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Welcome to you all here this evening. I wish to thank all the parents, grandparents, and friends for making this culminating moment in your daughters' and sons' lives possible.

I wish to thank all the faculty and staff who have helped these students grow, thrive, and learn at Riverdale. Thank you for your hard work and support of these fine people.

I would like to recognize two people who have mentored this class in special ways. Dr. Nicholson-Flynn aka KNF is a great head of the Upper School. She has encouraged many of you and made your time, in more ways than I can count, special at Riverdale. Naturally, we need to thank your dean, Julie Choi, who has shepherded you gracefully through these last years. Let's give them a special round of thanks.

Finally, I want to thank the splendid Class of 2015 for their leadership, the way that they have all challenged us and made us better people. Thank you and congratulations to the great Class of 2015.

I'd like to share some thoughts with you. I speak very briefly at graduation so this is the last time I will have an opportunity to talk with you all. I have put it all on a postcard that I made for you.



I will begin with delta, the first part of the formula and the scientific symbol for change. Change is the only real thing I can predict for you all. A world that is ever changing, dynamic, volatile and different. At times, that is exciting. At other times, it is daunting.

The other day, I said to faculty colleagues while celebrating Mr. Ron Murison's 25 years of service to the school that I only aspire to be him. I dream of being Mr. Murison. To be honest (sorry Ron) that was a lie. I aspire to be a mixture of Ron Murison and David Bowie. Kris, my wife, and I happened to be in Chicago in the autumn and were lucky to see the "David Bowie Is" exhibition traveling around the world. It reminded me of one of my very favorite songs, *Changes*, and that song relates directly to the first point I am making about change:

*Still don't know what I was waiting for
And my time was running wild
A million dead-end streets and
Every time I thought I'd got it made
It seemed the taste was not so sweet
So I turned myself to face me*

Change is important to making things happen, but it is also through processes of change that we turn “to face” ourselves and understand who we are.



I think about how things have changed for my family, how those changes have made myself “turn to face me” and how they have affected my understanding of our world:

- In 1917, my grandmother lived in Belgium and saw the first planes flying across the fields near Leuven.
- In 1944, my grandfather, who was one of a family of 24 children and had been a professional boxer and trainer, had his gymnasium in Hammersmith destroyed by the first armed rockets called V-1s that were bombing London.
- In 1953, after immigrating to the States with some dollars and dreams on an Italian freighter, my mother ran a bookshop and hung out with Margaret Mead, Jackson Pollock and Elaine Kaufmann in the exciting NYC of the '50s. She was stretching the idea of what it meant to be an independent working woman in a city that was changing rapidly.
- My aunt worked to bring Montessori education to a public school for deaf children in New Jersey in the 1960s and got her Ph.D. in her 50s – certainly the model of a lifelong learner.
- My father, whose family motto funnily enough is “Change or Decay,” was head of a company, Wilkinson Sword, which actually made swords and razor blades. It started in 1772. The sword factory was disbanded and sold in 2005. Wilkinson Sword only really remains as a trademark.
- When I was in university in the '80s, I was singing and etching and studying, but I could go to a room for the first time full of terminals and type papers on a basic word processor. I had to pay 25 cents for an hour's use. Otherwise, I would type papers on an electronic typewriter back in my room. Since I didn't even have email or a cellphone then, I am really not sure how I made plans with my friends. I think I just stood outside of their rooms until they appeared.
- In your lifetimes, you have seen us move from communicating via crude technology to having these devices manage our lives and offer us impressive means to communicate. People now find their potential

partners for room mating, carpooling or marriage with a watch. What will come next?

From early planes to wearable computers in just over a 100 years. It is a lot to take in and understand.

Heraclitus, whom you have probably studied in your time here, was a pre-Socratic thinker who lived in Ephesus in present-day Turkey. He was fixated on change and character. He coined the phrase “panta rhei” roughly translated as “Ever-newer waters flow on those who step into the same rivers.” Change is an inevitable part of our world. And yet, we are not brilliant about understanding change. So I hope that in your time at Riverdale, you have come to start to understand how change happens and how it affects you; I also hope that you have come to embrace change positively and develop the skills necessary to thrive under changing conditions, especially now as you move on to new adventures and experiences; but, most of all, I hope that you have come to understand how YOU can make change happen. That life doesn’t happen to you, but you happen to life.

The delta symbol is composed of two elements the base, and two sides that form an apex. I’d like to talk about these elements as they relate to my fantastic formula on the postcard.



