

2019 Judge Memorial Catholic High School Valedictorian Speech

Written and Presented by Christopher D. Clyne, May 26, 2019

My dear comrades, compatriots, confidantes, amigos, acquaintances, autonomous collections of cells, fellow homosapiens, and friends. If there's one thing the Judge English department taught me, it's that there's a lot of different ways to get a point across. Of course, the goal in any self-respecting piece of writing is to use precise, direct language to express meaning. Anyone who's heard me talk knows that the prevailing vernacular of my peers often eludes my diction. And it is a somewhat amazing considering how all of our brain cells have undergone daily exposure to the nuclear fallout of meme-speak for the last four years, which has reduced even the dialogue of the AP physics class to an incoherent string of Beyblade-centric jokes. The fact that we all passed English given this onslaught of pop culture cancer is nothing short of a miracle.

I assure you in my use of large words I do not wish to mince them. There's enough mincing going on in the nature of this speech anyway, mashing everything that's befallen us these last few years to a slurry of words meant to dazzle and amaze. Mr. Hentschel taught us about accuracy and precision, and I can't boil down of all our trials and errors, successes and failures, mindful moments and mindless moments, easy claps and big oofs, arguments and discussions, big games and small scoring margins, breakups and makeups, loves and hates, into a five minute (God-willing) oral summation. Before I go all Dickens on you, I'll betray Mr. Hentschel and my affinity for verbosity and sum it all up in one beautiful, elegant word: Apple. Yes, the enigmatic little fruit which has sat unwillingly on teacher's desks for ages and has been the hallmark of my lunches for the last four years. I love the little devils, but I enjoy more the metaphor they introduce. Judge is an apple, our time at Judge is an apple, we are all apples. All kinds too: gala's, honeycrisps, granny smiths, Fuji (you know who you are), and good ol' McIntosh Red. We came from apple seeds and to apple seeds we shall return, yes all very poetic. Judge is reminiscent of apples even in its colors: red and gold, representing the blood, sweat, and tears we've poured into high school and the golden reward of success and freedom which we now enjoy.

I'm always baffled this time of year when I see the delicate blossoms on trees and bushes, especially when Mother Nature pulls a fast one and dumps snow in May. I wonder how that paper-thin little flower could transform into a firm, mighty apple, indeed, how frail little freshman (though not as good smelling as fruit blossoms) could inherit the charge of school leaders and still have a whole life yet to live. The blossoms don't have it good: ice storms of social anxiety and fear of failure threatened to blow away the potential, but sticking it out was hardwired into our DNA, a trait that no demoralizing test or loss at football could wipe out. We had a mission to accomplish. Soon enough, the apples we are now began to take shape, the core growing and the seeds of our future gestating within. The whole point of fruit is to protect the seeds, to keep them away from pillaging forces before they are ready to grow into new and bigger things. Our thick, red skins conceal them from all the confusion and turmoil that aims to pervert the apples, even chop down the whole tree. There's enough of that built into adolescence anyway.

But we were fortunate enough to have a few kindly farmers looking after us, our parents, teachers, and mentors who made sure we had optimal growing conditions. We were challenged, stimulated, and encouraged to be better people. We asked the hard questions (like which is heavier, a kilogram of feathers or a kilogram of steel) and took nothing for granted. Even the sun, usually a sure bet as far as global happenings go, disappeared behind the moon for a short while. We fought off disease, famine, drought, fire, and frost to get where we are, growing together the whole way. And we were together for that. Whatever problems we plowed through, we did together. After all, we were just a branch-length at most away from each other.

Now, fully grown apples ripened by the sun of education in the tree of this grand social experiment we call high school, we are ready to begin the next stage of earthly existence. Perhaps one of us will fall on some unfortunate guy's head and change the course of human history. Some may just give the poor guy a concussion and a bad attitude. We may be the first apples to do apple things on Mars. Wherever we go, we're apples from the great Judge orchard, and that means we're different. We are nourishing, crisp, abundantly selfless, and a formidable force for good. I think we can all agree the world could use a good refreshing snack right about now, and we be lookin' like a snack.

I ate my last apple at Judge just a few days ago. I cried for several hours after. In fact, we all enjoyed our last something or other at Judge that we've come to know and love, and probably shed at least a single unwilling tear in the case of our toughest classmates. But we mustn't mourn the past or dwell on it, for living is the past is like choosing to crawl when you know full well how to walk. But you had to learn to crawl before you could walk, and you ought to be grateful for that. The future is no more safe, being subject to old Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. An apple won't reveal its core, its future, until its purpose has already been spent and it ceases to be an apple. Dwelling on the future will just make you think about death, and that comes up enough in any high school English class to satisfy even the offspring of the necromancer and the grim reaper. No, the present is where I'd like to be. You don't have to travel far to get there, all your friends are there, and the music of life is playing in the background. Make the decisions you know how to make, following the same instincts that got you this far. As a very wise and well-travelled gnome once said, "go and smell the roses." The Chuck-A-Rama buffet of life's opportunities is squarely before us, and the choice is indeed ours. Partake and be merry! But for heaven's sake, class of 2019, eat an apple every once in a while.

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