On Saturday, June 2nd, 2018, I gave the commencement speech for the North Penn-Liberty class of 2018, 35 years after I graduated. While much has changed, the basic challenges young people will face have not. A number of attendees asked me for a copy and I didn't have a clean one, mine was half-typed, half hand notes, so it is presented below. At least as it was written. I went off book in a few spots, including at the end. So even at my age I have new things to learn: Like always listen to the experienced speechwriters.

###

**Home**

Thank you, Kaitlyn, for the terrific welcome, North Penn-Liberty graduates from California to New York cheered like crazy when we heard you and the rest of the team did so well at the STEM competition this year. Thank you, Abby, for proving an impossible act to follow. And thank you all for giving me the honor and privilege of talking to you today. It's great to be back in Liberty, my old home town. It wasn’t easy explaining to people where I was going to be this weekend. I don’t know how often you have this happen, but when I try to explain where I am from, I have to name six surrounding towns for them to get it - and that’s just when I talk to people in Williamsport.

I came home to give this talk but I arrived yesterday afternoon and between then and now I installed two air conditioners and did some plumbing. Mrs. Horner was surprised I arrived so early today and I told her it was because I didn’t want to do any more chores. So while many of you graduates may be about to leave home, you should know that when you return, some things will never change. No matter how important you may feel, you will still do manual labor.
But some things do change, and they tell me I have 10 minutes to share 35 years of that change with you. For a guy who can’t even order lunch in under a thousand words, that won’t be easy. But I promise I will do my best because I remember sitting there wanting the old guy talking part to be over so we could get the certificate, and then get to pictures and then family parties and then celebrate tonight with friends in ways that absolutely did not involve alcohol.

(To the teachers) Principal Eglesia, that was not an endorsement of such behavior. It was a different time.

(To the graduates) Kids, get an Uber.

Thirty-five years ago, I sat where you are and listened to an old guy talk about the past. The world was a much larger place then. There was no Internet, we had no cable TV; a trip to Wellsboro was kind of a big deal. We had a town aquarium, but it was really just the creek where we watched minnows swim around.

So I am honored to speak with you today just as I was incredibly impressed in 1983 that a commencement speaker from here could go on to be a Vice President at IBM, a company with 350,000 employees. But if he did something important, why not me? Why not you? Why not anyone from our home?

For that reason (not to work at IBM, that sounded really, really boring) I was in a hurry to leave our small school and our home for a bigger stage. I wanted to leave so badly I took summer classes at Mansfield State - they weren’t even transferable to the university I was going to in August, I baled hay so I could pay for them - rather than acting out a Def Leppard video or something a 17-year-old should have done. And I did leave. First I moved to Pittsburgh and then to Silicon Valley and now I live in California and have offices in New York and Washington, DC.

But this is still my home town.

When I think back on the successes of my class and the good things that have happened to us, I always return here. I regard the teachers I had in this school as the most important educational instrument in my life, more important than college, more important than any mentors I had in the business sector. I recognize some of that is nostalgia. You may hear me talk about my classmates and feel like we could have challenged Jefferson and Lincoln and Hamilton for intellectual supremacy. While my memory may not be entirely accurate this school, and talking to you, are so important to me I asked speechwriters from four different Presidents to help with a 10 minute talk. And they did, because they could tell it was important to me.

But that is because this community, this school, made me the person I am. And I am a good person because I have carried the values of our home to every place I’ve lived.

Home, right? It’s just four letters. You’d think something so important would have a much longer word.
In 1983, when I graduated and left home, the year 2000 was the future I thought about. It would be a new century, it would be a new millennium. I would turn 35, which at age 17 might as well have meant an old folks home.

I didn't think about flying cars or living in space or the other stuff we were told was “just around the corner.” I instead wondered what I would be like. Would I go bald? Would I be a jerk? How rich would I be? Jay Z-Beyonce rich? I just wanted to take a limo to go to Bob’s market.

Now it's 2018, some of you were born in 2000, the year that was my distant future, and you are thinking about yours. You probably are not thinking about 17 years from now, because 2035 is not a milestone year at all. I don't think you have any easy milestones to look forward to like I did.

