



**CCDS Commencement
June 8, 2018**

Farewell Remarks by Head of School Anthony T. T. Jaccaci

And so, class of 2018, we are moments from the end of the Country Day leg of your journey.

For many of you, the college experience will begin with a road trip at the end of the summer. Going to school here in Cincinnati? Short trip. Leaving the Queen City and Buckeye state? A bit longer.

Regardless of your length of study at CCDS, this class has excelled in the classroom; on the stage and in the studio; on the fields, courts and pool; throughout the city, the state, and even the world. The trips you will be taking to university are richly deserved.

Not all road trips are pleasant experiences though.

Have you ever been squeezed into the rear seat of a car with luggage pressing on the back of your head, a younger sibling barraging you with a flood of commentary, the family pet competing for space under your feet, and a slightly queasy feeling as the car lurches forward in bumper-to-bumper traffic because your parents timed your departure at the same time as everyone else and at the precise time the AC decided to quit? I have.

Perhaps the most indelible memory of road trips for me, however, was the question “are we there yet?” because the trips never stayed on schedule with hosts of interruptions, delays, and detours.

Difficulties in reaching a destination are not a modern phenomenon. If Napoleon, the Donner Party, or Robinson Crusoe could plan their trips again, I am sure they would have made different arrangements.

As you receive your diploma tonight, graduates, your own life will take on elements of a road trip and what arrangements will you make?

While planning for the “road trip of life,” has never been easy, there did seem to be more certainty for earlier generations. For example, the idea that each successive generation would enjoy a level of prosperity greater than their parents was taken for granted in latter half of the 20th century. A life-long job at one company was followed by a gold watch at retirement.

In fact, one of the most popular games in the last 100 years is the game of Life.

Have you played this game? Small little plastic cars with pegs for passengers. You make choices about education, career and building a family. Admittedly, Life did not capture the experience of everyone in our country, but it was structured to reflect the definition of a life well lived in the minds of many.

Today’s world has been described as a VUCA world - variable, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. It is hard to imagine creating a game of life today for your generation that could possibly capture the manifold paths in front of you. While a parlor game may not offer guidance, perhaps we can look to the most epic road trip of them all for an understanding on how to address your VUCA world ahead.

Few travelers in history have had it as bad as this crew. After a decade-long war, they left a distant land, battling monsters, sorcerers, wild animals, and terrible weather only to find many of their own houses in turmoil upon reaching their home. In the ninth grade, Ms. Thornberry, Mr. McGivern, and Mrs. Dunn introduced this tale to you in Homer’s *Odyssey*.

Following the Trojan War, one Greek who had a particularly hard time getting home was Menelaus who was shipwrecked and stranded on the island of Pharos. The Greek king was an incredible warrior, raised from his youth in the skills and arts of warfare. When on Pharos, though, the training that had made him one of the heroes of the war was of little use. To escape, in fact, Menelaus learned that he had to capture the god Proteus when “the old man in the sea” came out of the ocean for his daily rest.

Easier said than done. You see, Proteus was a polymorph and could assume any shape. To surprise him, Menelaus and his men hid under sealskins and jumped upon him as soon as he settled down to sleep. Immediately, Proteus became a raging lion. They needed him alive and so their weapons were useless. Menelaus grabbed for the lion’s mane and held tight. Next, Proteus took the shape of a serpent. Again, Menelaus and his men changed their tactics and held the slippery scales tightly between their fingers. Soon, a ferocious boar and then a torrent of water. Finally, a huge and towering tree. With each change, Menelaus and his men adapted to the challenge in front of them. Finally, exhausted, Proteus returned to his original form, gave Menelaus the help he needed and jumped back into the sea.

Like Menelaus, you have been well trained. Memorizing facts, solving equations, reading novels, and writing essays may have felt like busy work at times, but you are graduating with the ability to think well, communicate clearly, and to separate the wheat from the chaff. I have been told by Country Day alumni that they feel uncommonly well prepared for their collegiate studies, and I expect this will be the same for you next year. You are all incredible engines of learning.

Prepared well for college and life? Absolutely. But perhaps the most important skill you will need to keep developing is your ability to adapt.

How to do so? As far as I know, there are no courses on adaptation in college. No blue print or manual on how to understand a changing environment. No, you will need to channel your Protean inner-self and practice the art of shape shifting.

First, think about shapeshifting of the mind. Your teachers in the Upper School often talk about developing a growth mindset. Our job in the equation? Instill a curiosity and joy of learning in you. Your job in the equation? Continuing to re-adjust the way you make meaning in your own life.

What will human wisdom mean in an era on the verge of an explosion of artificial intelligence? How do we sift the pop-psychology, click-bait noise to find good and useful approaches and practices to craft understanding? How do we adapt our use of language in an era when 140-character length communications carry great weight? This class has demonstrated such ability to alter your own meaning as we have witnessed powerful project-based learning, creative senior projects, stirring debates, and passionate expressions of voice. You have constantly re-adjusted your meaning this year, and you are well on the way to a life of the flexible mind.

Second, consider shapeshifting of the collective. Menelaus did not subdue Proteus on his own but rather had his men to help. The future will require you to seek help from others to find personal success, but also to think and work for the betterment of society. As David Brooks recently wrote, "life is not really an individual journey." Rather, he meant, it is a call to take responsibility for the creation of communities. Tonight, we do not only have scholars on the stage but athletes who have learned about the importance of the collective. You learned that playing together for a higher cause would not only help yourself, but also those around you. As future leaders, we will need collective leadership and collaboration to build bridges among a sometimes fractured and divided population. No, we do not all have to agree but we certainly do need to understand, as you all did on your teams, Abraham Lincoln's wisdom that "a house divided against itself, cannot stand."

Third, contemplate shapeshifting of the heart. Mr. Hall spoke eloquently about developing empathy. In addition to empathy, I would also suggest the Country Day virtue of compassion

is desperately needed by humanity. Our globe will see diminishing resources and increasing population in your lives potentially leading to conflict among nation-states and highly empowered individuals. It will not be possible to consider lives of prosperity for ourselves and our families without considering the fate of others. Compassion is putting empathy in action, and I have seen this in you already in the service you have given both on and off campus. Yes, we are blessed to have so much here at Country Day, but I have seen in your class an acceptance of responsibility for the condition of others.

Shapeshifting of the mind, the collective, and the heart. Ways that you will thrive and lead in this VUCA world of ours.

Graduates, I leave you with good wishes that your road trip to college in late-August is not an odyssey of epic proportions, but if it is, I know that you have already begun to develop the attributes and abilities to adapt, take a new path, and reach your destination charged and ready for growth.