Valedictorian Speech

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When I was told that I would be speaking at graduation, the first thing I did was google “how to write a valedictorian speech.” I was told to listen to other successful graduation speeches, and in the weeks leading up to the due date, I spent more time procrastinating listening to dozens of successful speeches than actually writing one. With that much procrastination, I guess this is gonna be the best graduation speech of the century. So here it goes:

“Parents, teachers, staff, and most importantly, the Class of 2018: four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth, on this continent…”

Thank goodness I’m not majoring in public communications.

Instead of reciting the entire Gettysburg Address, I suppose I’ll say my thoughts on the past four years. I think we can all agree that a lot has changed in our lives. The family of ducklings moved into our courtyard, the Incredibles 2 movie premiered today, and the Cubs finally won a world series.

But we have all also developed into beautiful young men and women. I still remember my first day of school as a freshman, shyly introducing myself to my peers, and mostly keeping to myself. But after years of writing essays and messing up lab experiments, I finally had the audacity to admit in my graduation speech that I had no clue how to write a speech in the first place. As Winston Churchill one said, “Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.”

I wouldn’t be standing upon this stage were it not for the love from my parents. After I was diagnosed with autism, my mother and father strove to include me in a classroom with the rest of my peers and allow my curiosity to blossom. I want to thank my parents for their love, care, and perseverance that put me on the right path to succeed, and let my passions shine. And I also want thank all the parents and guardians for guiding their kids in receiving a good education.

It was in these classes that I met some of my best role models. The most memorable teachers I had were not the ones who just taught what was on the next test, but who helped me come out of my shell. In my English class, Mrs. Miller would always encourage me to participate in literary group discussions. This inspired me to roast Scott Griffin on a class assignment. In my history class, Ms. McGuire always showed us her dog Willie, but also engaged us in intellectual discussion about current events. Most of all, I want to thank Ms. Paff for showing me both the colors of hydrogen gas in a diffraction grating and the wisdom to get through my high school career. Thank you, teachers, for your dedication to all of us.

But even with guidance, there is still ambiguity in where our futures lie. Before I entered high school, I believed my path would be laid out before me. (I certainly thought I’d find a better introduction to this speech!) But as the years progressed, I saw my interests change, my friend group change, and my hair color change. How could I possibly succeed in the future when the present was so malleable and unknown? At some point, I contemplated becoming a hermit and living in the middle of the mountains and raising alpacas with Mia DiPaola.

What allowed me to ease my questions about the future was my classmates, and my friends. My most memorable friends weren’t those who had the highest grades, or the who had the most likes on Instagram, but those who were there when I needed them and helped me grow. I still remember the time I walked home with Sandy Harvey in the middle of winter, and when Brett Wilson and I shared cannoli cookies and views on societal issues, and when Elliot Smith, Tara Frederick, Hayley Lohmann, and the rest of the commited pit band joined me and played for the school musicals. I remember Carly Nocchi and Nicole Meszaros always looking out for me when I was down, and Gisela Nucciarone discovering new ways of making me laugh.

You see, every single one of you have touched my life. All of you were determined to see me smile and let me shine, even though I was so nervous at first to show who I was. I would not have the confidence to talk with you on this stage if you weren’t here. Our stories are all intertwined, and our paths all intersect.

You all have the talent to succeed. Over the years, I’ve seen you rally for your beliefs in these halls, and band together in Relay for Life. There’s no set path that all of you follow in life, and yet all of you

continue to succeed. Do not worry about which path in life is the “right” path; your impact on others, on me, already shows that you’re creating your own beautiful legacies.

And, as my calculus teacher Mrs. Buttler always said, “You got this.” Let’s go out and shape each other’s stories. Thank you, Class of 2018, for shaping mine.