

Jeffrey
Hollender '73:
*Socially
Conscious
Entrepreneur*



Previous page: Morgan Woolsey, Annette Frost and Kim Chisholm model the latest in oxen driving fashion during the senior parade.

THANK YOU ALL. It's an honor to speak to you today and an unusual challenge as well. You can all feel great that you've accomplished something that I was never able to accomplish which is to graduate from this school. So, I commend you for that.

As I try to think back to what it was like when I was a few years away from where you're sitting today, and I must say it's a little hard for me to remember, but what I do remember is what was happening in the world around us. In 1969, just before I started coming to school here, Nixon began bombing Cambodia. In that year news of the My Lai massacre reaches the U.S. Massive anti-war demonstrations in D.C. resound the spirit of the tensions in the air. In fact, one of my most memorable experiences of being at Putney was going on a bus to the demonstrations in Washington. It was in 1970, when the killings at Kent State took place. Also in 1970, we had 280,000 troops in Vietnam. In 1971 the Pentagon Papers were published in *The New York Times* about the legacy of deception concerning U.S. policy in Vietnam, on the part of the military and the executive branch. It was in 1972 when the B-52 bombings in Hanoi and Haiphong and the break-in at the Watergate Hotel happened. Nixon was reelected that year. And finally, in 1973, the cease-fire is signed in Paris and the end of the draft was announced. And the last American troops left Vietnam.

I don't say this on such a wonderful day to depress you. But we live in challenging times. Beyond the war in Iraq, your generation faces being part of a country that has lost the respect of much of the world. Certainly, the business community that I live in is held in the lowest esteem by the public. We face global warming and a massive number of other environmental challenges. And, the disparity between rich and poor has never been greater.

In spite of all that, I am an optimist. And I'd like, if you would indulge me, to ask the graduating class a question. I'd like to get a sense of how many of you believe that you can make the world a better place? Do you believe you can do that?

AUDIENCE: Whoa! [Applause]

Well, whether you believe me or not, the answer is that you can. I have spent my life trying to make the world a better place and I know first-hand that if you believe you can, you will. The greatest challenge that we face today is the cynicism that we can't make a difference. And when I worry about our future, I worry about the generations to come who won't have the conviction that they can make the world a better place. So, if I leave you with anything today it's the hope that, if you don't already believe it, that you'll spend some time reevaluating that opportunity and experiment with the strengths that you have and the wisdom you have and the passion you have to make a positive difference.

In my career, and I'm a lot older than I look, two things, I think, matter most. One is that we figure out the values that we want to live our life by. I know that doesn't sound like something that's very exciting—I know when my dad used to talk to me about values my eyes would glaze over. But, truly, values do matter and I want to talk about them in a moment. The second thing that I've learned is that making a difference in the world matters. And those are the two things that I think matter most.

I want to tell you just a brief story about values because one of the things that I learned is that, in some ways when I was graduating from high school, I was clearer on my values than I was ten or twenty years later in my life. Life is certainly not a straight line. We often get off course in our lives. One of my most memorable experiences that changed my life was when I read Ivan Illich's book *Deschooling Society*. It was then that I said, "That's what I want to do." I wanted to start a skills exchange that was a model of education right off of the pages of Illich's book. I was incredibly passionate, politically and socially. And that was all of what my life was about. Then, all of a sudden,

I got to the age of 25 and I asked myself, "What am I doing?" You know, I should be making money. All of this social stuff is great, but maybe it's more fun, and matters more, to make money.

So I started this business, which I later sold to Warner Communications. It was an adult education company of a very different kind. We taught courses on how to make sushi, on how to invest in real estate, on the art of flirting. Our most famous course was called How to Marry Money. It taught young men and women how to find other young men and women with a lot of money. Week after week after week we had auditoriums filled with 300 to 500 people who came to this course. We were making a lot of money teaching this class. I ended up on *The Phil Donahue Show* talking about the course with the woman who actually taught the course, Joanna Syking, Edwin Syking's wife. She claimed that marrying him was, in fact, marrying money. The audience thought that sounded cynical and let us know in no uncertain terms.

