

Graduation 2005

Introductions by Mr. Hild

Dear Ridgeview Community,

It is an honor to be able to present our salutatorian and valedictorian to you. These two individuals, Jennifer Tillson and Danielle Dubler, are representatives of an entire class of students who deserve recognition. All of these students have grown very close to each other, to the school, and to me. They have done great things and thus become great. Their absence will be felt, but they leave behind them a pioneering spirit and between one and four memorable years of building a school together. I wish I could present all of them to you. My best wishes and congratulations go out to the entire class of 2005.

Salutatorian

Our Salutatorian this year is Jennifer Marie Tillson. I had the great fortune to study with her in seven different classes, and based on these many hours that we spent together, I want to introduce to you not just *one* Jenny but *three*: the Jenny who was, the Jenny who is, and the Jenny who will be. It occurred to me that Goethe's motto "Become who you are" is also a goal for this young woman, because Jenny is at this preciously crucial moment in her life when the character of a person begins to crystallize. Jenny told me that she is still unsure of who she is and even more so of who she will be, and yet I have seen her transform herself and can easily envision her on the way to a life filled with learning and love. Maybe it is easier for an outsider to see into the character of another.

So who *was* Jenny? She was born in Fort Collins and is the daughter of Kate Kiefer and Tim Tillson. They sent her to Ridgeview in January of 2002, and Jenny's first reaction was that of shock. A good shock that is: she attended our Classical Literature class and was immediately taken by the relevance of the issues that her classmates were discussing in our text *Oedipus Rex*. She recently told me that she "didn't know that such meaningful discussions could happen at a school." Inspired by her new classmates, Jenny participated, without having read *Oedipus*, immediately revealing one of her most endearing character traits: the exuberance and enthusiasm that all of us who have taught her cherish and rely on in our classes and that we will miss here. To Jenny's first response to Ridgeview, I have to add my reaction to who Jenny was when I first met her: it was one of shock: I still don't know the technical term for the kind of clothing that she wore on her first day here, but I do know that the material would barely clothe my son

Tobias, who will turn two soon. I pointed that out to Jenny, slightly worried about alienating her, but she simply accepted my comment and began wearing slightly more clothes the next day. Here, more of Jenny's strengths revealed themselves quickly: the willingness to work with constructive criticism and with the desire to transform herself. Early on, Jenny also asked me for a copy of *The Iliad*, since she wanted to read what her classmates had read the previous semester. Thus, I thought that there was hope and great potential. From that day on, Jenny never looked back: she quickly developed into one of our stronger students, revealing the love of literature that her mother had nurtured from a young age. I personally will never forget that she told me after a few months that she was very happy at Ridgeview, because she knew what she was supposed to do and what she wasn't. To me, as a young high school teacher, this was an important moment, and now both Jenny and I affirm Goethe's optimistic view of man, who can be great and humane *because* he knows his limits.

The first time I realized that Jenny was going to be a serious force at RCS was at the beginning of her sophomore year, when she asked me to place her in German II instead of I. From that time on, Jenny has consistently outworked an excellent and diligent group of students, received the award for the best German student of the year twice, traveled to Germany, written long papers in German and aced almost every one of our hundreds of vocabulary quizzes. This is who Jenny has become in the course of her years with us: I think it is no exaggeration to claim that Jenny has been one of the hardest working students at Ridgeview. I realized just how much Jenny had become to personify the hard working student when another, rather delinquent, student pledged: "Mr. Hild, I will be a Jenny."

During her junior year, I mentioned to Jenny that she was very close to receiving the prestigious “Student of the Quarter” award. It seems as if this came as a surprise to her, and she says she still doesn’t feel worthy of all the honors she received. Everyone else at RCS, however, knows better, and Jenny has not only received many awards, but, and I think this is even more important, she has become a student who represents Ridgeview: desirous to learn, in love with the good, with great hopes for humanity, and with a passionate and com-passionate attitude. So *this* is the Jenny that we see here today: tireless, brimming with enthusiasm, full of hope and love, *and*--maybe not quite aware of how extraordinary all of these character traits make her.

