

Blank Checks and Party Hats: Unworthy Charity?

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Senioresque. It's a phrase I first coined as a freshman here at Kennett High to describe the unexplainable coolness of seniors. Their lives seemed so together, and they definitely had high school figured out. I would sigh on my way through the lobby and wonder if I could ever make being a teenager look that effortless.

Now, I find myself in my fourth and final year here at A. Crosby Kennett and *senioresque*—much to my surprise—actually sparkles from the corners of my life too. Car keys jingle in my hand as I walk through the front doors in the morning. I stop by the Main Office to pick up the superlative voting sheet and notice the deadline for senior pictures. On my way to Writing, an elective just for seniors, I know and greet nearly every teacher and most of the students that I pass in the hallway. During a break between classes it's now my friends and I who gather on the benches in the lobby; at lunch we sit on the lawn under “our” tree. I cross the street with my senior privileges and drop something off in my car, smiling as I notice the black and white 2007 tassel hanging from the rearview mirror. Afternoons are for hanging out, loud music, driving around, and extracurriculars; when I get home, today's stack of college mail will be on the table to greet me. Senior year isn't without its stress and its homework, but it does have its own rhythm and special ways of reminding me just how much fun there is to be had in this final year at home.

A significant part of senior autumn is taken up by plans and preparations for the excitement that will come next spring. When the night arrived for the first Project Graduation planning meeting, I waited anxiously to hear about what had been discussed. Perhaps Mom would drop a hint or two of what my class' parents might have in store for us next June.

I was soon distracted from my mother's unwillingness to reveal any surprises by the fact that Project Graduation was going to require \$35,000. Thirty-five thousand dollars. I seem to remember the words *oh my God* running through my mind when she dropped this figure. Thirty-five thousand dollars could cover a year or even two at many colleges, buy seats for the auditorium at the new high school, make a very generous donation to the local Jen's Friends' Cancer Foundation, pay for a whole year's salary for many of the laborers here in this valley, cover more than a third of the scholarship money given out by Dollars for Scholars each year. . . . My mind raced with

the countless other uses for \$35,000. Over the past seventeen and a half years I have done my share of fundraising and I understand just how hard it is to raise any sum of money with four figures—never mind five—even for a good cause. It's not that our community is stingy by any means, it's just that money is tight and there can only be so much to go around.

We are going to ask local people and businesses to help us raise \$35,000? This is how much senior classes have been raising each year? I cringe at the ethics of asking people to support this cause: please give me money, not so that I can donate it to cancer research or use it to furnish a portion of our over-budget high school, but so that my class can throw one last party. Ummm, great. We are going to waste the generosity of this extraordinarily giving community, and deep down it makes me want to vomit.

When you break the \$35,000 down per student, it is less than \$150 for each one of us—not an entirely outrageous sum, at least not in terms of past class trips. The tales told to underclassmen about the adventures of current seniors on Project Graduation night combined with the questionably accurate lore of years long past make each class' planning committee anxious to devise a night that will be both memorable and flashily unique. Excuse me, but last time I checked, the point of this much-hyped evening was to have a good time and be together. Cruises on Boston Harbor, I-Max movies at midnight, even some time spent in Nova Scotia all circulate in the school rumor mill from the A-Building to the portables and back. What do these expectations say about the naïve mentality of graduating high school seniors? Furthermore, what is the parental message sent by this willingness to leap as high as our wishes command?

My mother is quick to point out the original intent behind Project Graduation: it saves lives. Events like Kennett's have been set up not just here but across the country so that kids will have a supervised, safe place to spend the night following Graduation Day. One too many tragic drunk driving accidents or crazy, police-busted parties on this night have caused people to take notice and plan events like our Project Graduation. I find it wildly ironic that on the night touted as the beginning of our adult lives, our parents have to again step in and organize an activity that will, in essence, save us from ourselves.

Now, before you get the impression that I like to bellow my grievances like Ms. Burnap in a full cafeteria, please realize that I am not a cynic; I am not anti-social. I count myself among the members of the Class of 2007 who think that, yeah, it would be wicked sweet to walk across that stage on McKeen Memorial Field in my white

cap and gown, board a bus, and in a few short hours be at Fenway Park to watch the Sox. Project Graduation is a rich tradition and a great chance to be all together as a senior class one last time, I get that. I understand all the reasons why it's going to be awesome and I'm excited for the adventure of that night, yet I can't help but see the enormous cost at which it comes. We're asking for thousands of dollars from this community and expecting perfection from our parents. As *senioresque* takes hold and clouds our perception of the realities of adulthood, can anyone else see the unrealistic enormity of our expectations?