

Graduation 2010  
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*Excerpted from Delegate Pollard's key note address to the 2010 Class of Washington & Lee High School in Montross, Virginia, during their commencement exercises on Saturday, June 19, 2010:*

Congratulations, Class of 2010.

It is a statement of the obvious that what you are about to do is receive your high school diploma. You should be proud; here you are at the sunset of your adolescence as a young adult receiving your diploma.

You have earned this diploma. For the past 17, 18, 19 years you have learned what has been taught to you – and all of that learning goes into the symbol of the diploma.

When you learned to talk and communicate around age two that was a foundation upon which you learned the alphabet. When you learned the alphabet that was a foundation upon which you learned to read. When you learned to read, that was a foundation for learning grammar, punctuation, spelling – and so on and so on, until you have earned your diploma.

Your diploma is a piece of paper that says, “I have done these things which other folks have asked me to do.” It is validation that you have reached these benchmarks.

But the next 50 years are a blank piece of paper on which you get to write. But what will you write on your paper?

My take is that you shouldn't write down your 'wants' or material achievements. Who really cares if you want a Porsche or if you just bought a bigger boat? Somebody will always have a nicer car, a fancier house, a larger salary.

This blank piece of paper which represents the rest of your life should represent what you believe.

I tried this exercise and found it to be rather challenging. But here's what I've written so far:

I believe fishing is better for the soul than sitting in traffic.

I believe that you should never borrow money for anything that rusts, rots or depreciates.

I believe in compassion and caring for those who are unable to help themselves.

I believe that too many choices of ice cream can keep me from enjoying the ice cream I have.

I believe politics can do a lot better for this country than it has.

I believe it is more rewarding to know the five people you see at the local post office than it is to be known by five Virginia governors.

I believe that the Windows operating system is an inferior product for which we pay too much.

I believe everyone has the right to worship in the way they see fit.

I believe people make rational economic choices except when they drive to Fredericksburg to save five cents on a gallon of gas, or when buying healthcare for a loved one.

I believe hard work and personal responsibility are the foundation of a moral character, thus, it is nobler to be a well respected trash man than the poorly respected CEO of BP.

I believe that changing the oil in your car is a better use of time than cleaning your car.

I believe the fun of life is learning new things – from woodworking to planning towns, to plumbing, business, religion, wildlife management, farming, or whatever.

I believe in family.

I believe that life is hard, but fun.

I believe in packing my lunch even though I would rather eat lunch out.

So let me end as I began –a diploma represents your life thus far.

The rest of your life is represented by a blank piece of paper.

Class of 2010, over the next 50 years, what will you write on your paper?

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