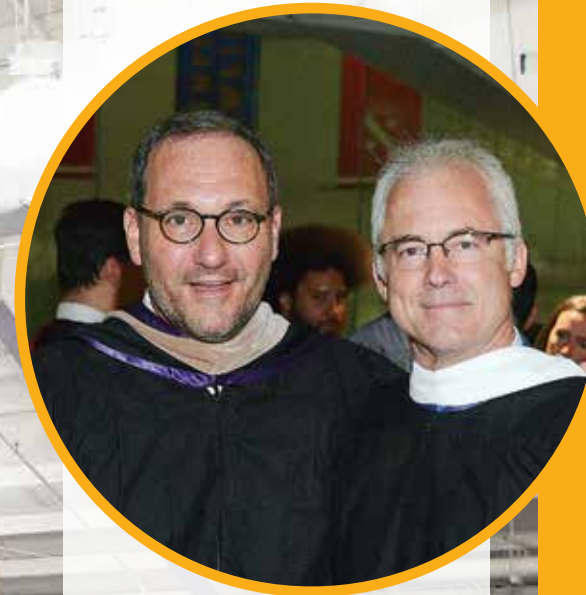


128th COMMENCEMENT

Photography by
Robert Falcetti



SPEAKER

A.J. Wasserstein

**Parent of Jake '18
and Michael '17**

Current and former Taft parent A.J. Wasserstein was invited to give the school's Commencement address. Here, we share excerpts from his talk about what he wished he had known when he was about to enter college.



1
Tattnall Holt '18
(winner of the George
H. Morgan Award)
with his parents
Stephen '85 and
Laura Black Holt '85.
HIGHPOINT PICTURES

2
Dig Singh '18
and his family.
HIGHPOINT PICTURES

3
O. Wanichkul '18
surrounded by
Taft friends.

4
Clyde Ramos '18,
winner of the
Thomas Sabin Chase
Award in Art.

5
Kevin Wharfe '18
shares a touching
moment with
his mother.
HIGHPOINT PICTURES

When I was your age I thought I had it all figured out. After all, I was graduating from high school—clearly, I had mastered everything there was to possibly know about life. Turns out I was wrong about many things. What I thought was important was not. And what I thought was unimportant was actually quite important. The single most vital concept I wish I understood was

that life is all about optimizing around long-term happiness. This might seem obvious, but so many young adults rush ahead into life without making happiness their primary goal. Sometimes the excitement and noise of our lives on a day-to-day basis pulls us away from long-term happiness. Aristotle defined the very purpose of life as developing your virtues in order to find happiness. Before we continue, let me define

happiness, from my perspective. Happiness is not fleeting or a temporary rush—like devouring a hot fudge sundae or bungee jumping. Happiness is enduring fulfillment, satisfaction, and joy, moving from novice to proficiency. Happiness is being in harmony in your personal relationships, your college activities, your spirituality, and your health. Happiness is knowing and living your values—having a strong and intentional sense of

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Pearl Young '18,
winner of the Dance
Award, the Berkley F.
Matthews '96 Award,
and a recipient of a
Global Studies and
Service Diploma.

7
Head Monitors
Leigh Sharpless '18
and Peter Horne '18
display the 2018
class stone, which
was later installed
in Centennial
Quadrangle.

8
Assistant Headmaster
Jeremy LaCasse
presents Raymond
Bai '18 with the
Aurelian Award,
awarded to a senior
who is "outstanding
in sterling character,
high scholarship, and
forceful leadership."
Bai was also a recipient
of the Heminway
Merriman Award.



Leigh Sharpless '18 Head Monitor

With age came experience, sometimes painful, but other times a privilege....As upperclassmen, it came that the most beautiful moments were those outside of our structured schedule, such as picnics on the fields as the sun set atop the flag of the athletic building, or perhaps going sledding....

All these new awakenings, opening our eyes to more than just responsibility, but also the somber realization of injustice and inequality....To that end, this was the class that came together beautifully in the face of adversity, hosting an inspiring yet productive meeting one night in the winter, and so at last we recognized our place on this campus, holding on in solidarity.... So here you all sit before me, the eldest students of Taft—an admirable group of unique individuals [who worked] together to guide this campus as best we could.

