



Speech

①

Fax to Doris Haddock, room 414

~~U. of Louisville, Ky~~

Thank you.

HIGH SCHOOL

We have these ceremonies in the spring. We do so to celebrate a successful ending, but we call them a commencement. Endings indeed commence new life, new worlds. The overture and opening act of your personal story is done: From here, the main action of your adult life begins. Good luck, all you darlings, and good love.

Dear young men & women

In the end --and it will end-- your life will seem to have sped by like a fleeting dream. Much of your story will be the age-old but ever joyful human experience: romance, family, satisfying work, and happy completion. I wish you all the success that you now desire for yourself, and that your friends and family desire for you. You will also be provided all the failures and tragedies necessary to deepen and widen your soul -- sufficiently, I hope, to make you wise and forgiving of all human frailties. I pray that these necessary troubles will never long crush your optimism nor your love for this magical life.



(2)

The greatest danger before you is this: you live in an age when people would package and standardize your life for you --steal it from you and sell it back to you at a price. That price is very high.

*you* You have already been selected for this program. You have its credit cards and designer labels already expensively around you. In the *may* months ahead, you *will* find yourselves working long hours, too exhausted for community life or even good friendships--too compromised to take a stand against its abuses. A great treadmill has been devised for you, and its operators do not care much if it wears you out or kills you. A system is in place to steal your life from you, if you will let it. Don't let it.

Read, study, meditate and think for yourself. Let your most serious education commence, if it has not already done so. Refine and hold your own values, and pay the high price necessary to live those values. Decide what is important to you, and hold your ground against all temptations and tortures. If you do not, with the *pink* ~~hard~~ granite of your own values, make a fortress against the

*z z z*



3

world's ethical compromises, you will soon be among those dead of eye who stand next to you in elevators but who are not alive. Don't let them steal your life. This is the only warning you will receive.

On my long walk across America, a young carpenter from Chicago came to walk with me for many months. He and a friend in college had pledged to each other that they would, all their lives, spend at least one day a week doing something they thought important to the world or to their communities. Nick has been arrested protesting what he believes to be America's immoral training of brutal army squads for South American regimes. He was arrested at the Republican Convention in Philadelphia last year, just calmly walking down a street to demonstrate for social justice. He rotted in a cell for two weeks where people were severely abused by the police.

Nick is a free man in a land where few people have claimed their freedom to live a life that represents their values.





I am not suggesting that you all need to be protesters and to get arrested to be free, but you need to stand up for your values, and you will be surprised at the trouble that will get you into today. I was arrested for reading the Bill of Rights in a calm voice in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. You will be surprised at what happens when you dare to be free. But you will never be sorry you dared to do so.

For free you must be. It is your duty as an American. It is where true happiness is to be pursued and found. Nick and I and so many others are happy when we meet. We have stories to tell. We are free people in a land that is free to us, because we have dared to be free in it.

The fate of the earth's environment is at risk in your generation. Prison industries are spreading over the land. A new kind of colonialism of our towns and cities is afoot by companies that can and do crush our local businesses and buy our elections and destroy our natural environment. You will participate in these and a hundred other issues, on one side or the other. Fight hard for whichever side\$ you choose. All I ask is that



5

your decision --your life-- be the product and the strategy of your deepest values.

As your generation begins its turn at the helm, my generation fades away. We have done what we could, imperfectly, for each other and for democracy. Endings commence new life, new worlds. From here, the main action of your adult life begins. Good luck, all you darlings, and to your friends and your countrymen.

Thank you.

Dear young men & women