Huntington High School’s 152nd Commencement

Valedictorian Todd Colvin’s Address

When Dr. Leonardi made the announcement that I was this class’ Valedictorian, people were pretty shocked. The most common responses I heard were “What, you’re smart?” or “I knew you were smart, but not THAT smart.” Whenever somebody would say this I would smile and nod, because I knew that they meant it as a compliment. But then by the end of the day it kind of wore on me, when one more person said that to me I got fed up. I’m not proud of it, but I just had to tell that person, “Listen, Grandma, you probably should have known that by now.”

It is an interesting task that I am assigned today, one where I get to talk about the upside of our years here. I say interesting because positivity doesn’t play a major role in most conversations. Take the media for example- nobody would read a story about a cruise that went well, but add a blown engine and a few backed-up toilets and suddenly the nation is enthralled. People’s fixation on the bad is the only possible explanation as to why Tim Tebow is now the most talked about New England Patriots quarterback. So, that is why I am so excited to give you my account of the past four years, to tell you why the glass is half full: why I believe in Huntington High School.

I believe that if you bet against the Huntington student body, then you are on the losing side of history. Who says that a Huntington athlete can’t drop 20 points down the stretch of a close playoff basketball game, or an actor can’t play Captain Von Trapp as well as anybody on Broadway? Who says that our generation, accused of being materialistic and selfish, can’t collect two busloads of food to deliver to Huntington’s food pantries? Who said that the Science Bowl Team isn’t worthy of being mentioned in the Congressional Record, or that our marching band can’t get 3rd in the state? It is never a wise idea to give a Huntington student the added motivation of having a chip on their shoulder, because it will rarely work out well for you.
And I also believe in the Huntington Student section. I believe in getting rowdy at football games, and telling the refs to check their answering machines if they miss a call, and I believe that if we are up by 2 touchdowns with less than a minute left, then it is time for your team to start the buses. I’m not saying that those are the nicest things to say, but nobody said that we had to be perfect! Our class at Huntington is passionate, we went hard or we went home. I also still believe that the lacrosse team won that Cold Spring Harbor game; there is no way that the shot that hit the crossbar was a goal.

But, mainly, I believe in the power of Huntington because I believe in the heroes who live here. I believe in John Cronin, possibly one of the most charitable kids in this school with his help in the Grandfriends Club as well as the food pantry at St. Hugh’s, and his infinite capacity for love and enthusiasm that he is so blessed to possess. I believe in Ms. Paz, and Coach Kevin Thorbourne, and Mr. Troffa, and Mr. Bisogno and everyone else that taught me, through their actions rather than their words, what the definition of selflessness is. All of these are great people that dedicate their lives to making this town a better place, and I am a better person for having met them.

We should all take a step back and admire the sacrifice that the teachers here undergo. If you ask any teacher, of course they will say that they love their job. But my question is, why? Why would these people willingly choose to do a job where the responsibilities are either tedious, such as grading a hundred plus essays that all basically say the same thing, or impossible, like convincing a room full of college-accepted seniors to care about a Regents. Surely, some sort of sort of masochistic delight in punishment is the only logical explanation for why anyone would want to be a teacher.

No, I don’t believe that these people are teachers because have a passion for sleep deprivation or low wages. I believe that they’ve found a sense of purpose in teaching, they’re all individuals who made the decision that they would be happiest in a job where they can give back to society by educating the next generation. In the words of one college English professor, these teachers view love, “as a consequence of meaningful work instead of as the motivation for it.
But this selfless work ethic can’t only be attributed to the teachers here. We need the unsung heroes too, such as the custodial staff. During the spring of my junior year, the lacrosse team was on a tear leading up to playoffs. After a first-round win against Islip, there was a lot of celebrating going on that left the locker room a mess. That was the final straw after a series of warnings about messing up the locker room, and one of the custodians came to us directly and asked, as politely as possible given the inherent frustration of the situation, if we could pick up after ourselves before we left. But then, almost as an afterthought, the custodian told us something that has stuck with me ever since. He told us that he had been buying bleach out of his own pocket to clean the locker room floor with, so we don’t get Athlete’s Foot.

And that got me thinking, why does he care so much? Most people would say, “your fungus, your problem.” But then I realized that that’s not how the people who work here think. Our fungus is their problem, too. They are driven by a deeper sense of purpose, an unscratchable itch to give back to their community. And that, ladies and gentlemen is why I believe in Huntington High School.