So, there I was on *The Phil Donahue Show* being attacked by the audience. They were standing up and they were screaming and saying, "What a terrible thing! What an unethical thing you're doing!" I walked off the stage and said, "My God, they're right. How did I get from where I was to here? How did I get so far off the path of what matters to me?" I walked off the stage and I said, "I've got to stop doing this. I've got to sell this business. I've got to find my way back to where I was headed five or ten years ago." And that's what I did. I sold the business and wrote a book called, *How to Make the World a Better Place*. I wrote the book from my own personal exploration on how I can make a difference in the world. And, thank God, since then I've been mostly on course—not always on course, but mostly on course.

Values are something that Seventh Generation has focused on in a very explicit fashion. We focus, as a company, on six values: trust, leadership, community, growth, service and social environmental responsibility. In many ways I feel very privileged to have a company that is focused as much on living these values as it is on making money. I really believe that the pursuit of what you believe in and the pursuit of values is ultimately the way to succeed at anything you do, whether it's being a musician or an artist or being in business. It is the passionate obsession for doing what is right and it's what we believe has led to the success of Seventh Generation.

We have a value at the company about personal growth because we think that growth is a life-long pursuit and that people, even people my age and older, still need to grow and still need to learn, and we want to support that. We say personal growth means ensuring the opportunity for each member of our community to experience the growth and fulfillment that is crucial to developing a sense of belonging and a sense of responsibility. Ultimately, supporting personal growth will help lead to the success of the company. We talk about community and needing to create a work place that embraces respect, dignity, trust, honesty, communication, open minds and hearts, fun, playfulness and a spirit of willing participation. And, we also talk about social and environmental responsibility. We take responsibility for our imprint on the planet and our communities while producing successful, financial results.

I would encourage all of you, as you move through your lives, to not separate the things that you value from the work that you do. Find a way to bring your values into your work, whether you work at a company or work as an artist. Don't separate and compartmentalize those parts of your lives. And if you're going to work for someone else, try to make sure that whoever it is or

Jeffrey Hollender's book in the hand of Erica Reed '04, embracing Amanda Sibbison-Alves '04, says it all: *What Matters Most*.



whatever the company is that it reflects the values that you live by. Life is short and you'll spend a lot of your time working. Life is too precious to spend working for a company, an organization or doing anything that doesn't reflect your values and what you believe in.

And the last thing I want to touch on is the opportunity you have for making a difference in the world. You will make a difference in the world if you live by your values because the way you live your life will touch other people and change the experience they have of their own lives. And that's certainly critical. But we also are consumers and voters, and we live a social and political and economic life. I think it's critical that we make a difference in that part of our lives, too. And, although it may sound self-serving coming from me, choose everything that you buy carefully. Every time you take out your credit card or you take out your wallet you're voting for a company and the values of that company. Know *whom* you support. Try to use those expenditures in a way that will impact the world in a positive way. I know it's sometimes hard to find out which companies are good. There's a wonderful website you can go to called IdealsWork dot com [www.idealswork.com] where you can check off that you care about human rights, you care about women's issues, you care about the environment, and so on, and it will rate the companies for you that do the best job and the worst job in those areas. You can now know in a matter of 30 seconds what companies you can support.

I would also say, judging from watching your entrance, that you've been trying to speak up and let people know how you feel. Don't stop doing that. If five of you or ten of you send your thoughts and your feelings to the same place, people pay attention. If I get five consumers complaining about the same thing, I know I have a great problem on my hands. You might not think people in corporations pay attention but they do. They can't afford not to. So be vocal. Let companies know what you think. Let non-profits know what you think. Let politicians know what you think. Take a couple of minutes every day to share those thoughts and feelings.

