

Class of 1965 Reunion Graduation Ceremony

October 10, 2015

Good afternoon and Welcome. My name is Tim Farmer, and I am your superintendent of schools. While I have worked in Sharon for eight years, this is my fifth year as superintendent. I have been looking forward to this event for the past several weeks. I always enjoy events that celebrate our Town and our school system, and I especially enjoy events that celebrate our students...in this case grown students.

Before we transition into today's program, please stand and join me in watching and listening to the Sharon High School Select Choir as the members sing our National Anthem.

Thank you. As I'm sure each of you knows, Sharon High School has a rich history and many proud traditions. Part of our recent history is the 2011 recognition received by Sharon High School as a National Blue Ribbon School. The Blue Ribbon School program is run by the Department of Education in Washington D.C., and fewer than 5% of the public, private, and charter schools in the country can claim the title of National Blue Ribbon School. Coincidentally, Sharon happens to have two Blue Ribbon Schools as East Elementary also received the honor in 2014. Among other things, these honors are based on sustained student achievement and academic growth.

I could go on and on about the accomplishments of our students and of our school system, but for now let's transition away from 2015 and take a look back to 1965.

Show slides two through nine (2 – 9)

While I fully understand that events in our country and around the world were in turmoil in 1965, in this retrospective I chose to focus on the more positive aspects of your senior year in high school. Thinking along those lines, in a few minutes I'm going to ask if anyone would like to come to the podium to share a brief but important story about a Sharon Public School teacher – anywhere on the K – 12 continuum - whom you feel had a positive impact on your life. So please be thinking while I take one minute to share an example from my early primary days.

My kindergarten teacher was Mrs. Pauline Morrison. At the time of my kindergarten experience Mrs. Morrison was a middle-aged woman raising her family in my hometown of Lubec, Maine. As you might imagine, as a five-year-old I was a little pudgy. I guess the more things change the more they stay the same. Anyway, during the cold Maine winters I had a tremendously bulky winter jacket with a zipper that just never worked quite right for me. Consequently, whether it was time for recess or time to go home, I always needed Mrs. Morrison's help to zipper my jacket. The manner in which she approached this help was to stand behind me, reach around me from behind, and just as the zipper was snug under my chin, she would give me a little hug. My parents and I called that jacket the "hugging" jacket for my entire kindergarten and first grade

experience, and while I know Mrs. Morrison taught me how to read and how to do basic mathematical operations, what I remember most about her is her hug as she helped me zip my winter jacket. I will spare you the details of stories from my 1st through 12th grade experience, but I can absolutely recall each teacher I had, and I have favorite stories about each.

Invite participants to the podium to share a story.

Thank you for sharing your stories. I hope the stories brought back fond memories of the educators who were tremendously influential in shaping the person you became during and after your public school experience, as well as the person you are today.

Let's take a break for a brief musical interlude. During the past few months I have seen a few emails sent to the listserv of people attending your class reunion, and in one of those emails, I saw the Sharon High School school song. Forgive me, because I don't remember who it was among your class who shared the song, but I have to tell you that no one I have spoken with since even knew we had a Sharon High School song.

Therefore, I'm not 100% confident that this musical interlude will be sung to the right tune, but I still hope you enjoy listening to the current Sharon High School Select Choir singing your school song. Let's listen.

Superintendent's Remarks to the Graduating Class of 1965

To the Class of 1965, Congratulations! In the next few minutes you will become two-time graduates of Sharon High School. Back in 1965, I have every confidence that your families, friends, teachers, and administrators were extremely proud of you for all that you had done to earn the distinction of becoming an alumni of Sharon High. I know many of you were in the school system since kindergarten; others joined somewhere along the educational journey between kindergarten and twelfth grade. Regardless of when you officially joined your class, please know how honored I am to be able to convene this graduation ceremony and to recognize you as a bright, inquisitive, inspired, and close-knit class.

