

Camden Hills Regional High School

Commencement Address

June 7, 2013

Good Evening

Despite the climate shift the Camden welcome has been warm and gracious meeting families of so many great students who have been to visit me on Eleuthera. We even made the front cover of the Herald along with a reef shark.

I am honored to be here and nervous in a good way as this is my first ever graduation speech.

I want this to be good for you, the graduates.

Before I begin I would like to take a moment to remember Aleisha Sonksen. I never got the chance to meet her and yet her memory now lives on so that students and faculty for years to come will be able to travel and study and work at Cape Eleuthera.

I want to also thank student leadership for inviting me, for taking a chance on a rookie

I want to thank my friends Lucinda Zeising and Des Fitzgerald for sacrificing three sons to The Island School and for supporting Ken Vencile to join our teacher conference.

I send special appreciation to Ken for his leadership and passion shouting the value of experiential education, encouraging students and faculty to cross the ocean and explore our island world.

Conch Horn: Bawoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

Now we begin the celebration!

Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott tells us that the moan of the conch is the call of mother ocean.

She calls to you across her ocean planet to celebrate your day.

The first people of the Caribbean, those who first discovered Columbus, used the conch to call their village together and launch voyages. Graduation is a coming together to celebrate all that has been accomplished and more importantly a signal of a new journey to begin.

You deserve to feel proud today and this is all about you

yet,

I challenge us to shift the emphasis from receiving to giving

I ask you to take a minute and think about a moment when a teacher or a coach sitting here with us went above and beyond and inspired you, find that mentor after this ceremony, tell them what they did for you and thank them.

This pay it forward idea is simple and powerful and needs young energy to create the multiplier that starts to improve the way we live.

You know I live on a small island named Eleuthera. You do not have to be from Eleuthera or Vinalhaven or North Haven to be able to talk about living on an island. After all we are all living on an island.

When I was born a little over 50 years ago nobody had yet seen the earth from space.

Think about that – it is a new image – a view of our home.

On Christmas Eve 1968 one of my early memories is the picture that Apollo astronauts sent back to the earth

The crew of Apollo 8 was prepared for everything. They were the most skilled pilots and engineers.

And yet,

with all their training, they could never have been prepared for that awe inspiring view of the earth rising from a dark and desolate lunar horizon.

The headlines read: *They went to explore the moon, and ended up discovering the Earth.*

This first view of our isolated and lonely planet, drifting in the darkness, glimmering with the color of water and life helped launch the environmental movement as many began to understand for the first time that the planet earth is indeed an island with limited and precious resources.

This has to be part of your life-mission; part of your giving back is a commitment to take care of our home.

I have learned from getting to know Camden students and families and teachers that this place has roots unlike most places. You still grow up in the woods here and along the sea, hunting and fishing, and you have learned the importance of stewardship far ahead of most communities.

I love the story of how the Windjammers became Windplanners. How students and faculty worked hard over 8 years and raised over \$500,000, busted through many obstacles, to stand proud next to a wind generator that is saving the school money and saving the environment.

I also love the words of Margot Murphy when interviewed, *“young people have the power to make a difference and things do not happen overnight... “*

It takes courage and perseverance to effect change and Camden also has deep roots tied to courage.

The windjammer mascot celebrates the days when Camden built and sailed ships to the four corners of the world.

For good reason the famous father of experiential education, Kurt Hahn, brought his Outward Bound model first here to Camden and Hurricane Island. His vision that I have worked hard to emulate at The Island School is tied to the value that comes from hardship -- pushing way outside the comfort zone.

Outward Bound is also the nautical term for a ship's departure from the certainties of the harbor and no doubt this is what is happening for you on this day. It is not easy to head off in a new direction.

Kurt Hahn also helps us understand as we deal with hardship. His favorite Latin verse, *Plus est en vous* -- there is more in you than you think.

You need to believe this to be true.

One of my favorite moments at The Island School is when a student is learning to freedive and looks down on that first trip to tunnel rock at the sand 30' below and thinks, I will never be able to touch the bottom.... only to celebrate moments later shouting from the surface hand high overhead with sand from the bottom spilling back in the sea.

Many years ago in navy training I was in the middle of hell week 125 straight waking hours of physical and emotional endurance designed to forge that same confidence – belief that you can do more than you ever thought possible. It was the middle of a long night and the instructors were marching us into the cold ocean arms interlocked; we sat with waves crashing over our head until people started to pull away and quit.

The corpsman pulled me aside to the ambulance and wanted to check an infection on my foot. I remember like it is now, sitting on the back gate of that ambulance. I could feel the warmth – the heat on my back. A glance over my shoulder and I could see in the shadows those who had given up, head down wrapped in blankets. I could not see their faces. I almost quit that night.

Hardship is good!

When I started The Island School I knew it had to be hard. I remember speaking to that first class on that first day, “When asked about your Island School journey I hope that you do not say it was fun. I want you to say that it was the hardest thing that you have ever done in your life.”

I know that you have all been there at that point where you are almost ready to quit. Pulling away from that ambulance and getting back into the fray is what forges spirit.

Maybe that teacher or coach you find at the end of this ceremony might not be the one who awarded you with an A, maybe it is the mentor who pushed you to the

brink of quitting, giving up on stage or refusing to rewrite a paper that was so full of criticism.

The message is simple: I want you to push yourself hard, way outside your comfort zone and be confident that you can accomplish much more than you think and I want you to save the planet.

I end with a return to where we began – the thread of giving back. Especially as you get stronger and more confident, it is even more important that you give.

Small acts can be heroic, great expeditions can start and end in your backyard, picking up a piece of plastic off the beach makes a difference.

Often the most heroic life is the simple, hard working life that does not strive to be on stage, no need to be a warrior or someone famous.

What feels good and what is good are anonymous acts of giving.

My favorite line from a Wordsworth poem:

that best portion of a good man's life; His little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love.

Here we are.... I send a final blast from the ocean to you; I leave this conch here with the school as a reminder of the greatness that you are right now and a lasting symbol of your launch toward the good work ahead.

Booooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

Thank you,