

Dear Friends,

I recently gave a graduation talk at the Eagle Hill School in Hardwick, Massachusetts which I am attaching to this email. I am sending it to you because it sums up much of my thinking about life and learning. Eagle Hill is a wonderful co-ed boarding school, grades 8 – 12, that specializes in working with students who learn outside the box.

I'd love hear back from you with your comments. You can email me at my personal email address, ehallowell@aol.com.

Have a great and relaxing summer!

All the best,

Ned Hallowell

Eagle Hill Graduation Talk

June 1, 2008

Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.

When Alan Carney, my classmate at Exeter, told me that he had suggested to Mr. McDonald that I be your graduation speaker this year, I was thrilled. Why would I be thrilled, you might wonder. Why would I be thrilled to give up a Sunday morning with my wife, Sue, and our 3 phenomenal kids? Why would I be thrilled to drive all by myself many

miles to the west? Why would I be thrilled to speak to an audience whose chief desire for this talk is that it end quickly?

I'll tell you why I was thrilled. I was thrilled because I knew I would be able to divulge a great secret in this talk, and I love divulging secrets. Who doesn't? As Samuel Johnson said, "The chief reason for divulging a secret is the vanity of being known to have been trusted with it in the first place."

So what is this secret I am going to divulge to you? I can see you wondering. I can almost hear you thinking, What's up with this guy? What kind of secret could he possibly have?

Well, the secret relates to your school, Eagle Hill, and to this day, your graduation. You believe that you have attended the Eagle Hill School, a school that describes itself on its website as a school for students with learning disabilities. You believe that P.J. McDonald, your good-natured head, is indeed that, a good-natured head of school named P.J. McDonald. You believe that you will graduate from this school today having mastered the prescribed curriculum so that you are now ready to attend college and take your place alongside students who do not have learning disabilities.

The secret is that this is all a ruse. The secret is that Eagle Hill is a covert operation, code name, Eagle Hill. The true mission of Eagle Hill is to find and train the most interesting, talented, gifted, unusual, tenacious,

humorous, creative, hard-working, out-of-the-box future innovators and leaders that can be found among kids of or near high school age.

Believing that it might cause these students to develop a swelled head were they told of the true mission of the school, it was decided years ago to disguise what happens here as the treatment of learning disabilities. This would encourage you all to work all the harder, not that you need all that much of such encouragement, and it would also help in fund-raising, as donors prefer to give to people in need.

But now, I can let you in on the secret. Having both ADD and dyslexia myself, I am a member of the secret society you all belong to, the society of the magnificently-minded.

I don't know any of you personally, but I can tell you about you. Let me describe you to you, and let's see if I'm right. I'll bet there is someone in this class who can make just about anyone, anywhere laugh. I'll bet there is a master trickster. I'll bet there is one person in this class who could make a fortune as a con artist but instead is heading toward a career in show business. I'll bet you have an amazing mathematician who comes up with incredible solutions to problems without having any idea how he did it. I'll bet you have someone who could make even the shyest person on this planet feel comfortable in conversation. I'll bet you have a superb writer, a superb artist, and a superb singer. I'll bet you have a magician, a chef, and a potter. I'll bet at least one of you can hit the cover off a golf ball and another one of you who someday will design a better golf ball. I'll bet there are more than a few of you who haven't a clue what you will do when you

get to that age when you're supposed to "do" something. Don't worry! You'll know it when you find it and you will surprise not only the world, but yourselves as well.

You see, this is the great secret, secret even, maybe, from each of you. You are beautifully, magnificently, and so very variously talented. You do not fit the mold, thank God. In fact, God depends upon you to keep changing the mold. Others in this world, the ones who plod ordinarily along, living with attention surplus disorder or the other disabilities of normalcy, sometimes don't understand you. Sometimes they place misleading labels on you, like LD or ADD. But, believe me, they rely on you. The world relies on you.

How so? Well, let me tell you about a couple of members of our society, the society of the magnificently-minded. I went to high school with one of them. He was a few years ahead of me. Our high school, Exeter, was another covert operation. Only it was even more covert than Eagle Hill, but Exeter itself didn't realize how many of the magnificently-minded it was helping develop their special talents. One of them, this fellow I want to tell you about, thought he was stupid while he was at Exeter. It took him 5 years to get through the 4 year curriculum. He rarely got a grade above a C or a D. The only reason they let him stay was that he was a faculty member's son. Finally, he graduated, but barely. His name? John Irving. He is now one of the world's most famous novelists, and probably Exeter's best known alum.

How about another? This guy couldn't stand school at all. But his family valued education, so he stayed with it as long as he could. Finally, he could take it no longer, and he dropped out of college. Others told him he was disabled and slow, but he knew better. He knew he had talent. To make a wonderfully long story short, he went on to become one of the greatest innovators in the aviation industry, the creator of, among other things, the electronic ticket. His name is David Neeleman, and he is the founder of JetBlue Airlines. He says his ADD is the key to his success.