I now want to look at our salutatorian’s future: After many tests, papers, discussions and a successful senior thesis, young Jenny has become Miss Tillson. She is *ready* to move on. She will attend Gustaphus Adolphus College in Minnesota to study Latin and German. Miss Tillson was sought after by several high caliber colleges and decided on Gustaphus Adolphus not only because she will receive impressive scholarships, but also because she will be part of a rather self-selective group of students who will take a more rigorous and classical educational path. I see her in this group of interested and interesting young men and women, who all share a desire to learn and become better. I see her rising to the top of her class very quickly because she discovers that the momentum she has built at RCS, the knowledge of herself that she has gained, and her good natured work ethic make her a formidable student every professor and student enjoys working with. Miss Tillson is very much looking forward to her studies as well as the opportunity of studying abroad. She says she hopes to continue studying forever. If, however, she should be forced to work, she envisions teaching at a small

Ridgeview-like institution, where work really is learning. I could easily image her teaching in Germany or even here at Ridgeview. Well, I don't want to take any more liberties with Miss Tillson's future, other than wishing her all the best and expressing my confidence that she has what it takes to become a first rate scholar and human being. I hope to see her continue her life with the same kind of joy and love that she has brought to my classes and our school. Please welcome the salutatorian of this year's graduating class, Miss Jennifer Tillson.

Valedictorian

To introduce our valedictorian, Danielle Dubler, is truly a great honor and pleasure for me. It has been a privilege to share and shape the path of Danielle's life for a few years. Danielle's parents, Jill and Pete Dubler, had set their daughter on her life's path and they are the ones who have given Danielle a sense of direction and goals to pursue. Now Danielle continues ever more independently, and yet still fueled by the energy that her parents have invested in her. Danielle was home-schooled until 7th grade and next to obviously excellent academics, Danielle learned to pursue and stand up for what is right. This moral nature and devotion to the good defines Danielle as it defines her parents. When I wrote letters of recommendation for Danielle, I claimed that receiving the character award at RCS revealed as much and more about her qualifications for a successful career as her academic prowess. Danielle's dedication to truth, beauty, education, recommends and endears her to me, and I think to everyone who knows her.

Her parents were the ones to sign Danielle up at Ridgeview and they made sure that she stayed here even when Danielle would have preferred not to: they, after all, also stand up for what is good. My first impression of Danielle was that of a quiet, even shy student, who did her work, but didn't seem to go much beyond that. A few days ago I went back to my records and was astounded to find that Danielle's first participation grade was a C+. That changed dramatically during Danielle's sophomore year: returning from a crucial and transformative summer, Danielle took her fate into her own hands and she has not let go of it since. She wasn't just present anymore; she was a presence. Danielle began to get involved not only in my class but the school; she was gaining a

stronger sense of herself, and became one of our best students in the course of that sophomore year. Because of Ridgeview's size, fortuitous opportunities opened up for Danielle. When Lindsey Wright asked Danielle whether she wanted to run as vice president for student council, Danielle said "why not," and her energetic campaign speech was, to me, the decisive factor in their victory. As far as I remember, this was the first public revelation of the young woman whom we honor today as our valedictorian.

During her junior year, Danielle wrote a column for the *Coloradoan*, further challenging herself in the art of carefully expressing what she stood for. Dealing with critique from strangers and knowing that her opinions were public property forced Danielle to define and thus become more herself. Entering her senior year she was the student every teacher wants: strong, self-assured and mature, and yet, always curious, open, and hard working (She once handed me an 18 page Nietzsche draft, when others were still contemplating what to write about).

To me, another leap in Danielle's evolution was her performance in this year's theatre production of *Our Town*. Again, fortune lent a hand, making her play a part she hadn't even auditioned for: I thought, however, when I saw her portray the removed, olympian Stage Manager that I no longer saw a high school teenager on stage. Danielle filled this role with so much wisdom and life that it seemed to me as if a mature woman had stepped into the teenager's place.

Danielle also continued as a leader in our student government, trying to affect change not just at RCS: after the Boxing Day Tsunami, Danielle organized a fund-raiser for the victims of that catastrophe. This reveals another aspect of her nature that has become more evident over the years: as her sense of who she is grew more certain, she

began to turn outward and increase her interest in others, even those far away. Knowing that we humans are integrally connected, Danielle has learned that our development as individuals does not remove us from others, but connects us to them. Her senior thesis also revealed her desire to define herself not through local customs or idiosyncrasies but through an understanding of what it means to be a “Mensch,” a human being.

Now, having become her present self by soaking up and embracing what her parents at home and we at RCS have offered her, Miss Dubler will take this foundation and build on it. She will attend Colorado College this fall. I envy the professors who get to work with her as she wants to pursue Literature, Psychology, and International Relations; in other words, humanity as revealed artistically, scientifically, and socio-politically. As she becomes a citizen of the world, Miss Dubler envisions a career that spans our planet; maybe at the UN, maybe as a journalist, maybe ... --we'll see.

Whatever it is that she decides to do with her life, I can hardly imagine a young woman in whom I have more confidence as to her ability to continue to learn, act, care, and use her talents for the benefit of humanity. Please welcome the valedictorian of Ridgeview's graduating class of 2005, Miss Danielle Dubler.