

## DEL MAR MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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It is a pleasure to be here this evening, to congratulate you all on achieving another major milestone in your lives. Especially here at Del Mar Middle School, since your colors are blue and gold as well—I feel right at home. I can still *barely* remember this moment in my own life, almost forty years ago now—how many of you have heard of the Beatles? Well, when I graduated from middle school in Melbourne, Australia, the Beatles were just taking off and I recall the struggles I had with my parents about the pros and cons of having a Beatle haircut. Looking at the graduates tonight, I can see that would not be a topic of high priority today! We had vacuum tube radios—you turned them on and they had to warm up for a while—no transistors or chips. No personal computers—not for another fifteen years. No networks, no CDs, and of course no ‘IM’, no online chats or downloads.

As you graduate to High School, parents, relatives and friends will begin asking you what you plan to do—what will you emphasize in High School, what will you study in College, ‘What do you plan to be when you grow up?’ as I was often asked. You will feel pressure to make decisions and choices, in your studies and in your personal lives, and some of them you really *do* have *to* make, but I’m here to tell you that a lot of them—most of them—you don’t have to make right now.

In high school, I studied all the usual material—english, history, geography, art, a language—in my case German, science and math. I discovered I sort of liked science best—though physics more than chemistry. I was a bit better at physics too. When it came time to go to College, I chose engineering not because I wanted to be an engineer, but because it turned out that for the College I was admitted to if you studied engineering you could always transfer to science after your freshman year, but if you were admitted to physics or chemistry, you could not transfer to engineering. So by choosing engineering, I was keeping my options open, though I really had no idea what engineering was about. I picked electrical engineering—it seemed the least ‘messy’ of the engineering options. I never bothered to transfer to science—I came to enjoy engineering. In my sophomore year I started fooling with the computer they had at Melbourne University, as part of my role in a student society. One Saturday morning, as a senior, I heard an American guy shout ‘Gosh Darn!’ (smile) in the Melbourne University computer center as he was poring over a box of punched computer cards, and I asked him if I could help. I did help him, and it turned out he was a Berkeley professor visiting Melbourne, and it turned he asked me to help him some more, and before I knew it he had invited me to come to Berkeley to join him in graduate school. Seemed like a reasonable thing to do, so I did it. When I finished my Ph.D. at Berkeley, I interviewed for a variety of jobs, all across America, and I received a number of offers, including one from UC Berkeley. I asked my girlfriend which offer she preferred I take, and she told me the decision was entirely mine to make so, since we were both living in Berkeley at the time and I had a preference for the qualities of the Berkeley faculty and students, I figured that the Berkeley job would be the best choice. When I told her I had accepted the offer to join the faculty at Berkeley, she promptly told me it was the only one she couldn’t live with, and three

months later she left me! But if that hadn't happened, I might not have met Petra and certainly would not be here tonight.

The point is, I've never really had any sort of grand plan in my life. I've just tried to keep my options open and do my best to identify and work with people I respect—to learn what I could from them—and to choose to do what seems most interesting and personally challenging at the time. Of course, doing the very best you can at what you *do* choose to do is essential to keeping those options open.

The most important thing I have to say to you this evening is that, in the end, everything really comes down to the people you choose involve in your life and the kind of relationships you choose to have with them. So that's the area in which to try to make the wisest choices. Plans are good to have too, but they almost never work out the way you think they will. People—the right people—will stick with you forever. And as my nine year old daughter, Neris, reminded me this morning, the most important person of all is, of course, yourself. Finding that place within yourself where you can just sit and say 'I'm OK—I like who I am. I make mistakes some times—I may not be perfect—but I'm doing OK' is the *most* important first step. It took me many years to find that place, and only through an often-tough learning process along the way, but she *is* right. And I hope you can all find that place within yourselves too, because I know you all have it.