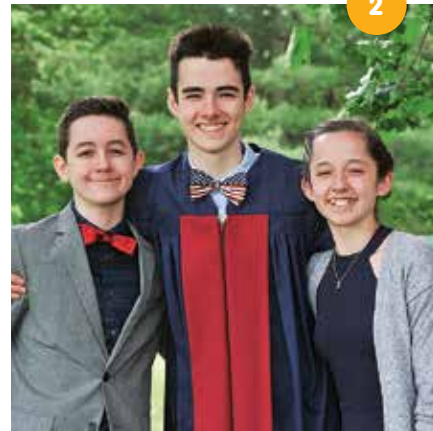
Peter Horne '18 Head Monitor

Thank you, Taft faculty, for guiding us....Whether it was in the form of advising, teaching, coaching, or just chatting, the help you all have given us over these years has propelled our transition from timid freshmen and sophomores to confident young men and women....

While we'll miss your exemplary teaching inside the classroom, we will miss the impromptu and informal moments the most, where you have helped us grow as people. The late-night dorm discussions [and] the last-minute lunches...were just a few moments that helped shape the community into our family. We admire your contagious energy....We cannot imagine living in an upper school boys' dorm with young children and constant fire alarms as requirements for the job, yet you always maintained your friendly attitudes. No one can thank you enough for what you do!



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1 Headmaster Willy MacMullen '78 addresses the Class of 2018 and their families.
HIGHPOINT PICTURES

2 Salutatorian Colin Schlissel '18 with family after the ceremony.
HIGHPOINT PICTURES

3 Kaedi Dalley '18 and family. Dalley received the George H. Morgan Award and Berkley F. Matthews '96 Award.

4 Dean of Faculty Edie Traina presents Academic Dean and math teacher Jeremy Clifford with the William and Lee Abramowitz Award for Teaching Excellence.

"To find happiness, and to answer what do you want to be, you must first understand who you are going to be—and college is a fantastic venue to discover and answer the 'who are you going to be' question."

-A.J. Wasserstein

embraced, relished, and most of all, not wasted. Although it might seem like being admitted to college is an ending point—particularly after all the hard work you did during the daunting college admission process—it's a new beginning.

Whether you are off to study physics, philosophy, or finance, one of the main goals of college is to learn how to learn—to become analytical, a critical thinker, and a great communicator, skills you have

already begun to develop at Taft. Exactly what the faculty here has worked hard at and is the essence of the Portrait of a Graduate, a mosaic I admire so much. But the very key in college is to fully discover who you are and what you want in your life.

Go all in while at college. Don't coast through and do the least you can get away with. This is a narrow window in time where you can test and try different activities and experiences with few

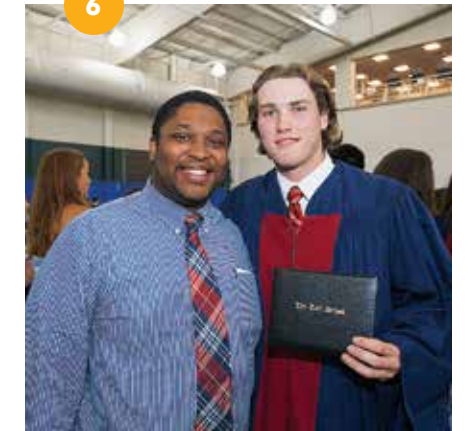
consequences. Try the hard English class; push yourself to give a new club sport a whirl; join the school newspaper. While in college, lean in—take full advantage.

When you are in college, resist the temptation to stay ensconced in your own bubble. In a conversation I had with Mr. Mac last year about transitioning into college, he asserted that different is not only good, but should be sought out with the desire to understand. College is a perfect



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5 Class speaker Barbara Garza Herrera '18, who also received the Berkley F. Matthews '96 Award, with Senior Class Dean Susan McCabe.



6

6 English Teacher Khalid Tellis with Caleb Hannon '18.



7

7 Juliana Yamin '18 with, from left, brother Matthew '22, parents Jennifer and Joe '85, and brother Michael '20.
HIGHPOINT PICTURES



8

8 Mthabisi Tshuma '18, one of the recipients of the Class of 1981 Award, which recognizes students who have shown exceptional personal growth and perseverance during their time at Taft.

