Intro

Good morning. The harder I thought about giving a great speech, the harder it got for me to write one. I have written three drafts with different topics, and none of them stood out for me. I ran out of time to put them together, so I decided to read the three polished drafts. I hope this tells you that you don’t have to be a super great student in order to give a speech at the graduation. We are only human, and I think the world is pretty generous. If I hear applause at the end of this speech, I will have proven it true. And don’t worry. I kept this speech short.

1.

Good morning. I thought hard about what to talk about, and I came up with nothing. I did have a lot to say, but nothing seemed appropriate for a graduation speech. Then I thought that I should change my subject from what I want to speak to what I think people want to hear. It was a design problem. If I just make what I want to make, my audience will not necessarily like it. However, if I make something that people want to see happening, they are more likely to pay attention to it. So I thought about the topic that is universal to everyone. One thing that I can tell that everyone here is doing right now is that they are all living. To us, to live is not very difficult as long as food and shelter are concerned. Some of us may be financially challenged, but we are all here living now. When we are sick, we appreciate our healthy time, which is hard to realize when we are healthy. Being alive is a little different. Because no one really knows what happens when we are no longer alive, we are not sure if we can even appreciate the time we were alive. But we are certainly alive now. If we are not, we are not here. It is quite a miracle to be able to be where we are, doing what we are doing. And it is also quite a miracle that we have been alive for the period of time that our age tells. That means our hearts have constantly been pounding without stopping even once. It is something that we should appreciate. It is nice to be alive. Some say it’s hard. Two days ago, I lost all the keys I had. I didn’t like it. I thought the life was a little hard. But if I am not alive, I can’t even lose my keys. Isn’t that boring? So let’s appreciate our existence in this world.

2.

School is a strange place. You spend a couple of years with same group of people, and suddenly after this day called graduation, you will never see them this much together again. When you realize this fact, the time you spent with the people around you may start to seem very precious, but you can’t get it back. You may think that you should have gotten to know your
friends better. Or you may think that you should have spent each day of school years more consciously. I don’t want you to regret anything. I think that you have done the best you could. If you still think that you should have done much more, please cherish this day and talk to as many friends as you can. It is going to be hard, even if you promise with them, to see your friends when you want to see them. While at school, whether you like it or not, you saw your friends almost every day. You talked to them in a relaxed manner, knowing that you were going to be able to see them again soon. You felt as if school years will continue forever in terms of seeing your friends, although you knew you were going to graduate sometime. And that sometime is happening now. If school years consist of all the days in four years, you are now in the 1460th day out of 1460 days. They went pretty fast, didn’t they? As you get older, you may feel that time goes faster and faster. On the other hand, didn’t years in your childhood feel longer? I have heard that it is because we have so many fresh things to encounter in our childhood. We remember fresh things. The more fresh things you encounter every day, the more you remember, and the more memorable the day feels. The more days with more fresh things you spend, the richer the years will feel. The more childish in a good way you become, the fuller your life becomes.

3.

Good morning. To be honest, I don’t really know why I am standing here now. I didn’t really have a long-awaited dream of giving a speech at the graduation. Nor did I ever imagine that I would do this six years ago when I left Japan. How could a boy, fresh out of his high school, who hardly could speak English, imagine that? From this, I have learned that something unbelievable can happen if I act. We tend to say that we cannot do this and that. It is not that we cannot do; it is just that we don’t do. When I received a self-nomination form for the speech in my mailbox, I was going to recycle it immediately. I automatically thought that it is the last job I would do. I thought it is something that someone who can speak better English should do. I was limiting an opportunity only by my imagination. Although I was not confident at all about giving a speech, in the corner of my mind, I was interested in doing it. In fact, I was very interested. I wanted to take a risk. I wanted to venture on this memorable day and make it more memorable. I wanted to test my bravery. And I wanted to add a little surprise for my family members, who came a long way. So I jokingly nominated myself, and here I am. Of course I am nervous, but I am doing this job anyway because I had to, and I am over two-thirds through the speech. I think that if we push ourselves, we can do pretty much anything that we believe we cannot. When you saw a nomination form for you, what did you think? “Whatever?” “I don’t deserve it?” “Someone else will do it?” I thought the same way, so I nominated myself because I knew my odds were much higher than when I play lottery. When I was a little interested in nominating myself, I asked myself, “Why do this?” Then I changed my question, “why not?”
I think that giving a speech is not that bad at all. You like to talk about yourself to your friends, don’t you? The only difference is that your audience has become bigger. And this time, your audience will listen to what you say carefully. How nice is that? It’s a good chance to get your voice heard by many. So what keeps us from doing it? You think you are not good at speech? Look at who is speaking now. I think it’s our false sense of pride that inhibits us from acting freely. We are afraid to be seen in a different way from what we expect others to see us. What is the real “you?” It can be any way others will see you. It’s not how you think you should be. It’s only who you are, whether you like it or not. You cannot change how people see you. Why fake it then? You actually want to live hard. To live hard, you need to follow your instinct. We all want to be recognized by others. When you ignored your nomination form, didn’t you act against your instinct?

I am very self-conscious. For example, I am afraid to make mistakes when I speak English because I don’t want to be seen as incompetent. I wear many masks to hide my incapability. So I forced myself into the situation where I cannot avoid confronting my true self. I know that while some of my audience appreciate what I say, others won’t like it, and still others just don’t give a damn. Everyone sees me in a different way. I may not like the ways some of you see me, but what can I do? I decided to live my own life regardless of how people see me. If we care too much about people’s eyes, we are surrendering our life to others. Then we are no longer living our own lives. Life is short. There is no time to waste, being afraid to do something that instinctively interests you. Please nominate yourself in your life. I heard that the past is dead. I also heard that humans grow until they die. Let’s live hard now.

Outro

Now I am done with all the three drafts, which complete my speech. Hope you didn’t get bored. To summarize my points, I wanted you to appreciate that you are alive, to stay curious like a child, and to nominate yourself in your life.

Merry commencement. Let’s cherish this special day, and have a good life.