

A Fantasy Valedictory by Papa (with occasional additions—and subtractions—from Iris):

Selection as a valedictorian is a matter of great trauma. Why? Because everyone thinks they are entitled to prepare valedictory remarks.

- My grandfather Gene has filled my speech with obscure Latin analyses of Greek playwrights from 2500 years ago, which shows that irrelevancy is also possible outside the IB program.
- My grandmother Iris remembers East High School's valedictorian who made fiery remarks about the lack of diversity among graduates receiving awards. She wants me to make sure my remarks create just as much controversy at GW High School.
- My English teacher has proposed remarks to reflect her preoccupation with 17th century English poetry and novels—which I have never read except in SparkNotes.
- My history teacher couldn't care less what I say so long as I do not end my remarks with the quote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."
- My STEM teachers have argued that I should thank them profusely for providing IB graduates the skills to become billionaires through startups and by solving esoteric equations that have no known use. (For example, if train A is traveling from New York to London at 150 miles per hour and train B is traveling from Madrid to Boston at 100 miles per hour, and each is carrying a jar of jelly beans eaten at different rates, what will be the racial makeup of the passengers at the point when the two trains cross each other?)
- The Humanities Department is in shock and has asked me to express their concern that the STEM program will ultimately make us all robots and prevent us from becoming decent, caring, loving human beings.
- My mother Pam, however, wants me to demonstrate that STEM skills do not interfere with human bonding by describing how I taught my little sister quadratic equations at age two.
- My aunt Diana insists that my speech should hold graduates accountable if they do not resolve the problems of climate change caused by the excess consumption of their parents' and grandparents' generations.
- My best friends suggest that I should have spent my time here learning the intricacies of Ultimate Frisbee.
- As for our principal, she does not care what I say so long as she has veto power over anything that might upset the governor or the superintendent of schools, as she seeks to obtain funding to translate the "Epic of Gilgamesh" into Sanskrit.
- My uncle Leigh wants me to internationalize my speech by teaching graduates the Aussie skills of hiding and stealing crab pots.
- The American Civil Liberties Union has argued that my remarks should ensure that "Huckleberry Finn" and "The Merchant of Venice" remain in the curriculum. Black Lives Matter and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith disagree.
- Denver's "Masterpiece" Bakeshop wants me to warn against cakes made by gay bakers, which they believe will give a spiritual stomach ache.
- Regardless of their stance on dress codes, religious leaders want me to emphasize that students can wear crosses, Stars of David, and headscarves under their First Amendment rights. They are split, however, on face masks.
- The Music Department has asked me to praise their new libretto, the LGBTQs, replacing the ABCs.
- As some of you may know, my father Mike is a journalist. He doesn't care what I say as long as it is accurate, well-organized, and grammatical.

- Is it true that 90% of IB graduates have never heard of Taylor Swift? And the other 10% believe he is a wide receiver for the Denver Broncos?
- Most of the GW faculty have advised that I should come across as humble, modest, and self-effacing. They suggest that I praise the great work done by my fellow students, who could just as easily stand where I am. But, at the same time, the school identifies, divides, and rewards us by the color of our graduation gowns.
- My mother and aunt, both psychologists, warn me that false modesty would sound condescending and psychologically bereft. Bereft?
- Half of my advisors want me to end my remarks so that you all leave sobbing, with tears rolling down your cheeks.
- The other half believe I should conclude with gales of laughter and applause.
- Finally, my grandmother tells me to ignore all suggestions. She reminds me of Benjamin Disraeli's response after being introduced with a long and windy introduction that concluded with, "And I now present Prime Minister Disraeli, who will give his address." Disraeli's reply: "My address is 10 Downing Street."

And with those words he left for home. Now so do I. Thank you very much.