

SOME ADVICE FOR MY GRANDSON ON HIS GRADUATION DAY

Dear Zack:

It is hard to believe that you are graduating from high school. It seems only yesterday I was calling your mom to be sure you made it through the first day of school without getting lost or having your lunch money stolen.

You are the first of the grandchildren to graduate from high school, and you have set a very high bar for those who follow: Honor student, president of student government, captain of the track and cross country teams, winner of eight athletic letters and a bushel basket full of awards. You are a great example of what can be accomplished if one is willing to work hard and stay focused. These traits will serve you well in life.

Not only are you a talented and pleasant young man, you are also very lucky. A lot of people love you very much. Your parents have shown their love by their support and encouragement and by establishing clearly defined parameters for what is right and what is wrong. Bless them for doing so.

There are more good things about being a grandparent than I have the space to list. Suffice it to say that grandparents enjoy all the advantages of child-rearing with none of the disadvantages. That is why Grammy and Granddad Wansley and Grandma and I are always smiling when you see us. If we had known our grandchildren were going to be this much fun, we would have had them first. Your grandparents didn't smile nearly as much when we were raising your mama and daddy.

High school graduation is a significant step in your life, but it is just the first of many. Now comes college. Your freshman year at Georgia Tech is going to be quite an adjustment. I was told on my first day at college that the year would be devoted to flunking out as many of us as possible in order to see who really belonged. That was many years ago, but I suspect the philosophy hasn't changed much.

There is no doubt that you will continue to work hard and that you will do well academically. That is your nature. But have some fun, too. College is a unique experience. Soak up every single moment of it, because you can never get those days back. Don't miss a football game or a basketball game, even if it means you have to pull an all-nighter to get ready for a test. There is much that is wrong with big-time college athletics, but it is all forgotten on a crisp October afternoon when you are sitting with your friends and rooting for your team to win. Those days you will remember far longer than a calculus test.

We've never talked about your faith, because that is a personal matter between you and God. It is hard to feel the need for or the presence of the Almighty when things are going as well for you as they are right now. You have a condition that afflicts all young people. It is called the arrogance of youth. At your age, it is hard not to feel bulletproof. As you get older, you will discover how difficult life can be. That is when you are going to need a strong faith. It is then you will realize that there really is a God, and that the best place to find Him is on your knees.

I've never mentioned this to you, but you changed my life. I was the prototypical Type-A personality who ran with the throttle wide-open, until you arrived. My boiling point remains too low, and I don't bite my tongue as often as I should — but nothing like the old days. You will accomplish many great things in your life, but getting your grandfather to stop and smell the roses will rank among your best. Thank you.

Zack, you have achieved so much in your young life. As you move on to new challenges, never forget how special you are. You have blessed Grammy and Granddad Wansley and Grandma and me beyond words.

Love,
Pa