We have to participate. We need to vote. In my opinion, you're living in a time when we are coming up to what I think is the most crucial election that this country has ever had in its history. I won't make partisan statements, but what I will say is that it is critically important that all of us who *can* vote *do* vote. And that we make sure that everybody we know is registered to vote and participates in the process. Having a country where less than half of us vote is a crisis unto itself. It's not going to take a lot more people participating in this election to make a positive difference.

I want to end by reading an excerpt from a book by Anna Quinlan called *The Short Guide to a Happy Life*. "I suppose the best piece of advice I could give to anyone is pretty simple. Get a life. A real life—not a manic pursuit of the next promotion, a bigger paycheck, a larger house. Get a life in which you notice the smell of salt water pushing itself on a breeze over the dunes. A life in which you stop and watch how a red-tailed hawk circles over the water gap. Get a life in which you pay attention to a baby as she scowls with concentration as she tries to pick up a Cheerio with her thumb and first finger. Turn off your cell phone, turn off your regular phone, for that matter keep still and listen! Get a life in which you are not alone. Find people you love and who love you. And remember that love is not a leisure, it is work. Each time I look at my diploma I remember that I am still a student. Still learning everyday to be human. Send an e-mail, write a letter, kiss your mom, hug your dad. Get a life in which you are generous. Look around at the azaleas making sudden starbursts in the spring. Look at a full moon hanging silver in a black night. And realize that life is glorious. And that you have no business taking it for granted. Care so deeply about its goodness that you want to spread it around. Take the money that you would have spent on beer in a bar and give it to charity. Work in a soup kitchen. Tutor a seventh grader. All of you want to do well. But if you do not do good, too, then doing well will never be enough. Life is short. Remember that, too."

Thank you very much. Congratulations. And it's a privilege to be here.



Martin Crook receives his hand-painted diploma from Director Brian Morgan as the class of 2004 cheers. See all of the 2004 diplomas in color on our website at www.putneyschool.org.



Stephanie Power and Alejandra Noguera-Garces bask in the brief remaining moments of their student life at The Putney School.

DEAR PUTNEY

So I wrote this speech this past week. I know it's a little late. So I didn't memorize it—don't hold it against me. But something happened yesterday that reminded me of this, so I thought I'd relay it. Maybe you guys will cry or something.

So yesterday I was playing with my dormhead's son, Sam. I think you know him. He asked me if I would stay and I said I had to go pack. And he said, "Why?" because he's three and everything is negotiable. And I said I had to go home. And then he looked up at me with those big doe eyes, he was so confused, and he said, "But you're already home." At which point, Caroline burst into tears. I couldn't say anything and I kind of just sat down and stared at him. And he kept saying it over and over, "You're already home. You're already home." And it got me thinking about this speech. So, I'm gonna try as best I can to say what I remember.

I have absolutely no idea what to say to you—absolutely no clue. You newly legal, wide-eyed and, hopefully, not too jaded young adults: Products of these acres of farmland, soccer fields and that giant new building. I have absolutely no clue how to address this speech to you. I have no words of wisdom, as I'm obviously no wiser than any of you. So, after much consideration, I'm going to deliver this speech not to you but to this grass, these houses...even that door-frame—to The Putney School.

Dear Putney, are you there? It's me, Meredith. I came here at 15 with dyed black hair. All I wanted was to be somewhere where I didn't hear the word faggot every ten minutes. You gave me a bed and a room with paper-thin walls. You gave me a crazy roommate, Habitat for Humanity and cow's milk. Later you gave me more crazy roommates, a home with a postcard view and a Hacky Sack. Then finally you gave me a single, even though I traded in for more crazy roommates and Jane Baker. You called me a hippie. You called me a Barney. You called me newbie scum. You even called me Harry Potter. But you never called me a faggot. And if you did, I know you didn't mean it like that.



