

Huntington High School's 151st Commencement

School Board President Emily Rogan's Address

On a sweltering Sunday afternoon, not quite thirty years ago, I sat on that field out there when it was still grass, not turf. I remember everything about that day; the pink sundress I wore, the bad perm I had, the party at my best friend's house.

I was off to Cornell, to become a doctor and live someplace, anyplace, but Huntington. I wasn't going to get married until I was at least thirty years old and I wasn't sure I ever wanted to have kids. Well, I did make it to Cornell. Aside from that, not much of my plan stuck. I changed my major, got married at 24 to a guy from Huntington, became a journalist, had two kids, and moved back here to raise them. And today I'm speaking to you as school board president. This was definitely NOT in my plans.

But I have no regrets. I'm not sorry about one decision that led me to this very moment, right now. Because I've learned that life is not a linear experience—it's more of a loopy curvy, up and down, and kind of all over crazy path. And...as much as you make plans, and that's a wonderful thing, the most valuable skills you need are those that help you manage when your plans don't work or your dreams fall through. How will you handle disappointment or adversity? What will you do when faced with an unexpected challenge or tragedy? Will you be resourceful and adaptable? Will you seek alternatives and be willing to try something different? Will you have compassion for others? Because those are the life skills that will truly serve you well. Of course your grades matter. Your accomplishments

matter. College and career? Yes, they matter. But your substance as a human being--that is what matters most.

For most of you, the years ahead will be filled with many firsts. Maybe you'll learn to cook for the first time or do your own laundry. You'll have to manage your own schedule & figure out how to balance the pull of socializing with the demands of your studies. Some of you will face true failure for the first time. Others will experience the exhilaration of success, the kind that comes from working really hard at something and seeing the fruits of your labor. You'll fall in love and have your heart broken for the first time. And you'll probably experience these moments on your own, away from the safety net of your home. Finding the people who'll have your back when your parents aren't there is an important part of growing up.

You're going to discover that it's OK not be perfect, that in fact we are all quite fallible. You're going to learn that you grow the most from the mistakes you make and the difficult times, not from the moments that come easily and you get right.

I'll end with a tale of two trees: a great oak and a small sapling. The trees grew side by side along a river, and one night a tremendous storm came. When the storm passed and the sun rose, the oak tree was lying on its side, roots pulled right out of the ground. But the sapling stood where it had been before the storm, roots firmly in the soil. In its rigidity, the oak tree was uprooted. The sapling survived because it yielded to the storm.

Be strong like the oak tree, but make sure you have some of the sapling's flexibility too. Be willing to bend, to be open to the possibility of change, and the reality that you don't have much control. You'll find life may be a little easier when you are prepared for the unexpected.

On behalf of the Board of Education--congratulations. We wish you great success as you begin this next phase of your journey. And don't forget about Huntington, the place that nurtured the roots that ground you and gave you the wings to fly away.