

Mooseheart Board Member Mark Penzkover
Address to Mooseheart High School Class of 2007 (May 26, 2007)

Thank you Bill. It's always a pleasure coming back home to Mooseheart, especially at this particular time of year. I feel that I have had a truly blessed life, but having the opportunity to come back home to deliver the commencement address to this graduating class is one of the greatest honors and privileges of my life. Being introduced by someone that I look upon as a father makes the experience even more special.

Two months ago when Mr. Airey informed me that the Mooseheart Board of Directors had invited me to deliver the commencement address, I thought it would be appropriate to incorporate some of the statements from my valedictorian address twenty-three years ago. I asked Gary Urwiler to look for a copy of my speech in the school records, but he could not find any trace of it. That might be a good thing, though – if that speech is missing, then perhaps all of my disciplinary records are also gone.

Before I address this fine group of young men and women behind me, I would first like to sincerely thank all of the people responsible for giving them a loving, safe and nurturing environment and providing all the tools that they need to be successful in life.

To Director General Bill Airey, Chief Operating Officer Len Solfa, Grand Chancellor Janet Fregulia, Supreme Governor Gene Huggins, Grand Regent Sandra Richards, members of the Supreme Council and Grand Council, my fellow Board Members, and all of you brothers and co-workers out there – thank you so very much for all that you do to continue making Mooseheart possible.

Where would the current 225 children living here today, or the nearly 12,000 children that have lived here over the years, be without your love, support and dedication?

To Executive Director Scott Hart, Superintendent of Education Gary Urwiler, Director of Residential Living Ron Ahrens, the rest of Mooseheart staff, and of course, the teachers and family teachers - thank you so much for all that you do, day in and day out, to raise and care for the children entrusted to you here at Mooseheart. Your efforts have made an impact on their lives, and have given them the tools and skills to make an impact on this world. Please give yourselves a well-earned round of applause.

On behalf of the 1.2 million men and women of the Moose – I want to wish the Class of 2007 hearty congratulations on reaching this important milestone in your life. We, your Moose family, are so proud of your accomplishments and wish you well in your future endeavors. If you don't know it already, I hope that some day you will realize how special you are to be a graduate of Mooseheart.

Since I am one of the few people who can honestly say "I know how you're feeling right now", I would like to step out of my role as Mooseheart Board Member, and talk to you as an older brother who's been where you've been, and who's ventured down the path you're about to travel. Exactly twenty-three years ago today I sat in this field house on this very stage waiting to receive my diploma.

I remember being excited and scared at the same time, thinking about what the future might hold, and trying desperately not to think about saying goodbye to the many friends and loved ones that I met during my 15 years living here. I remember that about halfway through the ceremony it finally hit me that I was leaving the only home I'd ever known. Would I be able to live up to everyone's expectations? Could I be successful entering a strange world without my support network? With all those things bouncing around in my head that day, I'm surprised that I made it through my graduation speech.

Most people consider commencement as the end of a journey. This commencement ceremony certainly marks the endpoint of your lives as Mooseheart students, but it is actually the start of the next phase in your lives. Nobody knows what lies ahead for you, but I can say with some certainty that the next few years are going to be filled with changes and challenges. How you respond to your individual changes and challenges will ultimately determine who you are.

Let's start first about where you are right now. You have been raised in a caring environment, and have received an excellent education; you've been trained in a vocational skill, and you possess the maturity, responsibility and social skills required to interact effectively in society. Additionally, whether it was in sports, scholastic, vocation, band, NJROTC, social skills, personal growth, or any other area, as an individual or as a team, I know that each of you has obtained some level of achievement during your years at Mooseheart. We are all proud of your accomplishments and achievements, no matter how big or small – and you should be too.

However, my first words of brotherly advice are: Do not let your current accomplishments and achievements stand as the high points of your life - Make them the starting point. That award you earned or that trophy you won are both great, but it only represents a starting point. Does this mean that you should strive to win an even more prestigious award or an even bigger trophy? No – rather, it means that you should apply that same skill, discipline, determination and passion to achieve your future goals and accomplishments.

I earned a whole slew of awards and trophies while at Mooseheart, and although they are no longer in my possession, I am still proud of those accomplishments from so many years ago. However, what I am most proud of in my life today are my intangible accomplishments that cannot be captured with an award or displayed on a trophy.

My achievements are now measured in areas such as parenthood, success in business, and in my profession, coaching little league, involvement in my community, service to the Moose and Mooseheart, and contributing a positive impact on society. All of this was made possible only by building on previous achievement instead of resting on my laurels. Each of you will have different goals and will have different set of metrics to define achievement. Set your individual goals and use your unique skill set to achieve those goals.

Next, let's examine what lies immediately ahead for you over the next four or five years. Some of you will continue your education in technical schools or colleges, some will move directly into the work force, and some will chose other paths.

