

**1997 Valedictory Address**  
***(Many Paths to a Common Goal)***  
**by**  
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Seniors, soon to be graduates, faculty, parents, friends and fellow students -- good evening. As valedictorian of the class of 1997, I am honored to address all of you tonight. I wanted to avoid the valedictory cliché of speaking of the past, present, and future, but it can not be avoided. These three things are what this ceremony is all about -- what we have learned in the past, the decisions we face at present, and the, exciting, promising future.

The past years have been spent preparing us for this moment -- our commencement. High school has been one of the most important aspects of our lives. It is where we spent much of our time, the center of our social lives, and a place to learn and grow. This academic arena we call high school, has been a gateway proving ground, both academically and socially. It has been an element of constancy in our lives for the past four years. Here, we have participated in various activities such as clubs, which helped us become well rounded individuals, student government, which helped us develop our leadership skills, athletics which helped us to test our physical endurance and competitive nature, and community service, which taught us to become responsible, giving citizens.

During our four years in the hallowed halls of Arlington, we have experienced many victories and failures, good times and bad, pleasure and pain. But we have survived -- and we have triumphed.

Now, at our graduation we find ourselves at a new threshold. We no longer have the sheltered environment for learning and experience that Arlington provided. When we leave here, we will wrap our high school experiences in tissue paper and store them away in a memory box. Sure, we can go back and look at them, but they won't be the same, because we won't be the same. Our arena has grown. We will now have to compete with the world. The good news is that we are more prepared than we know. Our diplomas show the world that we have learned how to learn. With our diplomas, we will stand at a crossroads in life. We may either take the path to success, or the path to mediocrity -- it is an individual choice. I now challenge all of you, and myself, not to take the easy road.

Now the question is -- "what lies ahead?." Our school's motto, loosely translated, means "many paths to a common goal." Those paths may be college, vocational school, the military, or a job. What is the common goal? Success. It is now our turn to become active and contributing members of society.

To conclude, The poet, Berton Braley wrote:

“With doubt and dismay you may be smitten.

You think there’s no hope for you?

Why the best books haven’t been written

The best score hasn’t been made yet

The best song hasn’t been sung

The best tune hasn’t been played yet;

Cheer up, for the world is still young!

No Chance? Why the world is just eager

For things that you ought to create.

Its store of wealth is still meager,

Its needs are incessant and great.

Don’t worry and fret, faint hearted.

The chances have just begun.

For the best jobs haven’t been started,

The best work hasn’t been done.”

Congratulations Class of 1997. I know each of us will reach the common goal.