

## **Huntington High School's 154<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

### **Valedictorian Caitlin Knowles' Address**

Members of the Board, Dr. Leonardi, Mr. Cusack, Mr. Polansky, parents, and fellow students, I am incredibly honored to stand before such a talented class of graduates. From excellent students, athletes, and musicians to superb artists, actors, and dancers, our class truly has it all. Our four years at Huntington High School were filled with your many accomplishments, and you should take pride in the fact that your hard work and spirit helped make our high school years memorable.

As I look back on my own memories, I immediately focus on my wonderful family, friends, teammates, teachers and coaches. I can't thank each of you individually unless you want to be stuck here until next September, but know that all of your contributions have been appreciated.

Upon closer examination of my memories, I notice another more interesting, subtler theme. Between fall of 2011 and spring of 2015, not only have we experienced incredible intellectual and emotional growth, but we have also faced an enormous number of challenges brought on by none other than terrible weather conditions. I'm not referring to a slight drizzle or a little wind chill. I'm talking about hurricanes, blizzards, and practically anything short of full-scale natural disasters. By late fall of my sophomore year, I was almost starting to think the creators of the movie *2012* were onto something. Don't worry; we're safe now, at least until Netflix starts allowing advertisements, because that will be its own kind of apocalypse.

As a result of these storms, we experienced a few cancellations. I'm sure every student here will recall the week and a half of school we missed for Hurricane Sandy, the snowstorm that postponed PlayFest, and our last midterm week that ended up becoming a string of snow days. Despite what you may be thinking, my focus on the weather does not stem from some hidden desire to pursue a career in meteorology or a cliché attempt to start a conversation. Instead, I see the amazing number of storms our class has had to endure during our time at Huntington High School as a symbol. Throughout all of this adversity, we still found a way to accomplish everything we strived to do and even enjoyed the process.

To combat the destruction caused by Hurricane Sandy, our very own Habitat for Humanity Club embarked on dozens of expeditions to Breezy Point to repair damaged homes. We may have missed a few days of school sophomore year for Superstorm Nemo, but we made Nemo our own force of nature this year when we won first place for the third year in a row with our Homecoming float. Even with the freezing cold temperatures at 3:00 A.M. during Relay for Life, we still raised over half a million dollars for cancer research over four years. Although we weren't able to perform our Lord of the Rings show in PlayFest, I'll bet anyone who was supposed to wear a Gollum mask considered that a precious development.

In the midst of these difficult storms, our class of 2015 found a way to dance in the rain, or the snow if you were the Highsteppers at the football county championship. Our ability to face these storms at so many of our school events and still have an amazing time reflects our improved ability to overcome obstacles in life to find happiness. To me, the most important

lesson we have learned at Huntington High School is that regardless of circumstances, if we can keep a positive attitude, we will simultaneously achieve greatness and experience joy.

As you move on to the next stages of your lives, you may not be completely in control of the world around you, but you are one hundred percent in charge of how you view it. You can choose to be happy in any situation, and you can find a way to bring positivity into this world, no matter how small. In this way, you are in control of your own destiny.

Every day offers a new opportunity to discover your passion and devote yourself to sharing your gifts with the world. Find what you love to do, and care about it. Never forget the importance of compassion in life. Care about the people around you, care about giving back to your community, care about your education, and care about yourself. I promise you that you will find a world of happiness if you choose to take on the view that every second of your life and every opportunity to find joy matter.

Go out into the world believing that you are prepared to succeed. Have confidence in yourself and your abilities. As a talented basketball player by the name of Joe Harris once said, "Expect to win." Be confident knowing that you can take on whatever life throws at you with a positive attitude and an unyielding determination to never give up. I know that I will always have confidence in this class' immense potential to achieve based on the amazing accomplishments you have already given to the Huntington community and those that I am certain you will bring to the world in the

future. I wish you all the best of luck in your future endeavors, and I can't wait to see the incredible success of Huntington's Class of 2015!