

Baccalaureate Parent Speech

By Tripp Crouch '86

Headmaster Seivold, that was a nice introduction, thank you. And I especially want to thank you for inviting me to speak. It's an honor and a privilege and thrill to address this year's senior class, their family and friends who are here to celebrate with them this weekend and all the faculty and staff who have so wonderfully navigated the school through this absurdly challenging year.

As you heard, I am a super proud Berkeley parent and an alumnus myself. And in an interesting bit of synchronicity, I spoke at my graduation Baccalaureate back in the day. I have terrifically-fond memories of participating in those end-of-the-year ceremonies, as I hope all the students speaking today and tomorrow will as well. Speaking of which, I have to commend the seniors who have already spoken today for how poised you were up here. Really well-done. And trust me, you all were much more polished than I was during my senior-year ceremony; in fact, I'm hopeful that my time up here today goes as smoothly as all of yours has.

Now, in considering today's presentation, I reached out to a few people to get some ideas on what I should talk to our seniors about before they take flight out into the world. I got some helpful feedback, but there was one particular piece of advice that I found especially inspired. A fellow parent here today has a senior and sophomore, just like Laura and I do. When his 10th grade daughter - realizing she would be attending today's ceremony with her family - heard that I was giving this address and was looking

for some inspiration, she seized the opportunity to influence today's proceedings and texted her dad this succinct bit of public-speaking wisdom that he then passed on to me: "Tell Mr. Crouch to just Keep. It. Short." I took the advice to heart, as it was practical and direct and right to the point; and I'll attempt to do the same with my talk today.

So, in addition to seeking out advice from high school sophomores and anyone else I could find, I spent time considering the people I know and admire that are the happiest and whom I would consider the most broadly successful. I also mined my own experiences to find some advice that I could give to Thatcher and his classmates as they prepare for life beyond the hallowed halls of Berkeley. And I've come up with a few things.

My first bit of advice is this and it's pretty simple: Seniors, be thoughtful about choosing a career or job that you can be happy in. Now hear me out: I'm not at all someone who believes that a person is fully defined by their job. But my experience is that your career and profession will dominate your life in ways beyond just your time in the office: it becomes a large part of your self-identity, co-workers will become friends, travel revolves around work events, even volunteering and charity work involve leveraging professional expertise, and so on.

People who really love their jobs seem naturally driven and confident and professionally self-assured in a way that others simply are not. So graduates, I urge you - as you're choosing majors and potential careers - make sure that you can be excited about an imagined future in that world. If imagining a future of doing that work and meeting

those professional challenges excites you and motivates you, then I suspect you'll be on a good path.

My second observation necessitates a bit of backstory:

Seniors, as a group, you've been wonderfully successful: the average SAT score for this class is crazy high and – if I'm not mistaken - I believe that it's the second highest for a class in Berkeley history, your average GPA is equally as impressive, and about two-thirds of your colleges applications were met with acceptances. The parents and teachers here today are thrilled with what you've done, and we couldn't be any prouder. But here's the rub: going forward, the mountains only get steeper, and there will be unanticipated roadblocks and obstacles and detours along the way. And that brings me to my second point: Know that success – whatever that means to you – is rarely a straight line, and ultimately we all need a little help along the way. A group with your history of achievement scares us because, when the struggles arise - which they inevitably will – they're unfamiliar and can be difficult to manage. Just be aware that it's more than okay to take a scenic route to success, and it's more than okay to reach out for help. The transition into adulthood that you're about to take is a challenging one, but it's the only way forward.

Now – and I feel I should warn you - we've reached the *tough love* portion of today's presentation. My third - and final - nugget of Gen X wisdom to my Gen Z graduates, is this:

Please don't take for granted the advantages and potential that everyone in your life - and everyone in this room - have been so thrilled to provide you. The Berkeley *that I went to* ... could not compete ... with the Berkeley of today. And it's not that the leadership and teachers back then didn't want to be great; it's just that so much more is known today about brain development and education and how students learn, and thanks to technology there's so much more sharing of and access to information and knowledge. Today's graduates – especially from here but from all over the world – are beneficiaries of significant advances in parenting and education. Take full advantage of that. Appreciate the head start that you've earned and had access to. And whatever field you choose – from education to medicine to finance ... engineering or the arts – know that there are challenges in those fields and in the world at large that you are especially well-suited and well-prepared to tackle. As you've all heard, to whom much is given, much is expected; and – if I could put a twist on our school motto – we hope and expect you'll go into the world and make a positive difference.

Well, that's all I have in the way of advice, but before I wrap up, I'd like to take the opportunity to recognize a couple of groups of people. I mentioned the faculty and staff earlier, and I just want to say that the work they've done this school year during the pandemic has been nothing short of heroic. So many schools – even private ones like ours – haven't come close to delivering the school experience that you all have. I know that the other parents in the room join me in thanking you profusely for the fantastic school year we just had, and for everything you do for our children. Thank you so much.

And – while I realize we’re here to honor our seniors - I have to give a congratulatory shout-out to all my fellow parents – many of whom are dear friends – that are here today. Like anything of real value, Berkeley is a heavy pull; it demands a lot of its students, of course, but it demands a lot of its parents too. Like many of you, when Thatcher began Pre-K we could have chosen a neighborhood school within walking distance of our house; Berkeley was a 14-year commitment that was a 30-minute drive each way. There were financial sacrifices to consider, and the rigorous academic load – at least early in a student's career here - is shared by students and parents alike ... But the parents here today – the ones in this room whose kids are graduating tomorrow - knew the sacrifices ... and knew how hard it was going to be and the effort it would take ... and you gladly took on the challenge. We get one shot at raising our kids, and each of you made the best choice you could in picking the best school you could, and you got them through ... Moms and Dads, we’ll raise a glass later today to us – I think we’ve earned it.

And that ... brings me to our graduates. Let me first say that I’ve so enjoyed watching you grow up and thrive, it’s truly been one of the joys of my life, and collectively you’ll always hold a special place in my heart for the part you’ve played in my family’s life ... I hope some of what I shared today resonates with you, but you’re a smart, ambitious and talented group and I think you’ll be just fine either way. And know that all of us here will be following your adventures into the future; I can’t wait to find out what’s in store for all of you next. So, as a final send off, I’ll speak for everyone here today and just say this:

Members of the Graduating Class of 2021, wherever *you're* going, we hope you get there. Thank you.