

Acquired Taste — Speech Copy

Like a guardian angel for the school, one quote hovers above us all: “Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” I find this ironic. Ironic because we drag our shovels to fill our leaky pails. Ironic because we smother the struggling fire. Ironic because many of us Barlow students *hate* school.

I mean, it’s the same thing every day, isn’t it? An overflowing daily agenda of stoichiometry problems or MUSQing articles or doing trigonometric proofs. It’s long, boring, repetitive — something the average high schooler hates.

And, in addition, the stigma of high school gives students even less reason to stay interested in class: significant others commanding time, fights and drug busts, video games in class. Unmotivation envelopes the academics of my peers, winning over school for attention and time. As a result, as many as two-fifths of students are “chronically disengaged,” according to the National Research Council (Crotty).

It’s like being forced to eat vegetables before dessert. It’s a *corny* metaphor, but school is one necessary vegetable to nourish us. But more than ever, we’re “dieting”: skimping on school, which might often seem a disgusting vegetable.

But school is an acquired taste. It’s very possible to like it. Ideally, we all would have built up an appreciation for school so that good “nutrition” is a matter of enjoyment, not tolerance.

The problem is, I don’t believe that many students have experienced the intrinsic *joy* in learning buried under worksheets, papers, exams. The Land of Opportunity robs us, quite ironically, of opportunity, a shield from realities and a mask over the blessing in education. “Winging” school to avoid effort is inconsequential.

To be honest, school often tires me too, especially writing essays. So when I began drafting this speech, the blinking cursor wasn’t enthusiastic. The empty page stared me down. My mind wandered elsewhere. Therefore, I took a little break.

But the break lasted a week.

And a week later, I was distracted again, going to program a Chrome extension and calculate a million digit number and even close-read a math textbook. The dread, the frustration, the hate of writing essays returned every time I neared the speech.

And then came April break bundled with disgust at my inaction. So I got to it. I wrote. Just kept writing. And some hours of furious keypresses later, my creative progeny sprung from a tired mind.

This struck me: just a few hours produced more than *fruitless* deliberation of *weeks*. For once, I had taken the initiative to do it myself and had felt the fun in the process of writing to figure out. Always had freewriting been to fill up paper and grades. Here I was with this indestructible *tool* of freewriting always on my person to hammer

out problems relevant to me. It was a skill— born from school, for myself. *This* is what school's all about.

But, you might ask, aren't they more important?

Well, they matter. A few years ago, I would have used this effort to score points rather than to discover for myself. I got "good grades," I was a "good student," I "learned" a lot. It worked well for me. And I, like many of my fellow classmates, thought grades were synonymous with success. Therefore, grades were my motivator. A sort of reward. But now, people cheat, cram, do more than necessary to boost grades for the short term, drinking metaphorical energy drinks and dreading the crash. Where's the motivator in that? And just look at the statistics: according to a study by *Challenge Success*, seven out of ten high-performing teenage students have chronic stress, a quarter depression, and seven percent attempted suicide (Carter, "Did you know? — High School Statistics"). Statistically speaking, this means one person from our class will attempt suicide for school's sake. For grades' sake.

I then realized that that A's and good colleges are false positives for success. That grades inevitably disappear, as well as our childish passions. How many puppy loves will last a decade? What good are dozen year-old video games? What satisfaction will a drug-related disease earn you when you know you could've earned a better life from learning, from discovering? And learning *doesn't* end. It's a virtuous cycle, powered by the maxim: "the more you know, the less you know"—once the spark is lit, every epiphany will fan the brilliant blaze.

Thus I lit my fire and threw away my pail, as the illusion of school as a dull job of aimless passions was no longer.

In a country in which, according to a survey, only two percent of high school students are always interested in school and two-thirds are "bored" (Bryner), know that learning doesn't come naturally. Learning is for *you*. By *you*.

Go seek those moments when something resonates with you. Stops you for a moment. Gives you an *Aha!* You could be doing anything — doodling, writing, running, coding, bowling — anything. So don't let me catch you idle, not learning, the defeating "hate" of school getting to you. And once you stumble upon the flow of learning, just catch on and never let go. Oh, the places you'll go!