

Fellow classmates, today is an important day in all of our lives. As we gather here to celebrate more than a decade of long, hard years of learning, we're surrounded by all of the people who taught and inspired us throughout our lives. Parents, family members, and teachers, you have all been instrumental in our education. As we leave this campus and move onto the next chapters of our lives, we will carry with us not only the book learning, but also the life lessons you taught us. One thing you all instilled in us was the need to challenge conventional wisdom and search for our own answers. So, with all due respect, I'd like to take this opportunity to set the record straight on a few of the more questionable lessons I've been taught thus far.

Dad, let's start with you. If there's one message I've heard from you time and time again, it's the infamous words "money doesn't grow on trees." Well, I beg to differ. A Toronto-based organization called Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests, or LEAF, has developed a calculator to compute the financial benefits of having a tree on your property. By cleaning the air, providing shade, and soaking up storm water, trees can lower pollutants, energy demand, and sewer treatment costs. According to calculations, a single strategically placed silver maple could save the average homeowner around \$21 a year in cooling costs. That equates to about 3 of the movie tickets you denied me over the years due to your misinformation.

Mom, it turns out that you were a bit misguided as well. Going out in wintry weather without wearing a coat won't actually cause a cold. Colds and flus are caused by viruses. While we do seem to contract colds more often during the winter, this is more than likely because we spend more time indoors in close quarters with other people and their germs. However, cold temperatures by themselves can not actually make us sick.

And finally, teachers, I understand that you certainly meant well when you so often advised us that we needed to finish school, or we would never amount to anything. Consider, if you will, a few of the country's most successful businessmen who never even earned a high school diploma. We all know Walt Disney, the man behind the mouse. He dropped out of high school at age 16 and later became one of the best-known movie producers in the world. Likewise, Milton Hershey, founder of Hershey's Milk Chocolate, only achieved a fourth grade education.

In all seriousness, while a college education may not be essential to a successful career, it certainly can't hurt. On behalf of the Class of 2013, I'd like to extend our sincere appreciation to our teachers and administrators for your dedication. We haven't always been the easiest group to handle, but you somehow got us all this far. To our Moms and Dads and all of our family and friends, thank you for your support throughout our lives. You've taught us more than any formal education ever could. We go out into the world with confidence and readiness because of all of your combined efforts. Thank you for the lessons you all taught us, and thank you for teaching us to think for ourselves. We are forever grateful. No matter where we go or what we do in this great big world, we promise never to forget that we owe it all to you. We also promise not to go around making weird faces at people, lest our faces get stuck that way.

Congratulations Class of 2013!