



Commencement Speech, by Anna Quindlen

So here's what I wanted to tell you today: get a life. A real life, not a manic pursuit of the next promotion, the bigger paycheck, the larger house. Do you think you'd care so very much about those things if you blew an aneurysm one afternoon, or found a lump in your breast? Get a life in which you notice the smell of salt water pushing itself on a breeze over Seaside Heights, a life in which you stop and watch how a red tailed hawk circles over the water gap or the way a baby scowls with concentration when she tries to pick up a Cheerio with her thumb and first finger. Get a life in which you are not alone. Find people you love, and who love you. And remember that love is not leisure, it is work. Each time you look at your diploma, remember that you are still a student, still learning how to best treasure your connection to others. Pick up the phone. Send an e-mail. Write a letter. Kiss your Mom. Hug your Dad. Get a life in which you are generous. Look around at the azaleas in the suburban neighborhood where you grew up; look at a full moon hanging silver in a black, black sky on a cold night. And realize that life is the best thing ever, and that you have no business taking it for granted. Care so deeply about its goodness that you want to spread it around. Take money you would have spent on beers and give it to charity. Work in a soup kitchen. Be a big brother or sister. All of you want to do well. But if you do not do good, too, then doing well will never be enough. It is so easy to waste our lives: our days, our hours, our minutes. It is so easy to take for granted the color of the azaleas, the sheen of the limestone on Fifth Avenue, the color of our kid's eyes, the way the melody in a symphony rises and falls and disappears and rises again. It is so easy to exist instead of live. -- Anna Quindlen's Commencement address to class of 1999 at Villanova