

Remember Our Winters
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Closing Exercises – June 3, 2023

Good morning classmates, teachers, trustees, families, and friends. It is a distinct honor and privilege to be speaking in front of you all on this very special day, and I thank you for this opportunity.

Today really is a special day. Soon, we, the 52 boys of the class of 2023, will receive our diplomas, the culmination of four, five, or six years of our hardest work. We are happy, proud, and maybe even a little relieved to have made it to this beautiful day. But the significance of today, the significance of those diplomas, lies far beyond simply having “made it.”

The poet Anne Bradstreet once wrote, “If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant.” That bubbling amalgam of emotions we are feeling on this most promising of spring days is a direct consequence of the countless winters we have weathered at Roxbury Latin, winters that have played such a big role in shaping who we are today.

Academically, our winters looked like a flurry of quizzes and tests; a mountain of Latin translations; or that night we were still assembling bio posters at 1:30 a.m. and graduation seemed to be nothing more than a fever dream. Extracurricularly, we faced days that would start with Spanish Club before school and end, long after sunset, with rehearsal or games in lands as far away as St. George’s. Even the harbingers of our winters were quite intimidating: Just ask any cross country runner that has seen the look on Mr. Heaton’s face as he devises a hill workout on his whiteboard.

This is a day of celebration and joy, so I will stop my list here, but I think, especially with the benefit of hindsight, that these experiences were the most formative parts of our Roxbury Latin careers. At some point, maybe after the first couple of storms, we got a good sense of the

fulfillment that comes from staring down and wrestling with adversity. To be sure, some snowstorms buried us, but then we worked harder, studied longer, and tried different approaches in pursuit of that hard-to-attain but oh-so-sweet feeling. The satisfaction and pride we are teeming with today—that we probably felt at smaller scales after an exam or a particularly demanding practice—came only from giving genuinely and completely of ourselves. In everything RL asked us to do, it stretched, tested, and grew our propensity to dedicate ourselves to whatever task was at hand. In doing so, it gave us an important safety net: There is something quite comforting in knowing that, barring all else, we will have our well-developed work ethic and our own tried-and-tested strategies to deal with the worst of blizzards.

More significantly, somewhere along the way, we realized that the barrage of assignments, the late nights studying, and the toughest sports games would be better fared alongside companions. In our dreariest winter days, we encountered little gestures of generosity from classmates: a helping hand, a sympathetic ear, maybe even a valiant stab at comedy to brighten our day. These pockets of support and silliness were our attempts to make the best of the difficult, draining situations we were wont to experience at RL, and they meshed 52 individuals into the unique band of brothers we are today. I say unique because I doubt there is another band that has a member named “imperialism Mike” or conducts push-up contests in the middle of an AP exam.

The winters we faced together, and the well of class-wide support every single one of us was able to draw from, saved us from a predicament that might otherwise have befallen a group with so many talented people: We never got so lost in our own pursuits that we forgot how to take pride in each other. If you witnessed our standing ovation after Owen and James delivered an Exelauno Day performance for the ages; listened to the awed silence in Hall when Justin and

Eli played Brahms; or looked at the grins plastered on our faces when Tait played guitar, you would get a sense of the joy we took in seeing our classmates do what they do best.

In a few months, we will face new winters in schools scattered across the country: we will meet hundreds of new people; we will live in new places; we will take dozens of new classes; and perhaps we will meet English teachers who, God forbid, loathe adverbs even more than Mr. Cervas. Needless to say, the journeys ahead of us will be hard, but if we remember our winters at RL—the lessons and the friendships they sowed—then I know we will tread our paths with humility, diligence, and the sweet hope that, as Aeneas told his weary crew, *forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit*: perhaps someday it will please us to remember even these trials.

I want to use whatever time I have left to recognize the Roxbury Latin community—the motley crew that has shaped the past few years of our lives and lent RL a special place in each of our hearts. When we consider what defines RL, we probably think about the academic rigor; age-old traditions like Exelauno Day or Founder’s Day; and, of course, Mr. Brennan’s mustache. But really, more than anything else, it is the dynamic of the people—our intimacy, our levity, and our interdependence—that makes me believe, beyond all doubt, that what we have done at this school is meaningful and will endure.

