

It is my honor and privilege to introduce to you the valedictorian of the graduating class of 2006, Miss Kristin Dean. This is an honor because I daresay that ANY of the teachers at Ridgeview who have had the pleasure of having Kristin in a class would be honored to be giving this introduction. And it is a privilege because I feel privileged to have simply KNOWN Kristin Dean and to have been a witness at close hand to her remarkable intellectual growth over the past four years.

Kristin was born right here in Fort Collins, the daughter of Ron and Cynthia Dean. After attending what is now Trout Core Knowledge School and was then Washington Elementary, Kristin went for one year to Boltz Junior High. She tells me she did not like it there. And so she was home-schooled for a year, in what would have been 8th grade, and then came to Ridgeview as a freshman.

I remember well the first day I saw Kristin, sitting as a 9th-grader in my Pre-Calculus class and wondering if she wasn't a little young for that level of math. It only took a few quizzes to convince me that Kristin was, indeed, ready. But it was not until the following year, after Kristin had studied Calculus I over the summer and was excelling in Calculus II and Calculus III as a 10th-grader, that I realized I might have a math prodigy on my hands.

I suppose I could tell you what most of you already know: that Kristin has gone on these last two years, and has been exploring deep mathematical waters far beyond the known shores of simple algebra and elementary calculus, that she has been probing mathematical seas where most of us would fear to sail. I could tell you that she is so multi-talented, what we used to call a 'polymath', that her art teacher here at Ridgeview felt compelled to author an 'Ode to Kristin Dean', which many of you heard a few days ago at the Awards Ceremony. And I could tell you that in the fall, Kristin will be studying at the University of Chicago, one of the finest institutions of higher learning in this or any other land, and that she will be intensively studying mathematics with some of the finest mathematicians in America. [And I can't BEGIN to tell you how pleased I personally am by that!]

But what I really want to tell you is what most impresses me about Kristin, which is not her amazing talent in mathematics, undeniable though that is, but her character. This young woman seems to have, so far as I can tell, a heart of gold---and that is a rare and precious thing in this modern Age of Cynicism.

Not too many days ago, I had the pleasure of listening to Kristin give her senior thesis presentation, and one of her major themes was the need for humility. I was deeply moved by this, and though this may sound silly, it triggered me to recall something from an old TV show that I used to enjoy. Some of you older people may remember Caine, the Chinese priest-in-exile who 'walked the Earth' in the Wild West of 19th century America. In one episode, Caine said, "The wise man is humble, like the dust." Our own Western religious tradition teaches us that 'From ashes to ashes, and from dust to dust,' is the common fate of all humans, the path we all must tread. Modern science has taught us that we are all of us made, quite literally, out of stardust, our very atoms forged in the cores of hot burning suns. And so, 'We are stardust', went one popular song of the era I grew up in. This thought fills me with both humility and a sense of wonder, and it has been with a sense of wonder that I have watched the intellectual and spiritual growth of Kristin Dean over the past several years.

I think she is wise beyond her years. But I would insist that the opposite of humility is not pride, as many might think, and certainly not justifiable pride, but arrogance. I think it would be all too easy for a young person of Kristin's accomplishments to develop a streak of arrogance, but this none of us has ever seen in Kristin, not to even the slightest degree. And since she will insist on remaining humble, I will take pride in her achievements for her, and I am certain that the entire Ridgeview community is proud of her, and I KNOW that her parents sitting in the audience are deeply proud of her, and RIGHTLY SO.

To Kristin Dean, Ridgeview's first National Merit Scholar, and in my opinion, the finest student to have yet walked through these increasingly distinguished halls of learning, I salute you and say that I may have learned as much from you as you have from me!

Please welcome Miss Kristin Dean, the valedictorian of the Ridgeview class of 2006.