

Graduation 2010

Well, it's a real honor to stand up here and I want all of you in the Class of 2010 to know how grateful I am that you've asked me to speak. There are many on the faculty who care about you and who have given greatly of themselves to you. Each of them would do as good a job articulating your experiences and celebrating your accomplishments as me.

I'm also honored to share this responsibility with Betsy, Freddy, Linnea, and Marlin. Each of them has done much to both set the standards of behavior for you and to help make the time you spent here, as well as your futures, both potent and, with any luck, meaningful.

The last time I was up here was 5 years ago ... when our youngest daughter graduated. I figured, that was it ... no more speeches at Graduation. To tell the truth I was a little relieved ... for to be in front of you, your families, my extended family, longtime friends of the school, and my colleagues is a daunting position ... and I was glad to be rid of it. Now, you've brought back this old dog and are asking him for some new tricks. You naughty kids!

But, in all truth, I thank you for putting me in a position where both effort and reflection are necessary. With any luck, I'm hoping to shed some light on our relationships to this school ... for graduation is first and foremost not the celebration of departure but the celebration of a relationship.

How do we make some sense of the experiences all of us have had while here? This is not an easy question as I'm pretty sure you know. It can also take some time to figure out ... but we have the time ... right? I mean, I've written 35 pages trying to figure that out and I'm looking forward to reading each and every one of them to you!

No, no, no; I'm kidding. But, and in all seriousness, I'm a touch sensitive to a reputation I seem to have developed as being long winded. I don't know where that came from and I certainly don't know how a 23 minute 34 second talk I gave five years ago could be seen as "longwinded."

So, in the interest of everyone's attention span and comfort I'll just spend a few minutes reflecting on our school and our connections to it.

I don't know all of you well, but I've taught most of you. To the few of you I haven't taught, I'm really sorry not to have had you in my classroom. To those I've taught twice, what growth you've enjoyed.

As you know, you were the only 9th grade class I've ever worked with. What a semester that was! I remember clearly a discussion in which the study of anthropology came up. There was real consternation mixed with confusion on the faces of some of you, leading me to wonder if the term was familiar. So, I asked if a class member could define what it meant. Hands were jammed into the air and one of you brightly said, "It's the study of human being, their culture, and their tools." Whew, I thought to myself that was really complete, and I complimented the answer.

But, immediately thereafter, I heard a moan and saw one of the other students looking really crestfallen and sagging in their chair. I asked what the matter was and in a quavering voice I heard, "I thought anthropology was the study of ants."

If you were there, you can well remember how funny it was and how much we all laughed together. But in thinking about that moment over the past month and

acknowledging the growth you've made, and how unlikely it'd be for any of you to make a mistake like that now, there's both beauty and import in this story.

For me, the core lies not in the humor, though it sure was funny, but rather in the openness of your peer to share what they thought the meaning was. Finding the right words to decipher our world is difficult and honest mistakes will happen in the word choice and syntax we employ. Only by taking the risk to miss-phrase ourselves can we become increasingly skillful at describing and then feeling our world. None of you would make that particular mistake now ... but all of you should be willing to.

Very shortly you'll no longer be students but alumni. Your relationship with CRMS will forever be phrased in the past tense. As you start to think back on this place it's important to ask yourselves what you'll remember and take away from it ... and will it be accurate?

All of our experiences get filtered through a variety of lenses. But, most of the time the lenses we use end up being both polarized and simplistic. On the one end of the spectrum is the rosy lens of insipid nostalgia: "I just loved everyone and everything at CRMS!" On the other, the dark and vitriolic lens of sarcasm and cynicism: "Dude, everything sucked at CRMS!"

To be sure, it's impossible for "everything to be wonderful" and equally impossible for "everything to suck," if, for no other reason than for the variety and range of what you've done here. Think about it: classes, work crews, sports, household and dorm jobs, Fall and Spring Trips, Scholarship Work Day, Interim, Senior Project, etc., etc.

How do we sort this out in a way that allows for honesty, consistency, and change; as memories both wax and wane over time? Make no mistake, finding an appropriate approach that is simultaneously durable, exact, and current to each moment is quite difficult.

It is also, at least for me, a matter of wording. Finding the right wording is critical. Even though your vocabularies have expanded since 9th grade, there's still some room to travel as we try to understand what occurred here ... and what it is we're really celebrating.

Your experiences here are far too important and far too rich to be sullied by paragraphs that contain only the "dudes," "rads," "sicks," "awesomes," and other assorted staples of the "Bro Talk" lexicon. We've just got to shoot higher.

As with most things that are important I look to wiser counsel for insight and edification. Wendell Berry tells us that to "know who we are we must first understand where we are." The vocabulary of place and the articulation of our geography are important to each of us.

During the last five years I've made frequent trips to see my family in the Northwest. For all intents and purposes, I left home at 18 to go to college, much like most of you will ... and never went back. I've spent more than two thirds of my life away from where I grew up. Still, when I go back the air, foliage, light, colors, smells, and sounds of my homeland hits me hard. Being there gives me a fuller context through which I continue to work on understanding who I am in my current home; especially when I can view my "first home" honestly and clearly.

