

## **Endings**

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I have always been fascinated with our choice of the word Commencement to describe the ceremony that will take place for our seniors in the Branch Theater on May 27th. As the word implies, are we supposed to look ahead at a new beginning? Or is it more appropriate to look back and remind ourselves of the events and circumstances that brought us to this stage in our lives? Does our commencement ceremony celebrate a beginning or an ending? For me, the answer has always been clear.

I think of births and weddings as true commencements – the beginning of a new life or a new relationship that orients us toward the future. After taking part in dozens of commencement ceremonies, my thoughts have always turned to the past. A commencement ceremony for me is a time to celebrate our time together and congratulate those who are moving on for a job well done. It marks an ending – perhaps for many students, the most significant and symbolic ending they have ever experienced.

Our commencement ceremony is a transition that is unique in the lives of our students. Unlike births and weddings and college graduations, graduation from high school is a singular event. It will only happen once. It is unique also because, unlike other transitions, we can almost always predict exactly when it will take place. We are thus able to make preparations for it and celebrate it in any manner we choose.

As we anticipate the commencement ceremony for the class of 2009, we can all take great pride in the individual and group accomplishments of this year's graduating class. At our Upper School Awards Assembly on May 18th, we looked back on the contributions our students made to the life of the school and their achievements both within and outside the classroom. As I read the names of award winners, my focus was not on the future. I chose to celebrate the past rather than anticipate what was yet to come.

As our seniors walk through the receiving line on May 27th after being awarded their diplomas, I anticipate they will hear two kinds of comments from our faculty members. Some will wish them well and orient them toward the future. Others will mark this important ending with a look back and a heartfelt thank you. Both are important. My choice will be to look back, to celebrate the past, and to try to create an ending that is worthy of the time and energy they have given to our school.