

## COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Sunday, June 7, 2009

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School President

Today, we the class of 2009, become diploma-carrying members of Phillips Academy, Andover. *Finis Origine Pendet*—the end depends upon the beginning. Today is both an end and a beginning for us, and our journey at this institution has granted us all the gift of a solid foundation.

For many of us, our journey began some years ago during our spring revisits. It seems just yesterday we received our acceptance letters and we were in the midst of deciding if Andover was the place for us. And I remember thinking ... worried ... the stakes are high. Would another school be just a bit more comfortable? I could always go to public school, or another good private school, just a little closer to home, and maybe a little bit easier. It's this last point that concerned me. Andover's reputation is daunting and I had some talented friends who decided to opt for an easier route. And so, my first memory of Andover was revisit day and listening to the speeches of Mrs. Chase and of Jane Fried. One of Jane Fried's comments resonated with my mother and me. She addressed us saying, "I know as you sit here, you are wondering, am I up to the challenge—"Well," she said, "if you've been offered admission, then you belong here." Realizing that others had faith in me was all I needed. If Andover was willing to believe in me, then surely I could muster the courage to believe in myself.

In thinking about the future some of us might wonder, "are we up to the challenge". And I would like to say, that if you are sitting here today, you are.

After spring visits, Andover turned into my first choice and I spent the next few months gearing up for what was to come. But I could not have predicted what I would find upon my arrival at Taylor Hall. I announced my name and room number to the two Taylor blue keys, who offered assistance with moving me in. The first reaction I received was "oh, you're rooming with that *really big* football player." I didn't know what that meant until I got to my room and saw what looked like a full grown man waiting for me on my bed. He shook my hand and said, "Hi, my name is Andrew Pohly." I couldn't move. I didn't understand how two completely different kids—one normal-sized, and one who could probably bench-press me AND all of my luggage—could be paired together and make it work.

Not only did Andrew and I make it work, but he is sitting in the audience, three years later, still my roommate and also my best friend. And from this I learned one of the four lessons that I will share with you today: embrace the unexpected. There will be challenges, but, remember, we're up to the challenge.

That first weekend of orientation was a big-blue- blur of learning school cheers, touring campus, meetings with blue keys, and just generally feeling awkward and unsure as we each slowly made our way towards Tang for matriculation. However, there was one activity, a game called Thinkfast, that sticks out. We broke up into teams and tried to answer questions as fast as we could. What other kind of game would you play at Andover? We were playing for prize money and peers became legends on that day by stepping on stage for the challenges. It was fun and memorable, and brings us to lesson number 2: Andover is not an experience that you sit back in your seat for. Andover *forces* you to step forward, to go out for parts, to assert yourself in the classroom, to try out for the teams, and to take YOUR place at the Thinkfast podium. When we allow ourselves to be uncomfortable, and vulnerable, when we take the risk and step up to the podium, we achieve our greatest successes

Looking back at myself as a new student, I was shy and not certain of my purpose at Andover. To see me here today, you may not believe it, but in my first weeks at Andover, I felt lost. Without a set group of friends, or a specific purpose I spent my free periods and lunch wandering along the path, checking my mail in GW, and more or less *pretending* to be busy. I had been told that I belonged here, but after the first week I felt like I needed a plan. We all had to start somewhere and, for most of us, it was on the bottom rung.

As with anything at Andover I looked to my peers to help me find my place. The first person I looked to was my roommate Andrew, who was a beast on the varsity football team. You may recall our discrepancies in body weight and strength. Fearing that I may not be as successful as Andrew on the football field, I decided to throw myself wholeheartedly into the club scene and to meet *my* athletic requirement by playing cluster soccer. Luckily for me, Andover boasts more than a plethora of clubs – from those focused on barbecuing to those saving the world. And I wanted to participate in as many as possible. Becoming *over*-involved was my first attempt at trying to find my place and my passion.

I changed from a boy who wandered campus during my free periods and evenings, to a student with overlapping time commitments, a worrisome lack of sleep, and

way too many missed meals, who was *actually* busy—no more pretending. Grudgingly, I realized I needed to cut back. By the end of my lower year, I had carved out my new identity at Andover and I threw myself into my activities with zeal.

Getting involved in student activities gave me a great excuse to get to know the people who make this place what it is. Eventually, I realized that I'm more passionate about the people than the activities that they're doing. In this, I learned another important lesson: the path to finding your passion is not always direct, but no matter how long it takes, *or how many times you check your mail in GW each day*, time spent finding your passion is the best time you will ever spend.

And, as passionate graduates, today we come full circle; the end depends upon the beginning. Where did we all begin? With our own families. They have traveled from places around the world to be here with us today. They join the faculty and friends who have been members of our family here at Andover for the last four years. As members of our Andover family, our teachers, coaches, house counselors, advisors, and friends have shown us kindness, compassion and courage.

Faculty: today I stand before you not knowing exactly how you have impacted me, simply knowing that you have. I have learned a lot of things from you already, but I have a hunch that your greatest lessons are yet to unfold, still unknown.

Similarly, today each one of you is equally celebrating something known (our graduation from this place), and something unknown: what's next. Whether you're a student, a grandparent, a teacher, a mom or a dad, I invite you to own the unknown, and to help each of the graduates in the audience write their story of what is to come.

The final lesson that we will all take from Andover is yet to be written. *Think about that for a second.* One of the things we have to appreciate about this school is that we haven't learned everything yet. This is just the beginning.

This journey that Andover has given us will stay with us for the rest of our lives. The goal of this community is not to push or pull any of us in one direction of thinking or being. And it is our responsibility to use this education, this beginning, for the betterment of others. As we sit here today sharing our last few moments together, we can see how far we have come. And though this is the end of our career as Andover students, it is not the end of our connection to our Andover roots. Today each of us walks away. We leave our friends, we leave our dorms,

we leave this place that has been our home for four years. But, we do not leave empty handed. We leave with one another, and we will always be members of the Class 2009.

We are embarking upon another path to the unknown. So now what's next? Do we actually know where we are going? Probably not. If I were to ask Danica Mitchel, maybe she would draw us a picture of the future; if I were to ask Nick Poland, maybe he would play us a sick guitar song about our journey; or if I were to ask Christian Anderson, maybe he would solve this equation. We are all talented in our own ways, but that doesn't mean that anyone of us has a better idea as to where we are headed than the rest... Maybe it's not important to know *where* we are going but *how* we are going to go about the rest of our journey.

As we go forward, the lessons we have learned at Andover will never lose their relevance. The four I shared with you today, learned in the past, are certainly relevant to the future.

- Number 1: embrace the unexpected (and the big goofy football player in your dorm room).
- Number 2: don't sit back and let life pass you by; get involved.
- Number 3: find your passion. Whether in college or in jobs, if we take risks and live our lives with passion, we will never go wrong.

So, you have reached graduation, but you are not finished yet. In the spirit of Andover, I have one last assignment for you; lesson number 4. As it currently stands, it is yet to be written. Your assignment... is to write it. You have a lifetime to complete it, it can be done in groups or individually, and you will be evaluated solely by your peers.

Please begin.