Reflect on some of our places: The Crystal and Roaring Fork, Red Hill, Tick Ridge, The Point, Sutank, Canyonlands, Highlands Bowl, the San Juan. All of these have had impact on you.

Likewise, I'd like to think that some interior places: The Forge, Hogan, Barn, Jossman classrooms, The Bike Shop, Ritz, the Bar Fork, and even your dorms might be places that spark reflection that connects you tangibly and physically to your time here. Even though these connections might be inchoate at this moment, the school has been a home for you during your time here. It has been the same for me.

After lunch and before you put this place, this home, behind you; please take a look at the brand of the old Bar Fork Ranch that hangs above the main door to the BF. You've been marked by it in an indelible fashion ... even though the brand might not be as visible now as it could be; as it will be.

I also look to Paul Tillich for clarity, insight, and help w/ my vocabulary. Many of you will remember his observation from the *Dynamics of Faith* that life is never static but is always in a state of movement and change. This is disconcerting as, in our heart of hearts, we like things that are stable and permanent. We embrace our pictures of what things were and create impressions of what things will be; even before they occur. Tillich's emphasis on the dynamic quality of life is hard for us to accept.

To make headway with this, Tillich offers us the idea of courage which he develops in another of his books. Courage means the willingness to look at all parts of life and to accept them in their entirety, to live with them, and to try to carve meaning out of a life that is, by nature, imperfect. Tillich's idea of courage gives the strength to affirm our being and to accept and turn towards the flux and opaqueness that belong to life.

Examples are many and your teachers have brought them to you. Oedipus, at least for me, is the most conspicuous. He continues his search for self as his hubris dissolves and the reality of his birth and impending doom grows. Antigone responds to the demands of natural law and stands against the civil law of her uncle. Sisyphus willingly shoulders his rock and pushes it up the hill ... for eternity. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, polar opposites in some respects, but brothers, in many; turn squarely towards their worlds and accept them.

Each of you has behaved courageously during your time here. Maybe it was when you decided to push yourself harder than necessary in a class. It might have been when you brought a project on a work crew to real completion and hung in 'til 5:30 when just getting it "sort of done" would have sufficed. Maybe you cleaned up the Bar Fork when it wasn't "your job." Maybe you went back to the mountain, trail, or river to work on a jump or a drop on your bike, board, skis, or boat that was both frightening and difficult for you ... and maybe it wasn't even videoed.

Reaching out to a friend who is in need rather than avoiding the situation is an act of compassion and courage. Getting up in front of the school to sing and perform are courageous acts.

Public acknowledgement of our shortcomings is an element of our curricula that we've tried to introduce this year, successfully and importantly so. Confronting ourselves honestly is very difficult, but the second step; taking palpable action to address what we find in these confrontations must occur for the event to be courageous. This approach, investigation followed by action lives at the core of all we try to do as a school.

I want to make sure that this interplay of the dynamic and the courageous isn't seen as daunting and somber. It is quite the contrary, especially when coupled with Kairos, that important Greek term that literally means "a moment of ripeness."

Much chatter surrounds our lives and much of the time we find ourselves simply going through the motions, behaving habitually, and not recognizing moments of import when they cut through the chatter and call to us; maybe even smack us right between the eyes. Too often, we're not ripe enough; we're just sprouts.

Embracing our dynamic lives courageously prepares the ground and readies our soil for us to hear "with other ears." If we can get ourselves in the right place of attention then our worlds become vibrant, complex, and rich. All of a sudden all the "drama" fades away and we're left with lives of content, lives that resonate internally and externally.

These "airy fairy" "high fallutin'" terms are experienced concretely as compassion, service, and excellence. As a school, we have tried to do all we can to give you something of content to listen to. Our hope is that some moments of your time here have truly resonated inside of you with a tone that is full and potent rather than one that is faint, thin, and brittle. The last thing we want is for the "sound track" of your lives to be composed by a band as shallow as Milli Vanilli or even worse, by some lame Boy Band!

So what lies ahead as alums? Well, we'd hope that you'd come back to check in, say hello, and bring us up to date with your lives. With any luck, the brand of the old Bar Fork will continue to remind you of the time you've spent at this wonderful school between the Crystal and the Roaring Fork.

I'm also hoping that your search for sense making yields an articulation that continues to live and resonate in you and that you let it speak in a voice that is strong, authentic, and increasingly transparent.

But our real hope is that the rest of your lives are a lot richer and more vibrant than the time you've had here. This is not to diminish your time here; it is only to set it in context with what lies around the bend as you come to know, articulate, and create new places; new homes.

Down the line, if this place comes to get referenced as "the Best Time of Your Life" then something is very wrong and we have been delinquent in our work with you. Your time at CRMS has been preparation to live more completely and more potently in the bigger world. If we have provided some direction and impetus for doing so then we can be very satisfied ... as we hope you'll be.

So, again, I thank you and wish you all the very best in the years to come.