

May 21st, 2020

I'm so grateful to be here together with all of you at this, what might be the first-ever-in-history Tailgate Graduation.

The humans who make up our class of 2020 were born in the years 2005 and 2006.

'06 was the year the iPhone 1 came out. Their generation has never known a world where you couldn't carry the entire wealth of human knowledge – and much of human ignorance as well – in your pocket. They were born 4-5 years after 9/11, and the beginning of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their generation has never known peacetime.

They were 2 years old in 2008 when the Great Recession began. They have no memory of the booming economic prosperity I grew up in, and my parents grew up in.

And they were born the year the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* came out. They will never get to be blissfully unaware of the uncertainty the future brings.

And now, in 2020, they find themselves approaching young adulthood in the midst of the greatest global crisis in a generation at least, the consequences of which are not yet written.

So their generation faces challenges their elders couldn't have conceived. And yet -- there is so much to be hopeful about. A study put out last year by Princeton University suggests that the *youngest* age groups are by far the *least* likely to share fake news articles – despite the fact that they are awash in more information than any other generation in history. They were born in these waters, and they have grown up swimming in them. And what we have tried to do for them in the Waldorf school is to equip them for this age, by

- building in them a sense for the TRUTH – and a commitment to seeking it –

- a sense for what is good and kind and beautiful – and a distaste for what is not --
- and the grit and determination to do the work that needs to be done in the world.

This generation — Generation Z — is, in my opinion, the most generous, most open-minded, most forward-thinking, most critically discerning the world has seen since the Renaissance. They've had to be – already. And it's a good thing too, because the world needs that right now.

John Locke suggested that all people are naturally endowed with the capacity for reason, that all people are created equal. The age of revolutions, of citizens rising up and demanding the right to rule themselves, was the natural consequence of the age of enlightenment. You cannot in one breath say that human beings are naturally selfish and brutish, and then in the next breath turn around and argue that we ought to have a say in how we are ruled.

Do you think we can be trusted to rule ourselves well?

Can you be trusted to rule yourself well?

8th graders, I can't believe we're here. We had some long days together, but the years have gone fast. It has been one of the great privileges of my adult life to watch you grow from little, squishy, adorable, starry-eyed creatures into upright individuals who are trying, even in these weird, hard times, to be decent humans. And who are just beginning to try to rule yourselves well.

8th graders, you deserve to be proud of yourselves. But you aren't finished people yet, so don't forget to be humble too. You still have lots and lots of growing to do.

All the boring stuff I made you do in school was there to make you disciplined, driven, and focused. These are skills you will need in order to do the things you *want* to do, and to be effective citizens of the world. You still have much to learn in this regard.

But you still have some time. You will have many teachers after me, and all will have valuable things

to show you, things I didn't or couldn't show you either because of the limits of time, or my own personal limitations, which are many. Approach those future teachers with gratitude and an open mind, and also remember the words of Assata Shakur (godmother of Tupac) – she said:

“No one is going to give you the education you need to overthrow them”.

(Though I have tried very hard!)

I take this to mean that you must remember to give your teachers a hard time, but in an intelligent way, and to be your own teachers as well.

8th graders, we've studied some hard history together this year, and it is so tempting to be cynical. The future is uncertain, sometimes it looks really dark, and people can be disappointing sometimes. But despite all evidence to the contrary, I still think that human beings have the capacity to be really noble, to do good in the world. You all help me remember that. I hope you don't forget it. There's really nothing cool or edgy about being jaded. It's just giving up your power. It's way harder, more courageous, and more subversive, to hold onto a sense of wonder, to hold onto ideals that mean something—

Truth. Beauty. Kindness. Justice.

And look around this parking lot at all these people who care about you and are rooting for you and believe in you. To say nothing of the many who couldn't join us today – your elders, your other teachers, your distant family members. You didn't get here alone. Somebody, indeed many somebodies, had to care about you an awful lot for you to get to be where you are today.

I was one of those people. And I did my best.

And when you're out of this place, I hope you'll forgive the things I did that didn't work. And remember the things that did.

So on that note, dear families, the graduates have something they would like to offer you – in their speeches, an expression of gratitude to the adults who helped to carry them on their journey through the Waldorf school. They have recorded their speeches ahead of time and you will get to enjoy those, while the 8th graders and I go on a little private adventure to say goodbye to our school.

But before we go, Jenn Sorensen has some things to say as well.

The Graduates

Drake Makai Ambagis:

Blacksmithing

University High School

May you always use the power of your voice to empower others. May your long list of things you *really* want to learn about never, ever run dry.

Jaiden Avi Gassen:

Cooking

Ironwood Ridge High School

May you carefully keep safe your bright, shining, gentle core, and protect it well so that it stays with you. May your warmth and laughter win you friends who are worthy of seeing beneath your surface.

Benjamin James Hurwitz:

Magic

The Gregory School

May you always hold on to your principled commitment to clear-sighted reasoning, and the defense of justice and fairness for all. May you see others in the most generous light possible, to best recognize the justice they deserve.

Enya Noor Illegems:

Photography

Salpointe Catholic High School

One of the kindest, gentlest human beings I have ever known. May you remain so always. And may you continue to grow in confidence and assertiveness, to take up the space that is yours to take up.

Nico Simone Johnson:

Sustainable Fashion

City High School

May you waste no time measuring yourself by anyone else's standard. May you know your own worth as you are, always -- your strength, fire, courage, creativity, and generosity.

Ravyn Rae Pradier-Youssef:

Electromagnetic Fields

Clarksburg High School in Maryland

May your voice be heard.... as a favor to others, really, for you know what you're talking about more often than most. May you always find joy in doing what is beautiful and good. May you be kind and gentle with yourself, enough to do what is good and then rest.

Olivia Hattie Ray:

Cognitive Psychology

Catalina Foothills High School

May you continue learning how to breathe and lean into what is new and uncertain. May you never stop rebelling against all that is broken and un-beautiful in the world. May you use your gift of understanding people to be a healer of those broken things.

Maximilian Eduardo Romero:

Aquaponics

University High School

May you use your easy magnetism to shine light into human spaces and bring joy to others. May you continue to be a most observant student of human nature, and to use what you've learned to lift people up.

Ayden Foxx Sorensen:

Electricity

Catalina Foothills High School

Ayden, my gentle giant. May you always be The Knight -- may you always protect the small, speak the truth, respect everyone, work your hardest, and leave the rest to the care of the universe.

Ana Francisca Wesley:

Bonnie & Clyde

Salpointe Catholic High School

May you always remember that you are whole, complete, enough. May you stand forward and show yourself -- when you want to -- knowing that who you are is a gift to others, that you have golden beautiful things to offer that no one else does.

Bethany Sarah Zashin:

Animation

The Gregory School

May you continue always to speak for those whose voices are unheard. May you continue to ask uncomfortable questions that challenge and awaken.

Humans of Tucson Waldorf, the class of 2020.

May wisdom shine through you

May love grow within you

May strength penetrate you

That in you may arise

A helper of all life

A servant of the holy things

Steadfast and true

Goodbye and Thank you, 8th grade, and everyone.