

Jeff DePree - Graduation Speech

Clergy, parents, teachers, guests and fellow graduates - a few years ago, a group of students entered the halls of Cardinal Mooney unaware of what lay before them. Some approached with hope, others with apprehension, to discover what sort of education this Catholic high school had to offer. Over four short years, those youthful derelicts have been transformed into intelligent, considerate, fully-functional members of society. In the presence of God, through the support of family and friends, they have been molded into the potential business and religious leaders of tomorrow. And with this accomplished, we can finally look back upon the whole of our high school experience and celebrate that we shall never have to put up with such hardships again. Never again shall we have to show up early in the morning for several days a week for nearly two-thirds of the year, and never again shall we endure almost six hours of mind-numbing discussions and back-breaking assignments broken up by as little as one study hall and a 30-minute lunch. At times the workload has been so great that students have been forced to go without sleep for two, sometimes three class periods at a time, but we have triumphed over the adversities that have stood in our way; we have hurdled the perils and pitfalls that teachers have placed before us, and here we stand at the pinnacle of knowledge, confident that nothing shall ever compare to the trials and tribulations that have plagued this, the most recent chapter in our lives.

But what is it that lies ahead of us? What is this "real world" of which people sometimes speak? I have heard tales from college and beyond that would make writing a four minute speech appear to be the simplest task in the world. Once we step outside the walls of CMHS, we will no longer be fighting for the precarious edge between in and out of uniform, not for the final few moments before the tardy bell rings, but for our very survival. Dirty clothes will cease to simply disappear, but will instead pile up and fester in the stagnant air of the dorm room. And as we sit down to feast upon the regular meals to which we have become accustomed, we will now be lucky to find a rectangular chunk of noodles set before us; we will have to forage in the wild, pillaging the college cafeteria or preying upon the unfortunate squirrel that happens to wander across the window sill. For those of you who have for some inconceivable reason, chosen to leave the Sunshine state, a host of new challenges shall confront you. On those cold winter days here in Sarasota when the mercury threatens to drop below 70, you bundle up and do not dare to venture outside, and yet you believe you can handle the arctic chills of Georgia or Alabama? Where I'm from in the south, which is ironically about 600 miles north of here, a 60 degree day means that its time to break out the slip n' slide. Wherever we go, our schedule will no longer be as foolproof as driving across town at the same hour each day, but we will, instead, be made to groggily stumble across campus in the early hours of the afternoon. Most frightening, we will have to make a conscious decision to learn, where before we were more or less forced to show up as much as three and a half days per week, now, we will have to want to be educated so we can pursue coveted positions such as doctor, rocket scientist, or crazy guy on the street who makes balloon animals. Now we who have never been trusted to walk down a flight of stairs in backless shoes, are charged with the future of our world. So as you travel through life, steer clear of the rampant apathy and cynicism that have taken over so many movies, television shows, and graduation speeches, and live according to the principles and values that have been instilled in you here at Cardinal Mooney. You might be expecting a conclusion around this time, but I never wrote one, for you see, you mustn't think of this as the end, but as only the beginning -- that's right, you will be sitting in these same seats for at least another hour and a half. Enjoy.