No matter what path you take, as long as you apply what you have learned here and stay true to your moral and value systems, you should eventually find success and happiness. Is life really that simple? Of course not, because no matter what path you take during this next phase of your life, there are going to be bumps and obstacles along the way. The keys to minimizing the bumps and overcoming the obstacles are to stay focused on your goal, work hard, and draw upon your support network as needed.

After graduating from Mooseheart, I attended a large university on a scholarship generously provided by the Moose. The confidence I had upon first arriving soon disappeared as I found myself no longer on top of the heap, but rather extremely average among 35,000 other students. I was very homesick and extremely humbled. I'll be honest – it greatly rattled me and took me a while to adjust to this new reality. It wasn't easy - and during my first year of college there were times that I just wanted to quit and do just about anything else. That would have been the easy thing to do. But that was not how I was raised. And it was not how you were raised

I somehow managed to hang in there by keeping myself focused on my goal, remembering that I had a responsibility not only to myself but to others, working hard, and eating a big piece of humble pie. However, it was only when I reached out to my Moose family and received some much needed support and encouragement that I was able to get through this tough patch. I never would have made it through that stretch of life without asking for help.

So, in the next few years when you hit rough and stormy waters, remember that you don't – and you shouldn't – have to navigate those waters alone. Mr. Hart tells me that you are a very close-knit class, having spent many years together. As a former student, I know that the friendships forged here at Mooseheart are priceless treasures. Don't be too proud or afraid to reach out to one or more of your classmates for support. Sometimes, just a phone call with an old friend is enough to get you through a tough time. Don't be afraid to call one of your former teachers or family teachers, or reach out for support from your extended Moose family.

Remember during those hard times - You're not alone and you're not forgotten. Your Moose family may no longer be there to shelter you, feed you, raise you, guide you, and teach you, but we have not disappeared – support and encouragement are only a call or e-mail away.

Moving on, let's look at what might lie ahead for you five or ten years from now. I don't remember many details from my graduation speech, but I do remember the underlying theme – **Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve**. It's a simple phrase, which long ago was carved into the concrete of the entrance out on Route 31. I hope you will carry it with you as you leave the gates of Mooseheart, and then apply its words later in life, as the opportunity to serve presents itself.

Both the founders of our great country and the founders of this great institution called Mooseheart believed strongly that those with the ability to improve their world, also have the responsibility to improve their world. I took this phrase to heart and still live my life by it.

My good friend, your Superintendent of Education, has also lived his life by it – and although our lives have taken separate paths, we can both attest that our lives have been enriched by service to others.

You each entered Mooseheart out of need and were subsequently given a top-notch education. You now have the responsibility to take what you learned and find a way to serve, when the time is right. Service comes in many shapes and sizes, and is typically developed and nurtured over time. Some of you may find a way to serve immediately, such as in the armed forces, but some of you may wait a decade or more before you find an area where you can apply your skills. That is fine, as long as you remember this important phrase and your duty to continue the tradition.

When the time is right, you might fulfill your responsibility to serve by helping out at your local church or charity, being on the school board, coaching little league, helping out as a cross-walk guide, donating time to a worthy cause, joining the Moose so you can help the future children at Mooseheart, or just being a friendly person that brightens others' days. You may even someday find your way back to Mooseheart as a teacher or family teacher, Superintendent of Education, or even Executive Director. There is no minimum time frame or level of service – all that is expected of you as Mooseheart graduates is that, at the appropriate time in your lives, you devote some of your time to service and help improve this world a little.

Before finishing, I would like to offer a few last bits of brotherly advice.

- Beginning today, there will be no one out there tracking your points. That job is now handed over to you. Use all the skills that you learned here to make your mark on the world.
- Take advantage of the opportunities that you have been given. The next five years will impact greatly on the rest of your lives. Get that college education, apply your vocational skills, or strive to do your best in whatever you do. That way, you will have the ability to choose your path in life, and not have to settle for what is put in front of you.
- There comes a time in everyone's life when you must make an important choice. When you make that choice, make sure you consider the possible long-term effects as much as you consider short-term benefits.
- Like many of you, my life did not start out very good, but thanks to Mooseheart and the men and women of the Moose, I have had a very blessed life. I'll always consider Mooseheart my home and I'll always consider every past and present student, staff, teacher, and the wonderful men and women of the Moose – as my extended family. When times get tough, reach out to your Moose family for help, support and encouragement. Believe me, you're not alone and you're not forgotten.

In closing, as I step out of my role as older brother and back into my role as Board Member, I would like to once again congratulate each and every one of you for reaching this point in life and wish you all the success and happiness in the world. Words cannot describe how proud your Moose family is as you leave campus and begin the next phase in your lives.

Remember always, Class of 2007, that you are special and your Moose family loves you and will continue to care about you throughout your life. We wish you health, happiness, and the very best in all your future endeavors. Take care and may God bless you all.