One more. This woman used to be so ashamed of her organizational problems that she would not let friends come to her house or into her room. She had a terrible time with certain academic subjects, but, she too knew part of her mind was magnificent. She never gave up on herself or on pursuing the vision she had. Vision was indeed her gift. She is now a Pulitzer-prize winning photo journalist and a New York Times best-selling author several times over. Her name is Sharon Wohlmut.

I could tell you hundreds of other stories about members of our society. But you want me to end soon. I understand.

But before I end and before you leave, I want to be sure you're in on the secret. You are not disabled. Just the opposite. You are magnificently-minded. You are the innovators, the ones who can make people laugh and cry, the ones who will dream up new stuff and the ones who will make the new stuff sell. You're the ones get knocked down a hundred times but get up a hundred and one. You're the ones who find new ways to new destinations and new ways to bring others along.

One of you, probably one of the ones who hasn't heard a word of this talk, will come up with a stand-up comedy routine that will bring down the house. Another of you, probably one of the ones who almost missed this morning's ceremony for a comedy of reasons, will one day discover a new medical procedure accidentally on purpose. Another of you, probably all of you, will be the most fantastic, playful, devoted, hopelessly-in-love parents the world has ever seen.

The mention of parents leads me to the one suggestion I have for you graduates. Take a moment today, perhaps on the way home, maybe after you get home, but certainly before you go to bed to say two words to your parent or parents or whoever it is who changed your diapers, worried over you year after year, gave you birthday cakes and occasional reprimands, stayed up late when you were sick, took you to doctor's appointments, ball games, museums, dances, and parties, reminded you to kiss grandma and to look a person in the eye when you shook hands, take a moment to say to that person or those people, the one or ones who made the smart decision for you to come to this covert operation of a school and paid the money as well, take a moment and say two words. You know the words. Thank you. You have no idea how happy it will make these simple people. We parents are so very simple. We love you insanely. Indeed, the day you were born we entered into a permanent state of psychosis, falling madly in love with you. Seeing you grow, seeing you find and develop the secrets in your magnificent minds, watching you come to like life and like yourselves, this is reward enough for us. As I said, we're simple. But, if you would say thank you, and really mean it, well, then you would see us glow. Just watch.

After you say those two words, just stand back and watch. You'll see it. The glow. Probably some tears, too. It'll make you laugh.

The rest? Well, now that you've lived in this magical kingdom for a while, your mission becomes to share with the less-enlightened rest of the world all the wonders you've discovered. Don't worry. This will come naturally to you. One of the great qualities of the society of the magnificently-minded is that once they have spent time in a place like this, they—you—become irrepressible, unstoppable, and undefeatable.

As you listen to my words, if in fact you are listening, I hope you feel as good about yourselves and about life as you ought to. You are magnificent. The world will open up to you more and more as you go. The magnificently-minded are what the ordinary world calls "late bloomers." That is to say, your most unusual and spectacular achievements lie years away. These years of work—and it takes a lot of work to develop magnificent minds—will pay off big time later on in time. Trust me. I know. I've been there myself and I am in the business of helping develop magnificent minds.

You deserve tremendous credit now for your hard work. People with ordinary minds do not have to work as hard as you. Learning is easier for them. Sometimes you might have wished you could have been born like them. That's understandable. But, I am here to tell you, you are the lucky ones. What you have can't be bought or taught. You have to be born with a mind like yours, a magnificent mind. Each of you has a special talent. It just takes work to develop it. It is one of the paradoxes of life that

the most talented people almost invariably face the most formidable challenges. I guess God wants people to pay a price for talent. But you all have paid the price. There is still more to pay, more work ahead, but I bet one of the great discoveries you've made here is that you can actually like the work, because work can be play. Indeed, that's what a great career truly is. It's finding some form of play that someone is willing to pay you to do. And believe me, you all are uniquely equipped to find some such play. Your problem will likely be in choosing which of many to pursue.

So revel in your differences. Exult in who you are. Tough as it may have been, it is worth it to be you. And this world really needs the real you, not some altered version being forced to fit an old mold.

So, be glad. The world is now your oyster. And if you don't like oysters, it's your pizza, your hot dog, your Eggs a la Russe or whatever you especially adore. This covert operation, code name Eagle Hill, has turned you all into special agents of goodness, creativity, positive energy, and joy. Wherever you go, you'll carry these great qualities with you, loving life and helping others to love life, as you so delightfully live it according to the dictates of your own magnificent minds and hearts.

One last secret. I can now reveal to you the true identity of your good-natured head. Mr. McDonald, good old P.J., is in fact the direct descendant of Albus Dumbledore, head of the Hogwarts School. Because the good folks who support schools do not like to think of their Heads as being wizards or masters of magic, P.J. passes himself off as the affable, normal man you know and love. But underneath, his genius hovers over this

place, connecting you all to the legion of predecessors who have developed the talents of special, magnificently-minded youth since the dawn of time. Welcome to their midst.

I know you all will thrive and surprise. I send you off, be it on broomsticks or in Volvo's, with my heartfelt wishes for everlasting good will, good luck, and joy.

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