

We Are Ready - Graduation 2009

Micah Frank



*San Diego Jewish Academy Lifers (K-12 graduates):
Top l-r: Hunter Spiegel, Michelle Efer, Kevin Sherman, Sam Dosick
Bottom l-r: Ronit Hakakha, **Micah Frank**, Gabrielle (Gaby) Maio, Jaclyn Gaylis, Sarah Abelson*

The world as it was in the year 1995 is much different than the world as it is in 2009. Bill Clinton was our president, Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Whitney Houston dominated the billboard charts, the number one show on television was Seinfeld tied with Home Improvement, the first computer animated film (Toy Story) was released, Yahoo and eBay were founded, the idea of a DVD was first announced, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated, 168 people were killed in the Oklahoma City bombing, OJ was found not guilty, and the Chargers were in the Super Bowl. 1995 was clearly a very important year in our history and also a very influential one in determining the future of this world – because most importantly in 1995, my 36 classmates and I entered Kindergarten.

13 years ago I first stepped foot onto the La Jolla campus of the San Diego Jewish Academy. 13 years ago, I barely knew how to read or even write my name, I didn't know a word of Hebrew and I didn't know what 2x2 was. 13 years ago, I was oblivious to the world around me.

But now, 48 different teachers, 2,340 school days, and 1,239 tests later – here I stand, with only a few minutes left at that same school that I first entered 13 years ago.

Today, right now, we are all partaking in a ceremony commemorating our graduation from High School. A ceremony in which thousands of teenagers take part in every year, a ceremony which many of you took part in when you were our age. But it isn't the same. Because while yes, today is a graduation from High School it is so much more for my 36 classmates and me. Today is our graduation from the San Diego Jewish Academy. And as my dear friend Gaby Maio once said to me, a graduation from SDJA is not just a graduation from High School – it is a graduation from a lifestyle.

This lifestyle is something that only SDJA graduates can really understand - an experience shared with a very select group of people. It is nearly impossible to fully explain what this lifestyle is especially in such a short amount of time, as it has taken me 13 years to understand it myself. This lifestyle that I speak of is not something that has been taught to us rather, it's been shown to us, as it has been lived by our teachers, faculty, and classmates. It is something that we have learned just from being at the San Diego Jewish Academy.

As part of this lifestyle, we have learned that there is no such thing as a perfect person. Everybody was created with flaws and everybody is destined to make mistakes. But it is important for us not to get lost in our challenges; we must learn and grow from them so that we can a little bit stronger and a little bit wiser. And from these mistakes, we have learned something else – the importance of forgiveness. We have learned that we must not only forgive each other but we must forgive ourselves as well because the ability to forgive is essential to society, without forgiveness we become stuck in our past, not able to move forward. We must forgive so that we are able to make progress. And, we have also learned the importance of progress. This world was not handed to us in perfect condition and we have a lot of work to do. This is something we're reminded of daily as we put on our senior sweatshirts as on the back of them is a quote by Dr. Seuss "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot nothing is going to get better, it's not." Caring is something we also have learned and embraced. We not only care about our friends and family but also we care about the strangers in need of help and we care about making this world a better place. And above all, we have learned the most important thing of all – to always be a good person – to treat everyone we meet with honor, kindness, and respect.

There is another way of describing this lifestyle, a single word which is used daily here at SDJA: menschlikite.

I am confident in saying that each and everyone of my classmates are true mensches. And I have been given the privilege of witnessing this over the past 13 years. I saw it everyday at lunch as we shared food with classmates who didn't have, I saw it everyday in class as my classmates gave me lead for my pencil, I saw it when one of my classmates embraced a friend who was overcome with emotion at Aushwitz, and I saw it as our entire grade embraced each other at the funeral of our friend and classmate Matthew Beaver.

It is a true honor to stand here among some of the nicest, most caring, and most promising people I have ever met. But we would not be here without the help of some people who have shown us this lifestyle everyday. To Mr. Kissell, Dr. Davis, and Mr. Kahn, thank you for your endless love, support, and guidance. To our teachers, you have not only shown us what it means to be a mensch everyday inside of the classroom but outside as well. You have given us room to grow both as students and as individuals and shaped us into the people we are today. Thank you for the kicks in the butt you gave us when you realized we weren't reaching our potential and the pats on the back you gave us when we got there. To the seven lifers, I have grown and learned from you each day as we have grown from 5 year olds to 18 year olds- thank you. It sure will be awfully hard going to school without you next year but I know that we will keep in touch. And, most importantly, to the entire senior class – I want to thank you for 13 years of love and friendship – it has been a real gift getting to spend each day with you. You are all wonderful people and I cannot wait to see what you will do next.

I would like to offer you a gift of my own, a poem by Christopher Logue.

Come to the edge
It's too high
Come to the edge
We might fall
Come to the edge
And they came

And he pushed them

And they flew

Right now we are standing at the edge and in just a few moments we will be pushed off. But we are not afraid – no, we are ready for our time at SDJA has prepared us for this very moment.

Because today, right now, we are ready to join this world as more than just citizens of this world. We are ready to join this world as menches.

We are ready to become accountable to both ourselves and to society

We are ready to think

We are ready to learn and we are ready to fill this world with new ideas

We are ready to bring change

We are ready to join a cause and we are ready to fight for it

We are ready to struggle

We are ready to dream and we are ready to make our dreams come true

We are ready to believe

We are ready to create a world that not only we want to live in but our children will want to live in, and our grandchildren, and our great great great great grandchildren will want to live in

We are ready to do

We are ready to experience

We are ready to smell and listen and touch and see and hear and breathe and feel

We are ready for the passion, and success, and happiness, and peace, and love that lies ahead.

We are ready for our future.

For I know that in the words of Peter Pan – it will be an awfully big adventure.

To the class of 2009. It is our time. We are ready.

Lets go fly.