

Graduation 2006

Introduction of Salutatorian

It is my pleasure and honor to introduce the salutatorian of Ridgeview's graduating class of 2006, Tristan Van Maren. Tristan is our salutatorian because of his own merit, but he would neither *be* nor be who he is without his intimate connections to others. First and foremost are parents, Laurel and David Van Maren. Tristan was born at his family's home in Fort Collins as the third of five sons. This strong attachment to his home and family obviously shaped Tristan's life, even more so as his mother home schooled him through 3rd grade. Tristan was a very outgoing and wild infant and boy, his mothers recalls, who made friends very easily. Paired with this extroversion and embrace of the world came Tristan's commitment to the first word he learned to say. It is a word that he claimed as his own, and he is still able to use in its sanctified form today: the powerful word no.

As her son's first teacher, Mrs. Van Maren placed emphasis on Tristan's ability to read, memorize, and enjoy the beauty of literature. As a sensitive and imaginative child, Tristan developed his love for the world of the imagination and became maybe more at home there than in the world of the typical elementary and middle school boy which he entered in the 4th grade at Liberty Common Charter School. Thus, he spent many a recess "scornful of mindless others," he remembers, "cleaning up after them," as his mother told me, because he neither sympathized with the amusements of smelly little boys, nor approved of the disorderliness they left behind.

The change to Ridgeview in tenth grade made life harder and more fulfilling, even though Tristan was not able to put this Ridgeview experience into words yet. At the recruiting event at Liberty, Tristan remembers muttering that "Ridgeview is hard ... and hard."

I first encountered Tristan in my American Literature class. He struck me as somehow unhelpful for the atmosphere of reasoned, passionate, and respectful dialogue that I like in my classes. Tristan already seemed to know everything, looking down from his objective vantage point with a removed and sometimes sarcastic verbosity regarding the texts and ideas of our class. As I tried to

convince him of the intellectual sterility of such a distanced and nay-saying attitude, Tristan responded by becoming less detached with every text we studied and more willing to be taught by the great authors we encountered day after day. In my opinion, there were two defining moments in Tristan's junior year: First, his flawlessly sensitive and articulate recitation of T. S. Eliot's 131 line poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and, second, his junior thesis in which he not only discussed Emerson's "Self-Reliance" as the critical theme of our American literary experience, but also claimed that he was neither willing nor able to make final pronouncements on the nature of American Literature. In the course of just one year, Tristan had become a student.

Our senior year together was thus a blissful one: every day I could count on a thoughtful, attentive, sincere, and helpfully provocative Tristan to help us through Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Conrad, and Joyce. Tristan says that the dialogue between Nietzsche and Dostoevsky became the most inspiring manifestation of The Great Conversation he had witnessed so far, and this particular dialogue continued to bridge the gap between literature and philosophy that had begun to narrow in his junior year. Not unsurprisingly, Tristan's excellent, personal, and spiritual senior thesis was not merely an attempt to continue the bridging of the literature-philosophy divide; it was an attempt to say no to the abstract puzzles of traditional philosophy and say yes to the representation of life in literature in order to encounter and embrace life in the world. For this life giving quality, we, at Ridgeview, like to refer to Literature as the king of the academic chess board, and in the mind and under the pen of Tristan, the literature of Dostoevsky & Co. turned out to be the authoritative life giver, the royal granter of Being, the model to understand our lives by, and thus Tristan's reading of literature did away with the traditional philosopher's abstract systems and concepts. Let me quote from the end of Tristan's thesis:

"By accepting that there is an author; that that author has given meaning to this life; the burden of "Why am I?" is lifted from our shoulders. We are *in* this life, and any attempt at objective truth only distances us from not only this life, but also ourselves. We must reconnect with life. We must cease to live our lives on the outside of life, looking inward at it; examining it; defining it; dissecting it. We must embrace the answer which allows us to be our true selves and no longer to hold high and lofty claims to meaning; verity; definition."

Tristan's senior thesis thus ended up with two important results: First, in its attempt to find the limits of human knowledge, it revealed to Tristan the limits of Tristan's knowledge; second, it returned Tristan to the life affirming child he was.

And thus, freed from false idols which move us out of life, humbled by the great minds and their texts, and ready to learn and live more, *Mr. Van Maren* now turns to the future. He will attend Hillsdale College in Michigan for a future full of the past: full of further inquiry, dialogue, philosophy, literature, computer programming, and friends and family. At Hillsdale, after leaving mother, father, and three brothers behind in Fort Collins, Mr. Van Maren will study with fellow Ridgeview graduates, including his brother Emrys. Thus as Mr. Van Maren leaves us and hopefully takes something of us with him, he will find some of what he leaves behind waiting right ahead.

Please welcome the salutatorian of Ridgeview's graduating class of 2006, Mr. Tristan Van Maren.