Instead, looking at the world now, you will face challenges, and lots of them.

Heroes

I'll be honest with you, we haven't made it easy. I thought we would. We naïvely believed Baby Boomers had squandered America's potential and we were all Billy Idols and we were going to Rebel Yell into a place with more equality and no poverty and no war.

We didn’t really do that. Instead, when you were in elementary school the world economy instead lost $17 trillion and for the first time in American history we worried that the next generation would have a worse standard of living than its parents. That's on us.

But I have confidence in you because you are Americans from Pennsylvania, and you have been given a huge dose of grit and common sense just by being raised here. History is on your side. In 1776, the founding fathers in Philadelphia had to sell people on the whole idea of America. They had to convince the public they should go to war against the most powerful nation on earth, in order to create something that had never existed before.

They talked about it, but young people made it happen.

In Gettysburg, on July 2nd, 1863, we were two words and two minutes away from not even being a country any more. Three hundred soldiers were the last line of defense for the United States. They were out of bullets and General Robert E. Lee’s troops (and lots of bullets) were two minutes from reaching them. Joshua Chamberlain said two words: “Fix bayonets.” I imagine those soldiers looked at him like he was crazy but they did it and they charged into history.

He gave the order but young people made it happen.

World War I, World War II, the space program, 9/11 - I could go on, but I don't need to, you all know of stories like that. And that is the point. There are a lot more heroes than you see in ceremonies. American history is filled with them, and not just the military kind. Firefighters, cops, teachers, inventors, scientists, you name it, and American history has fantastic stories of heroism. There are heroes in this room right now, you just don’t know it yet. Because no one begins life that way.

You’re about to enter adulthood and at some point each of you will see a door that reads “HOW TO BE A HERO.” Everyone wants to open it, but most will close it again right away, because on the other side there are no tools and no instruction manuals, just incredible challenges and terrible
situations.

So if nothing will be easy for you, that's on us, but I have a great deal of confidence that with you taking charge we are all going to be just fine.

(Someone just looked at their watch. Don’t worry about staying on schedule, I’m almost ready to get started.)

Because I am older and I have some experience, and it is mandatory that in a commencement speech I give you advice you did not ask for, I am going to do just that.

**Get on a black list.**

Honestly, if there is a black list I want to be on it. And you should too. I don’t mean black list like the FBI’s Most Wanted...don’t be criminals. I mean break some rules. Make people nervous that you’re going to paint outside the lines. The world has only advanced because some people went to the boundary and then went through it. We’re Americans, the whole country began by doing something no one said was possible. You can do the same thing.

Pennsylvania is the keystone state, but we’re also the home of the best revolutionaries.

**Consider using a typewriter.**

People are worried about digital privacy, you see it all over the news. If you want your information to be secure, consider using a typewriter. When is the last time a "Mission: Impossible" movie involved a piece of paper? In 35 years people may not even be able to read, any more than you can use a rotary phone today. You know what never happened with a rotary phone? Drunk dialing.

*(actual rotary phone finger wheel motions, including having to press the switch hook at the sixth number and starting over because of a mistake)*

You were sober by the time you got a phone number entered.

**Be worth following.**

I don’t mean in the social media sense, no one is going to follow Kylie Jenner anywhere. I mean that in the challenges you will face, you can lead, follow, or get out of the way. But when it’s your time to lead, be worth following. That is what makes heroes.

**CLOSING**

This summer, some of you are going to make some questionable decisions, most of you will have fun, but it is really the last summer where you can live like you are in a Bruno Mars song, or The Weekend or whoever you whippersnappers are listening to these days. After that, the real work begins. So embrace the future, but enjoy this moment, and always remember what it feels like to be right here.

To feel like you’re home, the way I feel every year when I come back to visit.

To use a sappy quote, “Home is the starting place of love, hope and dreams.” Whatever the future holds, whether you will be famous heroes or the more quiet kind, I know you have been given a great start. And I have every confidence you will use that to succeed beyond our wildest
expectations.

However, you will still have to do chores when you come back.

So from an old guy who sat where you are 35 years ago, congratulations to the class of 2018!