

# BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE



## Valedictory Address

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The time has come for my graduating class to fully embrace adult responsibilities and finally enter the work force.

The trouble is, that isn't really how it works anymore. Most of us have been working part-time jobs for years. Many of us have already become wildly successful in the food-service industry. I'll bet you nearly everyone in this room has been served coffee by at least one of my classmates. We are already in the work force. And the truth is, for most of us, our degree isn't going to get us any better of a job than we already have. In these insane economics times, we simply can't count on a diploma to get us a fancy paycheck.

Yet I intend to convince you that I and my fellow graduates are some of the luckiest and most privileged people in the world.

Let me lay some numbers on you. According to the World Bank, the average world income is about \$8,200 a year. Now let me show off some of my math skills I learned here at Bryn Athyn College. If you divide \$8,200 into months, you get about \$680. That number is getting pretty small. The average monthly income of human beings in this world is \$680 dollars a month. If you break that down into full-time hourly pay, you end up with 4.2. That is \$4.20 cents an hour.

Now let me get really fancy. For world income statistics there is a big gap between the average and the median. When you factor this in, you find out that anyone making U.S. minimum wage is raking in an income in the top 20%. What I'm trying to tell you is that a Starbucks employee is one of the wealthiest people in the world.

Since we are all ready fabulously wealthy, what does this degree really mean? Though, when I told you my graduating class is among the luckiest and most privileged people in the world, I actually wasn't talking about money. Even though we forget it sometimes, life is really about more than just the Benjamins.

This diploma is not a symbol of all the money I'm going to make. To me, this diploma isn't even a symbol of my own hard work. I argue that this diploma is a symbol of all the hard work that has gone into me.

A student at Bryn Athyn college pays a tiny tuition in comparison to the amount of money it costs to educate us. The rest of that cost is covered by the school's endowment. That means that people, most of whom I have never met, have given their own hard-earned money so that I could be educated. Otherwise, my class could never be here today. It is only by the incredible generosity of donors that this school

can exist. And I have a sneaking suspicion that those donors weren't giving money with the hope that I could one day get a fancy job and make tons of money for myself.

In fact, I bet those donors don't really care what it says on my paycheck. So then why do they do it? Why have they given so much, put so much into me? The same must be said of the school's administration and faculty. The tireless work they have put into us students is astounding. I have the luxury of sleeping through my classes if I'm having a lousy day. A habit I probably should have avoided more than I did. But when I do manage to drag myself out of bed, my teachers are always waiting for me. Ready to educate me, by whatever means necessary, while I sit in a chair. I worked hard in school. But for every ounce of effort I put into school, my teachers always put in two.

Why? Why have you invested so much in me – in my classmates? I bet it has little to do with our future salaries. There seems to be only one answer. And this answer is the reason we are the luckiest and most privileged people in the world. Those donors, the school's administration, and above all, our teachers, must love us for no reason other than that we are other people.

This diploma is not a symbol of all the hard work I've done. This diploma is a symbol of the incredible care that so many people have invested in me – in my class. Donors, administrators, teachers, family and friends, who have all spent countless hours helping us become the people who stand before you. We don't deserve it, we didn't earn it, and we certainly aren't entitled to it. It was freely given.

And now it is our turn to make something of all that you have given us. We will make you proud – not with the size of our paychecks, but with the care and devotion with which we live our lives. We can only hope to live up to the incredible example you have set before us. By your kindness you have taught us something that is contrary to the very nature of young people: you have taught us to be grateful. And we are humbled by your generosity.

And so I am here today to offer you, on behalf of my graduating class, a few gentle words that should echo in the halls of this school forever. From all that is in us—*thank you*.