

Monday, October 18, 2004: Newton Sears, Senior.

Good morning students and faculty. Today I will be discussing how a summer job changed my outlook on society and how fortunate each of us is for our lifestyle at Nichols.

I worked as a janitor this summer at the L-Co Building on Smith Street in South Buffalo. I worked with two classmates of mine: Brendan Swift and Will Cheyney. This was the first job for any of us and we weren't quite sure what to expect. I won't speak for either Will or Brendan, but the best part of the job for me was getting to know our co-workers. Our co-workers weren't fellow high school students looking for some extra spending cash. These were middle-aged men who were supporting their families on their salaries from being a janitor. I'm not going to lie and say that I had spent a considerable amount of time with people of this socio-economic status. To my surprise, though, as the summer progressed, these guys taught me more about different ways of life than anyone had before.

I became particularly close to one of my co-workers, Charles. Charles grew up in the Broadway district on the east side of Buffalo, and had been a janitor since he graduated from South Park high school. Charles and I were paired up on numerous projects throughout the building. I would tag along with Charles as he taught me how to properly distribute sweeping compound and what needed to be cleaned up and what didn't need to be cleaned up. During these jobs I would usually just listen to Charles as he told stories about what was going on in his life and what not. Charles knew that I went to Nichols and that I lived a relatively comfortable lifestyle, but he did not judge me because of this. He would ask me what the most gruesome thing I had ever seen was or how many times I had been to the east side. Let's just say that none of my answers impressed him. Charles wasn't trying to poke fun at how sheltered I was from his lifestyle; he was attempting to make me look at myself and realize how fortunate I was. I began to fully understand what my father had been telling me in the past: "You don't realize how fortunate you are for the way you live."

This is a bit of a digression, but I have to tell my favorite story from Charles. One day while sweeping on the 8th floor, I chimed in on the conversation and asked him if he had any kids. He told me he had an 8 year old who was at one of the new charter schools. Charles then told me that he had his son enrolled in summer school, so that when he started 3rd grade he would be ahead of the game when he got there. This was probably the most practical piece of parenting I had ever heard, and it was coming from the last person I thought it would. This is how sharp Charles was.

But back to my main point. Charles made me realize that I needed to be a little more grateful for everything I have. I admit I have not turned into a saint since Charles' advice, but I have tried to earn everything I have, whether I'm successful or not. This is why I am talking to you today. I think I was the typical Nichols student before I got to know Charles. I was ignorant of the other end of the socio-economic spectrum. We don't realize how fortunate we are when we are sitting in here for morning meeting,

walking on a beautiful campus, or even taking a math test. The opportunities presented to us every day here are more than many people will have in their entire life. To practice what I am preaching, you do not need to go down to the city mission or throw 20 bucks on some guy's lap, I'm telling you to look at yourself and ask if you are being grateful for the lifestyle you live.

Thank you for listening.