While many of you are sharing this special time with your friends, I'm sorry to say that as I stand here this evening, while I can still *visualize* a number of my friends from my Middle School days, I don't *know* any of them any more. Perhaps because the work you had to do in my day to keep in touch with people in a dynamic lifestyle was more than I was willing to take on. I'm not exactly sure why, but now I wish I *did* know what Malcolm McClimont, or Rob Evans, or even Lynnette Moet are up to today. Perhaps I'd like to know just because I'm human. And for some reason, I'd also like to know they are all doing well—I'm not sure why, and I know I'd be disappointed in some cases, but I would still like to know.

As I thought about this last weekend, I decided to try to track down a few of these people so a 'Googled' them. It seems Malcolm is a 12<sup>th</sup> grade math and science teacher in Maroondah, Victoria, and plays lawn bowls—and wins. At least one of his former students says Malcolm was one of the best high school teachers he ever had. Even though I can't recall much about my friends from my middle school days any more, I do remember a couple of my most influential teachers very clearly. In fact, other than my family, I would say my teachers over the years have had the most influence on my life. Not all of them, not even most of them, but a few have really stood out. And not so much for what they taught me, but for who they were, what they stood for, the example they set for me—what they meant to me in my life.

So I'm also guessing that 10 years, 20 years, or even 40 years from now you will want to know what your middle school friends are up to too—though as you look around you tonight I'm also sure many of you are wondering why you might possibly care in some cases! But you *can* keep in touch with your friends, and I'm sure *you will* do that. You will also recall special people in your lives as well—people who have helped set an example for you along the way; people you

respect, people you might call a mentor, people you have learned from, and even a few people, as Kari remarked earlier, from whom you learned very profoundly what not to do!

Why am I so sure you will keep in touch with these people? Because it will be *very* easy to do it. Because communications technology—personal computing, the Internet, and what that is certain to evolve into—will *make* it very easy to do, and so you will do it, just as I was able to track Malcolm down this weekend, but it will be much, much easier than that.

In the world of information technology, we are continually asking what is the next big application, “What’s the next Killer App?” as we say—the next Napster, the next instant messaging. Almost a decade ago now, Silicon Valley entrepreneur Pavel Curtis said “People are the real killer app. of the Internet.” and I am convinced he is *absolutely* correct and that technology will be developed to will connect people to people throughout the world that will go far beyond anything we have seen, or can even imagine today. The world you are living in today is an *entirely different* world to the one I grew up in. Your world was born thirteen years, six months, and two days ago tonight, when the wall fell in Berlin. This is a new world, a world that is about the same age as most of you are here tonight. Perhaps I should actually say this world was reborn, because the world I grew up in—the world your parents grew up in—was defined by what we called the Cold War—a world that was defined by boundaries and separation. By ‘us versus them’ and ‘whose side are you on?’

Your world, on the other hand, is defined by connections—‘who are you connected to?’ and ‘who can you collaborate with?’; ‘Who are your friends?’; ‘How can you help one another?’ These are relationships built on a two-way exchange and, ideally, relationships of mutual trust and respect. While the Cold War was defined by the power of your weapons, this new world is defined by how much bandwidth you have. And, of course, some important consequences of this global rebirth were brought clearly into focus in September last year.

So this world is *your* world—it’s no longer mine, or the world of your parents. With the help of like-minded people, with the help of modern technologies, you really have the opportunity to make this world into one that you want it to be. A world that puts *people* ahead of politics, ahead of hatred and of envy. So who *are* you connected to?—you’re connected to *everyone!* Eventually, to everyone on this planet.

So have a great summer and don’t worry *too* much about what is next, because so long as you have your friends, as long as you like and respect who you are and keep your options open, it will work out some how. It has for me so far! And remember, ‘People are the killer app of the Internet’ and of your life as well.

I’m going to send Malcolm McClimont an email tonight—I hope he remembers who *I* am. Very best of luck to you all. Thank you, and *Go Bears!*