First, I will talk about my classmates, the 52 members of the class of 2023. They say variety is the spice of life, and if that’s true, then our class must register something like 150,000 on the Scoville spiciness scale. For reference, hallucinations can occur at around 200,000 Scoville units, which, by the way, is what Owen feels when he eats one of Chef J’s buffalo chicken tenders. Seriously, though, I am lucky to have been surrounded by a group with such a broad range of personalities and interests. I daresay there is not a single corner of school life in which the class of 2023 has not made its distinctive mark.

Not many people can bend the soccer ball like Adam, hit a baseball like Antonio, run around a track as gracefully as Kofi, or sneeze as loudly as Michael Allen. Many of you parents have been serenaded by the eight seniors in Latonics or the 40 of us in Glee Club. We've acted in musicals and plays, including a thoroughly entertaining one just last week directed by John Austin. Carter delivered an award-winning speech at the World's debate competition, and while we are on the topic of public speaking, who could forget Will Matthews' spirited attempt to convince our Boston tour guide that he was the newest recruit of the Harvard men's volleyball team? I probably could have filled these ten minutes with such examples, and I was tempted to, but that wouldn't be a complete representation of who we are.

This speech would be lacking if I did not mention the strength and gusto with which we sang *The Founder's Song* at our last Senior Concert; the time and energy we put into organizing the best May Day possible after two COVID-impacted years; or the goodwill and patience with which we assembled a school cookout. We took on our time at RL with spirit and love, resilience and good humor. The moments I'll remember most will be those in which you all exemplified those virtues, and your example has made me a better person in a thousand little ways.

However, if our body of work is impressive and this shower of congratulations well-deserved, it is only because of the faculty, or as Mr. Brennan once put it, the "connective tissue" that has binded, supported, and nurtured us for so long. Our teachers are men and women of the world. In lessons and lectures alike, they textured their vast knowledge with lived experiences. Mr. Pojman taught us all about intermolecular forces and LEO GER, and he gave us some killer chemistry pick-up lines along the way. Mr. Brown infused lively discussions about supply, demand, and externalities with a robust understanding of tax evasion. Mr. Bettendorf sharpened

our minds with his mathematical brilliance and his endless supply of hot, but unfailingly didactic takes.

I know we students like to complain about how much is expected of ourselves at RL, but our burden pales in comparison to the effort and the sheer amount of time our teachers dedicate to preparing us for life. How lucky are we to have attended a school that people like Mr. Randall, Mr. Brennan, Mr. Pojman, and Mr. Sugg deem worthy of their lives' labor, a school to which they have devoted their careers? I know we haven't always been the easiest group to work with—just ask Mr. Sokol about his BC calc class—but we are the better for our teachers' love and attention in more ways than we could express. For serving as our guides, mentors, coaches, and advisors, for being our confidants, our friends, our cheerleaders, and the best role models any student could want—one last time, thank you.

I would also like to thank our families, not just for your cheers at games and concerts or your generosity at school functions, but for dragging us out of bed when all we wanted in the world was to sleep just 30 more minutes. Thank you for keeping up with us even at the busiest of times, and for helping us, in your patented, unassuming way, through the highs and especially the lows of being a student. There is no one better at lightening our moods or checking our egos than you. The 52 brothers, sons, and grandsons graduating today will never be able to thank you enough for your role in this journey, but we will be forever grateful for your love and your sacrifices.

Over the last several weeks, graduating has been something of an ethereal idea for me. Even now, it's hard to believe that today we walked into Rousmaniere as students for the last time. Tomorrow we will wake up and, for the first time in four-to-six years, be forever free of a schoolboy's RL commitments; the thought is somewhat disorienting and unnerving. But maybe

that's a good thing, because it suggests that this place where we are known and loved will never leave us—how could it, with all the lessons, bonds, and fun moments it fostered? My only hope is that the memory of those great things remains as clear as it is today. Classmates, of all the wonderful things Roxbury Latin gave me, the greatest is you. It has been a pleasure and the highest honor to have been a part of this class of 2023, and even though this is far from good-bye, I will miss you dearly. Thank you.