Barbara Garza Herrera '18

Class Speaker

There are certain qualities that are, because of their inability to be assessed numerically or comparatively, taken as secondary to extracurricular endeavors, like the way we treat or engage with one another....Like the multiple abilities you possess, the affection and sense of care we develop for our peers is learned behavior that is strengthened over time. At Taft, I have come to acknowledge that I am the person I am now because of who you are, and the same applies to us all: students, parents, staff, and faculty alike.

As said by my first English teacher at Taft, "One must love kindness before she can be kind to anyone else. One must cherish humility before she can show it to those people in her orbit. Kind and humble actions, this way, become a prayer—a statement of faith in the fixed value of the most important element in human life, love."

place to do this. Interacting with people who are not like you is incredibly important in life to broaden and expand yourself.

When you get to college you might experience something for the first time—failure. Failure is going to be part of your life, so you might as well get used to it and embrace it. To think you'll coast through college and life without experiencing failure is optimistic and naive. All people pursuing happiness

trip regularly and encounter failure. And when you do suffer that first failure in college, try not to get down. Instead, get gritty. Persistence, resilience, and stick-to-itiveness are all your allies and will help you prevail and find happiness.

When I was your age, people would ask me what I wanted to be when I grew up. An innocuous enough question, but one that might be exactly the wrong question to ask a young person. The right question



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2018 graduates Jake Wasserstein, Kevin Wharfe, Kaia Whiteley, Natalie Witkowski, and Ian Wohlhieter.



2

Juliana Yamin '18, Lauren Pelosi '18, and Benjamin Laufer '18.

Raveeno Douglas '18 received the Harry W. Walker '40 "Non ut Sibi" Award, which is presented to the senior whose service and work outside of Taft best exemplifies the School's motto.



3



Charles Verheggen '18 Class Speaker

Earlier this year I visited the Library of Congress to [do] research while I was at home in Virginia.... I noticed a stone plaque with gold lettering [that] puzzled me: "We taste the spices of Arabia, yet never feel the scorching sun that brings them forth." I began searching for some extraneous idea that could be reflected in these words.

Throughout our careers here we have been offered the spices of Arabia in many different ways. The attention we receive at Taft has cultivated, enhanced, and "spiced" our individual talents and interests.

We have opened art galleries to showcase our paintings and photographs. We have hosted open dialogues to lead conversations on social issues. We have worked for a spot on varsity baseball team, and been given a lead role in the fall musical. We have learned to no longer consider ourselves just math students or English students, but all-around students. Tasting these various spices at Taft has enhanced our very being....Our future service to the school should reciprocate all that it has offered to us.

to pepper young people with is, "Who are you going to be when you grow up?" "Who are you?" gets to the essence of how you see yourself—your core and character, what type of person you aspire to be. With no simple or reflexive answer, it's much deeper and more challenging to answer than "What do you want to be?" To find happiness, and to answer what do you want to be, you must first understand who you are going to be—and college is

a fantastic venue to discover and answer the "who are you going to be" question.

As part of defining who you are, I hope you consider and embrace Taft's school motto: *Non ut sibi ministretur sed ut ministret*. You are incredibly fortunate to have received a Taft education. Think about how you will use this gift and how you will serve.

There is an ancient Chinese saying that goes, "If you want happiness for



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4 Bagpipers lead the processional of faculty and graduates into the Athletic Center.

5 Seniors Angie Narvaez, Courtney Wandelt, Emma LaRose, and Nathalie Bonilla share a moment before graduation begins.
HIGHPOINT PICTURES

6 Jake Marx '19 and Annabelle Pulver '18 before the ceremonies.

7 Shamir Johnson '18 and family.
HIGHPOINT PICTURES



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an hour, take a nap (just not right now please). If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody." If you embrace Aristotle's view that our purpose is to find happiness—part of that answer is through service.

When you finish college, it would be wonderful if you have a fully formed sense of your values, goals, and identity—who

you are going to be. Nobody can tell you specifically what these are—there are no right or wrong answers, you simply need to find what works for you. Think about this in great detail while in college.

To all of the graduates, I wish you good luck and success in your next chapter. I wish you fun and enjoyment. I wish you new experiences and new friends. But more than anything else, I wish you happiness. ■

A.J. Wasserstein has led a distinguished career as an entrepreneur, received numerous awards for his leadership, served on multiple not-for-profit boards, taught at the Yale School of Management, and authored a book on raising children.

For more Commencement photos visit www.taftphotos.com/Commencement-2018.

Selected photos, where noted, courtesy of Highpoint Pictures.