

Be bold. Be brave. Be kind. And, be on your way.

Webetuck High School Commencement Address

Marcus J. Molinaro

June 23, 2012

Webetuck High School, class of 2012, congratulations!

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share this special moment in your life with you, your families and friends. You should be proud of your accomplishments and know that what you have learned here at Webetuck will prepare you for what lies ahead.

It was American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson who wrote, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” It is how we approach life’s challenges, how we make decisions, how we treat one another, that defines who we are and the impact we will have on the world around us.

Be bold. There is boldness within you, class of 2012, so be bold.

I was just 18 years old when I decided to run for public office, in fact I had to ask permission from my mother. I ran because I wanted to make a difference, have a positive impact on my community, and change for the better the world around me.

While I understand that holding public office is not for everyone, there are many ways in which you can get involved and be passionate about the things you believe in.

Sure, this is the time for you to enjoy and celebrate your life, (and I know I stand between you and many graduation parties), but it is also time for you to make it significant. You need only to find the right moment, take advantage of the perfect occasion, and make use of the talents and skills you possess to make a real difference.

Remember... Complacency rights no wrong. Apathy overcomes no ill. Ignoring a problem solves no problem. We need you, your generation, to roll-up your sleeves, get involved, help your neighbors in need, and together build and rebuild a community to be proud of.

Be brave. There is courage within you, class of 2012, so be brave.

Do not be frightened by that which you do not understand.

Two years ago, Dr. Jerri Nielsen lost her battle with breast cancer. You may not readily know her name, you may only vaguely recall her story, but it is her struggle and insight that ought to leave a lasting impression.

Jerri Neilson was the sole physician for the forty-one person research team at Amundsen-Scott South Pole Research Station. At forty-seven she found a lump in her breast in the winter of 1999.

Rescue from the South Pole was not an option. Because of the extreme weather conditions the station was off limits to the outside world. She was left with no choice. An emergency room doctor from Cleveland, Ohio, Nielson performed a biopsy on herself. She treated herself with the anti-cancer drugs delivered to her during a gripping airdrop by a United States Air Force plane in blackout, freezing conditions.

Rescued by the National Guard, when it was finally warm enough to chance the flight – 58 degrees below zero – Dr. Jerri Neilson returned to the United States where she underwent multiple surgeries. The cancer went into remission until 2005.

“More and more,” she wrote in an e-mail to her parents from the South Pole in 1999, “as I am here and see what life really is, I understand that it is not when or how you die but how and if you were truly alive.”

More recently, before her death, she said: “I had a romantic notion that adventures happened in another time, but not in our time. Now I realize there are always adventures in life. That’s what life is.”

Be kind. There is compassion within you, class of 2012, so be kind.

There are many people that need you; there are many people counting on you. Look around you; you see many of them here with us today. Most importantly, though, there are so many who, by extending a simple gesture of kindness you can impact for a lifetime.

I know one young girl who continues her journey through the public education system and counts on others for support. Despite the love she receives from her family, compassion exhibited by her teachers and opportunities presented her throughout her life, she will always have difficulties.

She was born with a disability. The loss of oxygen at birth caused damage to her brain. Her motor skills are slower, speech jumbled, attention span limited and she lives on the Autism Spectrum.

Since January of 2007 every two weeks she experiences a seizure. She has too often visited the hospital, yet, is an amazing young girl, whose desire to learn is only overshadowed by her genuine compassion for others.

As she continues her travels upon this earth, some will tell her that she can’t accomplish certain things. They will be wrong.

As a student, some classmates may choose to pick on her, make jokes or avoid her. They will have missed an opportunity get to know a terrific young lady.

Her name is Abigail. And she is my daughter.

She is a lot like you. Creativity and curiosity are deep within her. Nothing in her eyes is impossible and the horizon is limitless. What lies within her is special and she has a positive impact on everyone she interacts with. She is brave. She is bold. She is kind. She makes a difference in the lives of others.

Within each of you, whether you believe it or not, if you accept it or not, is the spark necessary to redefine, for your generation and those who follow the very course of our society – and to improve the lives of those around you. The possibilities are limitless.

With that in mind, let me share with you one last lesson, written by my daughter's favorite author and one of America's finest philosophers and fantastic explorers... Theodor Geisel... Dr. Seuss.

(Dr. Seuss: Oh, the places you'll go!)

Use what is within you to make the friends, family, community and world around you better. And, always ask yourselves, "what will I do to make a difference?"

My answer:

Be bold. Be brave. Be kind. And, be on your way.

God Bless you, and congratulations Webutuck High School, class of 2012!