us fed, clothed, and safe. think of all the love and care they’ve lavished upon us from the moment of our birth to the present moment. and it’s from this atitude of gratitude that I’d now like to ask all you seniors in the audience and all their parents to please stand up.

[after they’ve done so] good! now seniors: please hug your parents and tell them “thank you” —and you might throw in an “I love you” for good measure! [as they do so] ah . . . that’s so beautiful! you can sit down now, thanks!

now beyond our parents, i think all of us here owe a tremenous debt of gratitude to the dedicated West hempstead School Administration, who are the heart and soul of our wonderful school, and to our tremendous faculty, who have molded as into the citizens and schol-ars we’ve become.

in closing, i’d only remind my fellow graduates that WE’re all different. The class of 2017 is diverse and talented; each in his or her own way. so let’s not waste time trying to live someone else's life. There will always be people smarter than we, wealthier than we, prettier than we. But everyone faces hardships in some way at some point in their lives. Don't think for a moment that anyone's else life is more perfect or better or happier than yours is, or that your success lay in emulating someone else’s. I am not mature enough to know if life is like a set of forked roads; but if it is, there must be an infinite number of them, each different and traveled only once. we are infinite. lets be proud of that and feel safe within our individuality.

thanks for listening.

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