In anticipation of what I would say to your class, the Class of 1965, I decided to steal a few snippets of past graduation speeches I have written for Sharon High School students. For example, last June I told the seniors that I had been ruminating for weeks about what message a 39 year old – yes, I said 39 – could impart to teenagers that would resonate and live with them for years to come. I worried that my perspective as a 41 year old – yes, I said 41 – would differ significantly from someone so much younger. Before I started to write my 2015 graduation speech, the class advisors told me that the graduation speech writing contest was based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s famous quote found in the 1892 book, A Case of Identity, and the quote is “It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the most important.” Well, that was the starter that I needed to create a bridge between the 17 and 18 years olds in the Class of 2015 and this 43 year old. Yes, I said 43.

To the Class of 1965, I am convinced that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was correct in his assertion about the little things being most important in life. After all, if the little things we do for others are often the things most fondly remembered by others, then a vigorous argument can be made that it is these small actions or deeds that truly matter most in the long run. So, from the perspective of a 45 year old, please allow me to share a few of the “little things” in life that I feel contribute to good living and that I also suspect have been long held beliefs of your generation as you graduated from high school, pursued post secondary education, the military, or the world of work, raised families, welcomed grandchildren into the world, and/or simply enjoyed life in whatever form made you happy. In the style of the recently retired David Letterman, host of television’s the Late Show, I’ve arranged a Top 10 list of “little things” that have mattered most to me in my 47 years, and I hope they resonate with you, as well.

Number 10: A smile will get you much further in life than a scowl.

Number 9: Good humor and good friends are an unbeatable combination.

Number 8: A little kindness goes a long way...to your friends, to your family, and to those who may need a little lift in life.

Number 7: Say “thank you” as often as possible. Not only do others appreciate hearing your gratitude, but I believe saying “thank you” creates an internal mindset and sense of comfort that will serve you well.

Number 6: Use your manners. They matter. Whether it’s simply following the rules of the road or using social media to send your message to the world, in my 49 years – yes, I said 49 – I’ll say it again, manners matter.

Number 5: Appreciate a good sunrise or sunset. Bad weather and bad news are plentiful enough in life; take time to marvel at the wonders of the universe.

Number 4: Speaking of wonder, take more time to wonder more often. Wonder about nature. Wonder about the myriad technological advances that have surfaced just in your lifetime, and wonder what's yet to come. Simply wonder.

Number 3: Read often and read widely. Enough said.

Number 2: Celebrate you. I know full well that it's trite to say, but it's also true. There is only one you and you know better than anyone else the goodness that is in you.

Celebrate, and show, that goodness often.

Number 1: In my 51 years, I have come to realize that family matters most. I lost a sister when she was a sophomore in high school and I was in middle school. I lost all of my grandparents before I was a senior in college. I've lost my dad. I've lost seven aunts and uncles. Each of these losses has influenced the person I am today, as well as my firm belief that family matters most. Unlike the Class of 2015, you have had fifty years beyond high school to create, celebrate, and immerse yourself in family life. I suspect that over the next few days each of you will tell hilarious, heartwarming, and celebratory stories about your lives and perhaps about your families. As you do, keep your sense of humor, be kind to others listening and keep the stories short but interesting, say "thank you" for sharing your stories, use your manners, enjoy a beautiful fall sunrise or sunset during the next few days, read a good book, and join your friends in celebrating Sharon High School's Class of 1965.

Again, congratulations to the Class of 1965 on this event, your fiftieth anniversary of your graduation. After you leave this event today, I know you will be reunited with a few

of your former teachers and I ask you to take a moment to fulfill the promise of a “little thing” in life and extend your own, personal “thank you” to one or more of those former teachers. Like my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Morrison, I have every confidence that your teachers cared deeply about each of you. So, in closing, I have one final declaration to make and that is, “...age is just a number.” Take it from a 53 year old – and that’s the truth – you are never too old, or too young to appreciate, acknowledge and celebrate the little things in life. My thanks and sincerest best wishes to each of you!