

Blake Sugarman

Speech at SCAPA Senior Banquet

May 22, 2010

Good evening everyone.

Like many of you, I've been going to SCAPA since fourth grade... fourth grade... That means I've spent the last *nine years* in and around 400 Lafayette Parkway. Now some people may be amazed by that. "Wow you've literally spent half of your life in there!"

But I'm more amazed that it's *only* been half my life... because I can't remember life before SCAPA. I grew up there.

And now the time has finally come. In less than two weeks, I will put on my funny hat and "gown" and venture forth into the world. In less than two weeks, I will have my final class with Mr. Thomas... That's not to say I won't continue to learn from him, though. I'm pretty confident the lessons will continue - because that's one of the things that is so special about this program: *we stay in touch*. I doubt I'll be visiting any of my math teachers from Lafayette, but I KNOW I will see Mr. Thomas, Ms Lab, Ms J, and all the other arts teachers who have shaped the way I view my craft and my role as an artist in society.

We've had a real opportunity --the chance to spend some time doing something we love *each and every day* at school. Not everyone can say that. We've had the opportunity to be in some of the only classes offered at Lafayette where - hopefully - every kid is actually engaged in what's being taught. Imagine that! We've had the opportunity to grow and learn more as artists than we possibly could have if we'd only practiced our craft *after* 3:15 in the afternoon each day.

And after all that, well, I guess what I want to say is ***Thank You***: To the administrators who make it all possible and to the arts teachers who make it all worthwhile...and (of course) to the parents for encouraging us all to audition in the first place and for volunteering countless hours so that this program has the resources to be everything it should be. You've given us something wonderful.

And whether we are going on to a career in the arts - or perhaps a career waiting tables while waiting around for a career in the arts, (that's probably going to be me) - or a career in... dentistry or nondescript office work ... whatever. We will always carry a bit of the artists' spirit within us. Of course, I can't speak for everyone, but I also can't see how you could dedicate this much time to your art - only to leave it behind on June 3<sup>rd</sup>. Don't.

Henry Van Dyke (whoever that is) once said, "Use what talents you possess! The woods would be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best." I just know the quote because it's on a little plaque in my basement, but I think there's something very profound about it. Even if you aren't going to be a *professional* artist, that's no reason to quit being an artist. It's a lifestyle. And it's a good one.

I'm pretty sure there's an actual scientific ratio between the number of artists in the world and the number of bigots. So be one of the artists. (Now hold on, that's not to say that people who *aren't* artists are bigots or that there aren't bigoted artists. There are...I've met some. But I hope you know what I'm getting at... Art doesn't discriminate. It brings people together with common appreciation and respect.)

The more art brings meaning to a community, well... the better! Art is what gives a people its cultural identity. The music, dance, writing, theatre,

art and architecture define us more than technological advancements or wars or ...healthcare policies... As artists, we help shape that identity. *(and)* That's why the School for Creative and Performing Arts is so important.

So finally I'd like to thank everyone who's fought to keep the arts in our public schools. In all seriousness, it's crucial to the future of our society. SCAPA has enriched the lives of thousands of people, whether by direct participation, like us, or through attendance at Dance SCAPA, an orchestra, band or vocal concert, a play, art exhibit, poetry slam, piano recital, or any SCAPA event. It enriches the community.

Thank you very much.