The base is a foundation. I hope that at Riverdale you have developed a good base or foundation from which to develop and grow. What is that base composed of? Well, certainly it is both knowledge and skills. It is also habits of mind like how to ask a good question or evaluate the credibility of evidence. I also know that you have developed habits of heart and community. We talk a lot about character, and I can hear your groans – “not again” – but as Heraclitus also says, “Character is fate,” and, “Good character is not formed in a week or a month. It is created little by little, day by day. Protracted and patient effort is needed to develop good character.” I do believe that you have grappled with what it really means to respect others, to empathize with people very different from yourselves, what it means to truly persevere in light of failure. This grappling has no real answers, but it takes you on a journey. It takes you on a journey to the third element on my postcard. If you turn the triangle upside down you have an “evergreen” V for values.



I hope that you have started to develop values that allow you to make the right decisions in your lives. Sometimes I think we talk about values rather flippantly or just assume that they are a given, something you have or acquire: silent genetic morals. In some ways that is the problem with “values.” They are often tacit or assumed. I have been proud to see you all raise values to a conscious level and to question some of these tacit values in your own minds and in our collective consciousness. What does it really mean to be a human being and what rights do you have as in different types of situations? Should our sexual identity lead to different rights and privileges in our country? How can it be that black lives seem to matter less than others? You have been leaders in raising these questions and others these last years. I hope you keep doing that, but I also hope that you understand values are not a right, nor a privilege, they are principles that evolve and carry responsibility. Having a value is not enough. Exercising values, prototyping values in action and refining one’s values like a “values designer” is the way that values truly develop. You have to fight for values. So I hope you continue to develop your values and use them in your lives in exciting and ethical ways.

All of this leads me to the last symbol... by turning the triangle on its side you have the “greater than” symbol from mathematics, the arrow pointing in a direction moving forward. For me, a sign of purpose.



Why? Why do values matter? Obviously collective values are important for our society, but why should they matter to you at this time in your life? The research is very clear. Making money won’t make you happy. Being famous or beautiful will not make you happy. They may make you happy for a moment, but that instant joy will not be long lasting. As Bill Damon, a psychologist at Stanford writes in his book *The Path to Purpose*: “What does matter for happiness is engaging in something that the person finds absorbing, challenging, and compelling, especially when it makes a valued contribution to the world beyond the self.” So you should be asking “why” to what you are doing at every moment. Why am I taking this course? Why am I friends with these people and does that resonate with whom I really am? Why am I doing what I am doing? Your values along with a foundation of knowledge and skills give you fertile ground to find your own ever-evolving purpose in life.

As Thomas Carlyle wrote, “A person without purpose is like a ship without a rudder.” So how do you find purpose? Ask “why” as I mentioned above in a reflective ongoing way is one important step. Stating your purpose is another.

Your college application got you to think about purpose. You really need to think about how you can state, revise and reiterate your purpose in ongoing ways. I bet you that if I asked many people in this room their purpose, they could not give me a good concise answer. We all need to think about what is our “pitch for purpose.” Some of you have done this in your senior speeches. Some of you live your purpose in ways where it is clear and also evolving. I hope that you can keep thinking about what your purpose is, how, at times, you need to pivot and find a new purpose and how you can communicate your purpose to others as it develops and deepens.

You also have to do something. So much of life can be passive and done to one. We just go through routines and complain. I would argue that taking action is so important. Education, schools and universities can be mainly about passively listening and absorbing. I would argue that they should also be about doing. How can I take what I am learning and do something with it? Again, it does not have to be what you do for the rest of your life. It is provisional. Take action, make change happen as I said above, and see what happens. The act of doing is an act that will help you find and sharpen purpose in your life, and by finding your unique meaning and purpose in your life you will be happier.

Finally, purpose, as Bill Damon writes, is found “beyond the self.” Purpose is really only found through interacting with others. You have shown what you can do collectively. You have argued, debated, forgiven each other, grappled, collaborated, worked with each other over the years and this has been great practice in finding purpose. Continue your learning of the science and art of collaboration since that will be essential to finding your own purpose.

So as you leave Riverdale and move on to the next promising phases of your life, remember change and how you have made change happen; remember the foundation you have begun to build here and build off it; remember the values that guide your actions and allow yourself to surface and examine your values regularly; and finally, go on a journey to find your purpose, your direction in life. It may require some good meandering, some fruitful detours, some dead ends even, but if you think and go looking for it you will find it, or it will find you.



Yesterday, I was at the memorial service for Ed Gilligan, the father of Kevin who graduated a while ago and Shane, who is a junior. Ed certainly had purpose and he loved the rock music that I love as well. I began with Bowie. I will end with a Beatles song that was quoted yesterday, the last song they recorded together. Finally, as you search for your purpose in this world remember as the Beatles sing in *The End*:

*And in the end
The love you take
Is equal to the love
You make.*

Best of luck and thank you for all you have done for our school, for our community, and for me personally.