



PINGRY

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
EVAN ROSENMAN '08

JUNE 8, 2008

I'd like to begin with a story. Most of the senior class has already heard this, and, for that, I apologize. Still, I think it's kind of an interesting tale, and, in a funny way, it fittingly introduces my message to the departing Class of 2008.

It all began on May 7 when I received an email from Mr. Leef asking me to come see him. The following day, I dropped by his office three separate times, only to be greeted by a closed door. Frustrated, I marched into the upper school office a fourth time and bumped into Mr. Leef as he was rushing out into the hall. I somewhat overzealously insisted that I walk with him, concerned that I was going to be late for track. Mr. Leef awkwardly said OK, and so I followed him about 10 paces and then realized what his destination was: the male faculty bathroom.

I looked for an escape route, but it was too late. I had no choice but to follow him as he explained to me why he wanted to see me. And so it was that I found out I'd be valedictorian as Mr. Leef answered nature's call.

In the days that followed, I wondered how I should interpret this unusual situation. When I conveyed the story to Mrs. Grant, she responded by laughing uncontrollably and telling me something unexpected, but somehow right. She said, "Well, that is something you will absolutely never forget." And that's when I began thinking about the memories from my Pingry experience that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

I'd like you all to imagine a blank space—an empty field in the middle of Martinsville. And then I'd like you to begin to fill in that space with all the things that have comprised our memories of the past four years.

First, the building. We don't often think of the fields, the classrooms, and the clock tower as an essential piece of our Pingry experience, but they have been here all along, providing a comfortable backdrop for everything that we do. It's not just that we have amazing facilities; rather, it's the way this school's architecture has provided a context for our experience. It has provided wide, open spaces in which to ponder and cozy nooks in which to study or be consoled. And all along, it has given us the solitary image of the clock tower, standing as an unforgettable monument to each moment spent at Pingry.

Next, the faculty. First, imagine them the way a first grader might—as if they lived at this school, always waiting for a stray student to enter their classrooms. Now I'd like you to remember back to every amazing conversation you've had with a teacher here—if you possibly can. After all, how lucky is an institution to have a dynamic duo like the Grants? To have the cool wisdom of Mr. Keating and Dr. Dineen, the teddy-bearness of Mr. Coe, the fake villainy of Mrs. O'Mara and Mr. Hata, or the simultaneous ability to insult and inspire that is possessed by Trem? In how many ways has this faculty made themselves available to us, challenged us, and changed the way we look at the world? In how many ways have they entered our minds and our hearts? These teachers have become our role models not just as intellectuals, but as responsible and caring adults, and we will always be grateful to them.

And as the last element of our memories: our fellow students. We have envisioned a silent building, full of expectant teachers; now, I'd like you to fill that building with the sights and sounds of one another. I'd like you to look at the students around you—some who are your friends, some who are not—and think of all the

memories you've shared with these individuals. We have all affected one another, loved one another, and made incredible connections that I sincerely hope will endure in the future. And if I can only speak for myself, then I'll say this: the other day, I realized I have an overpoweringly positive view of humanity. And it's not because we've lived in such hopeful times—we haven't. It's because I am in such unflagging awe of the 122 students with whom I share this stage. I have so consistently been astounded and humbled by the wisdom, the talents, the kindness, the compassion, and the strength of my fellow students and friends. I won't name names, but I will say that my time at Pingry over the past decade has been amazing for no greater reason than your presence. Basically, you guys are freakin' awesome. Don't ever forget it.

But in all this—in the recasting of our memories at this school—I'm forgetting one special part. I've talked about how Pingry, the institution, has left its indelible mark upon us. But how have we impacted Pingry? How have we left our signature on this school? A few weeks ago, I talked with a friend about how, deep down, we all desire to be Pingry legends—the kind of student the faculty still talks about 20 years later. But will we be those kinds of students?

In my heart, I think so. And if I have one final message for all of you—one “carpe diem” or Barack Obama “yes you can”—it is this: the individual can affect the institution. Just look around.

It's not simply because I'm so proud of my classmates that I feel we have changed Pingry. It's not just the ridiculously high number of Pingry Record issues we have put out (eight, by the way), or our stratospherically high PSAT scores, or the fact that we give the Class of '09 an inferiority complex. Rather, it's the look I see in teachers' eyes when they discuss our graduation. It's the many times I've seen seniors mentor underclassmen. And it's the ways I know our class has stood out as being one of the closest-knit grades in Pingry history.

And if an institution as powerful as Pingry can be touched by individuals, then we can certainly do the

same when we engage with other institutions in the future. Because while a school may be the first major organization that we encounter, there are countless others that await us. Government is an institution. Healthcare is an institution. Generalizing further, even poverty or ongoing violence or global warming can be seen as institutions to be confronted, challenged, and ultimately changed. It seems our lives are shaped each day by associations and conventions that we did not create and do not fully understand. But I have the strongest faith that, if our high school experience has prepared us for anything, it is the monumental task of altering the world's institutions for the better.

And one more lesson we've learned: the power of the Class of '08 is greater than the sum of its students. We have been most potent in our ability to affect this school by growing close to one another, by supporting one another, and making meaningful personal relationships. There's something to be said for this – for the strength that is endowed in the connections among smart, caring individuals. So I encourage you all to keep networking, to keep reaching out to others in the ongoing quest to make a difference. After all, if 123 unique individuals can unify into something as cohesive and amazing as a single class, then there is nothing we cannot achieve. Or perhaps Jack Johnson put it best when he said simply, “It's always better when we're together.”

So how, then, do we say goodbye? Well, as the word valediction means, literally, “a farewell,” I suppose that must be my job. So to finish this speech, I'd like to quote the great transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau wrote, “Nothing makes the earth seem so spacious as to have friends at a distance; they make the latitudes and longitudes.” While we may be heading off for different locales and disparate futures, let us inhabit this spacious world in which anything is possible. And let us always be linked by what we've shared here at Pingry—by our memories, by our friendships, and by the ways in which we've entered each other's hearts.

So thank you, and congratulations to the Class of 2008!