



NATIONAL GEOSPATIAL-INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Office of Corporate Communications

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**Remarks as Prepared for
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for
Briar Woods High School Graduation
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What a great, great day! Look at all your proud faces! Thank you Principal Starzenski for the kind introduction, and thank you to the Class of 2015 for allowing me to speak on your day. I am so honored.

You are amazing — the products of a remarkable school and wonderful upbringing. I am awed by the individual and group accolades that have accrued over your four years.

Look around at everyone who is here — for you. Parents, siblings, friends, partners, teachers, neighbors — not a single one of them is here by accident. They want to be here. They want to be here because this is one of the great inflection points in your life — when everything you have accomplished and become has readied you for everything you will do and be. They know you. They have seen you joyous and crestfallen, silly and serious, confident and insecure, smart and foolish, and strong and gentle. They want to be here because they know what I know — that you carry with you our shared hopes and dreams.

Yep, let that settle on you — we're counting on you. We are counting on you to help create a brilliant future out of the uncertain, complex, dynamic present in which we live. We are counting on you to serve your turn. And, we know you will be enough — if you accept that you must be. There is no parallel universe where the REAL people are doing the work. It is only us...you.

They want to be here because they see what I see — what you can't yet — that yawning in front of you is a life of unimaginable possibility and they want you to know that you are just the right people to make something great happen. They want to celebrate you, and bask in your glory, and launch you with every bit of courage that you will need to take on that great quest that is the life of your dreams.

This is actually the second time I've spoken to a graduating high school class. The first was to my own — nearly forty years ago. Forty years ago. That's so shocking to say! I thought I'd be a lot older by now! If you had told me then what the next forty years would

hold, I would not have believed you (no matter how sure I was or how much confidence I exuded!).

I've helped keep America safe for democracy. I've travelled hundreds of thousands of miles around the world and met people so different and yet so the same. I've built things that were more unbelievable than the stuff in sci-fi movies. I've led women and men to achieve great heights and I have personally failed in ways that still make me cringe. I've seen my children born, grow, and move on to pursue their own adventures, and I've lived every day with my best friend. I've been awed in the heroic accomplishments of patriots and I have been there on the lonely tarmac when some come home for the last time. And, I've had this life not because of any great ability or predisposition, but because I had the courage to start a journey, just as you are about to do.

So, graced with a second chance to speak, this time with some hard-won wisdom under my belt, let me offer you some thoughts that I hope you will find useful as you chart your course.

Do not be in a hurry! Be purposeful, yes, but you do not need to achieve everything tomorrow, or in your first semester, or in your 20s, or before retirement. By all means, fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run, but it doesn't have to be in a straight line. Keep your head up, try new things, lend a hand, take some detours, learn a lot—and a lot of different stuff—and enjoy every minute of every day.

Do get good at something. You must acquire skill and expertise. Everything good starts when you actually know, and have worked to know, how to do things. You want people to care what you think? Start with being good. But, do not view acquiring knowledge like a check-box exercise, like acquiring badges. Actually care about learning.

You are not that cool...or you are. If you are, today, one of the cool kids, get ready, because cool kids are a dime a dozen out there. If you are not cool at all today, get ready, because you will find so many others in your life who are like you and get you. All that matters is the quality of your character. And if you hold on to that, you will always be enough just as you are. In other words, be true.

There is always a solution. You will confront challenges...some that seem impossible to resolve. There is always a way. It might be hard, it might cost you something, but if it must be done, it can be done. The key to happiness is believing you have choice. The key to success is knowing that there are consequences and you don't control any of them. So make choices that are worth it.

You. Are. Not. Alone. You haven't been to this point in your life...you need not be going forward.

You do not actually possess all the wisdom in the universe. True. Deal with it now, it will go easier on you later.

There are people who will help...be brave enough to ask. And please, if you hold on to nothing else, remember that help is not when you can give it, help is when someone needs it.

Call your parents—more often than you think is warranted. Not just when you need money. Call when you are happy, or sad, just won the game, or just lost your love. Call just because. If you're worried that they will know too much just by the sound of your voice...text. Or send pictures. And not on Snapchat, because we don't use it, we don't get it, and we want to actually KEEP the images.

Learn how to make decisions. This is the most vital of all skills. Decisions impel progress. Inertia should not be the dominant force in determining your path. Practice it. Get good at it. You will make some wrong moves, but if every mistake you make is an original mistake, you will find your way.

You have the ability to make things worse. So, when you find yourself leading, own the responsibility. And, just when you are absolutely certain of your rightness, consider the possibility that you might be 100 percent wrong.

Give away everything you have if it will help the cause. Be generous with your time, your ideas, your energy, even your things — you can get more of most of these, and time spent on others is time well spent. But do keep something for yourself. It might be friends, family, music, books, art, but have something that sustains and strengthens you.

Do not just stand there on escalators. I'm serious. There are places to go and people to meet...get on with it!

And be careful with fireworks. They're dangerous.

Say yes. If someone you respect asks you to do something — even if it's scary — say yes.

And believe. Believe that you are actually supposed to achieve the goal set before you. If you do, you will find your way around and through the obstacles that would deter the less committed. Moreover, people will want to come with you. People are cynical to protect themselves. Be someone who inspires others to throw off the bowlines.

Finally, be gentle, for everyone is fighting a great battle.

Be inclusive, appreciate diversity.

Overuse “thank you” and practice gratitude.

We are all travelers, none go their way alone.

The motto of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency is Know the Earth...Show the Way...Understand the World.

I think if we squint at it, it is a perfect encapsulation of my message to you.

- Know the Earth — be good, be grounded and be present in the moment.
- Show the Way — bring someone along — be generous in thought and deed — so that we all get there. Be positive, honest and respectful.
- Understand the World — do not be myopic. Be aware that you are in a system that has its own force and vector. Your actions matter, but they are not the only things going on.

Again, I am so honored to be here with you — to send you on your way, to get to say I know you. What you will do, every day, makes a difference. Live that way.

Now, go forth and do good! I can't wait to see where you take us.

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