Senior Speakers:
Meredith Heil

Dear Putney, are you there? It's me, Harry Potter. I think I've learned a few things during my brief stay here. For instance, hip pop music is good but only if it's ironic. And if it speaks to you it's most likely atmosphere. A kid can ride an animal four times his size anytime he wishes, but needs to get permission from the dean each time he wants to ride in a car. (That's for you, Dave.) It's normal to make out with your friends. It's even more normal for an eighteen-year-old to have a ten o'clock curfew. Smoking cigarettes is bad, using drugs is worse, but there is no greater crime than throwing a freshman in the puddle.

Dear Putney, are you there? It's me again. I thought a lot about growing up here. What do I do when there's no study hours in college? And co-ed sleepovers? Help me Putney, because I'm a little confused.

Seriously, though, I am worried about the future. Most of us are moving off into a world where no one cares where we are at 7:30, where final exams take the place of cushy project weeks, and it's not always okay to kiss your friends. You think you're preparing us for life, Putney, and in some ways you are. I can muck out a stall, solve a calculus problem—okay, so maybe that's a stretch, I didn't do too well this year, sorry Abijah—and analyze Hemingway until my eyes cross. But won't it look funny when I go to my local post office and demand ten dollars and three packs of Polaroid film, wondering why my mailman isn't checking up on my spring break transportation plans?

The truth is, Putney, I'm scared. You sheltered us from income tax and rising gas prices, rent and deciding what we're going to eat for dinner. Is there life after 11 o'clock on a Saturday night? Will my dorm head still make me a cake on my birthday? Is there going to be a trustee assembly to sleep through?

Dear Putney, are you there? It's us. The class of 2004: class of shabby looking art kids that couldn't clean up nice if we tried, class of big dreams and even bigger egos. I know my questions will be answered and I know you'll promise to write, even if it is just to ask for money. The thing is, I've felt you chewing at my brain now for four years and I think, Putney, you're finally ready to spit us out.

Thank you.

Hooray for the freshest batch of Putney alumni!



LITTLE THINGS

I don't quite have Meredith's organization skills. So I have spent some time writing up some guidelines for what I was gonna say. But I think I'm gonna work a little and try and get away from those. Yeah, so I keep getting this question and it's starting to bug me, but not too much, of how does it feel to be leaving Putney? I'd say I get it maybe every 15 minutes or so—every time I see someone who I haven't seen in an hour or so. And I keep giving about the same answer. And that's that I won't really be able to tell until I'm sitting in my big black car riding away from here. Because that is really when...when something becomes immediate. Now, the problem is I've been thinking about it more and it doesn't really feel like I'm leaving Putney; but it feels a little bit more like Putney is leaving me, in a sense.

Now, it's kind of hard for me to imagine, outside my own Putney experience, but I know that every single person here has had a different Putney experience. And at the center of it are these things that we all share and that make the school so memorable to so many people. Little things. Standing in the milk lunch line; thinking you wanna have a riot, because the muffins are coming out really slow; being told to turn off the music that's playing out your window even though it's a really nice sunny day and everyone's outside. And, of course, there are the little more personal things. And there's Sing, of course, which I could not do this speech without mentioning and I, I have a confession to make: I've never really given my whole heart to Sing. But as I was writing this it was the first thing I thought I should mention and I sort of crammed it in way back here. But I think it really just means a lot more than I thought it did. Yeah.



Senior Speakers:
Ryland Ianelli

So then there are the small personal experiences. I know my mailbox has been next to Ofurhe's for the past three years. Ianelli/Igbinedion—it's not much to go on. But it's small, and it's personal. And so I know I got to thinking about that recently. And I'm thinking next year it's gonna be maybe Indenbaum or someone I don't even know next to Igbinedion. I think I know I preferred not to think about it for a really long time, but this school is going to be moving and changing in so many ways after I leave and after the wonderful class of 2004 leaves. And it's a really sad thing for me to think about. But I just want you all to know that you've really helped me have—and helped each other have—a really great time here. So, thanks. 