

ANTILLES SCHOOL CLASS OF 2009

CLOSING REMARKS by Cecile de Jongh

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Before I start, I want everyone to know that I got very strict instructions from [redacted] not to cry at this graduation like I did at [redacted] two years ago. And I promised [redacted] to do my very best, but I reminded her that like ideas and babies, speeches are a whole lot easier to conceive than to deliver.

I have known this class for a very long time. I have gone through four years of high school with just about all of you, and the better part of the ELC, Lower and Middle School with many of you. And along the way I have learned what you have learned; some of Ms. Humphries Math, and Senora Graciela's Spanish. I know, as you all know, that Thames means so much more than a river in England, that three words for kindness are Aguilar, Marshall, and McElligot and that "muy malo" is very bad Spanish but very good Carol. That Howe is not just the beginning of a question, that Wilson is synonymous with thought-provoking, Bertrand with artful inspiration and Riggle rhymes with wiggle.

This Class of 2009 has developed a personality, its own personality. I have been thinking about this as I prepared to talk to you today. But your class, like all groups, is really a collection of individuals. And what individuals you are! I suggest to you that the word that best describes this class might be to describe it as a collage. A collage, from the French coller, to glue, is a work of art, primarily in the visual arts made from an assemblage of different forms, thus creating a new whole.

Heavens knows that this class has been cohesive and loyal. It has been outspoken. It has been challenged and challenging. It truly embodies the saying, "if it is not one thing, it's your mother". And in the school context, it has been one that was not afraid to speak its truth to power. And like any good glue, it sticks together. All wonderful traits I think.

But let's not forget that all of this has developed in this special world that is the Antilles School. This school, like any good school, is like a hatchery, and your class has taken shape as a school of fish within this aquarium that is Antilles. But the point and purpose of this aquarium has not been to teach you to swim as a school, but rather to prepare you to go from being little fish in a small pond to big fish swimming freely and independently in bigger ponds, in bigger seas and oceans. That is where you are soon to splash down. So, here first, are some words of caution: do not join the first new school you see. Think before you swim. Remember the good things you learned here, not just the Math or English or Science, but the meaning and importance of friendship, of loyalty, of conviction to principle. And as you have collided against the walls of this confinement called Antilles School, even as you imagined what was on the other side, the bigger world you are going to, remember that your teachers and your parents built and maintained it not only to train you but to protect you.

Trust me when I tell you that every parent here wishes that when you are finally in the next ocean, we could still be there to protect you. But increasingly you will be swimming on your own. You, not us, will have to remind yourselves to keep your heads above water - to swim!

You will also do well to remember well what you have learned here. And you have learned much; some things perhaps too soon. Sadly, you have learned that bad things can happen to good people – not just accidents but tragedies. You have learned that when this happens you must do at least two very difficult things: you must comfort those who need comfort and you must move forward taking with you the lessons learned - we all must make our own promise to the future. And each of you must try to do better not just for your parents or your friends but for yourselves.

And I know that as a class you may have felt that you have sometimes been noticed more for your deeds than your words, your mistakes than your achievements, your stumbles than your strides, but we all know that you are a great class of wonderful individuals; a great assemblage of different forms. And in thinking of great things and what the future holds for you, I envision that some of you will be healing the sick and helping the less fortunate; some instrumental in creating a new mechanism so a dear friend can walk again; that many of us will be collecting your works of art, applauding you on Broadway, at Major League Baseball games and in the WNBA and yet others will be proudly defending our Constitution and some our country.

So as the mother of one of you, who has felt the full range of feeling of a mother about all of you, I wish you well, knowing that you are all at once both great and able to do great. Get started, keep going and congratulations!