

Huntington High School's 155th Commencement

Valedictorian Rachel Carpenter's Address

Thank you to all of the parents, teachers, faculty and friends who have come out to see us commemorate our grand accomplishment this evening. It is an appropriate time of day to celebrate, I think, if not a bit unconventional for graduations. As the sun hangs tentatively in the sky, we are able to breathe in the day we just lived, and prepare for the coming sunrise. All of our lives, we have been told to prepare for the next step, the next moment in our lives. Take a moment and reflect, are you what you want to be, are you ready for the next step?

I have no sage wisdom to give you, I will not stand up here and tell you things I cannot know. But I can tell you the things that I hope. I hope that in your life, you find happiness and joy, but you also find the depths of sadness, and learn how to climb out of that dark abyss. I hope that you find something or someone you love, come to understand that love and do your best to keep it a part of you. But above all, I hope that you never forget to hope. To look towards tomorrow, that bright and beautiful horizon that brings life to every new day. The sun as it sets can signal an ending, this sun that we see tonight sets on our high school careers. But the wonder of the sun is that it will always rise again. What will the sun illuminate for you, in the early hours of morning tomorrow? (Or perhaps I should say, late morning to mid-afternoon, we are teenagers after all).

The world is vast and we are small. Yes, our time is limited. But that does not mean that our actions are limited. I had so hoped to avoid clichés in this speech, but I must include one that I ardently believe in-nothing is impossible to a

willing heart. This world is ours for the taking, so do not waste it! You have courage and strength within you that you have yet to discover! Take risks, because you do not want to live with regrets. Treat all of life as you have your time in the classroom. That may sound a bit odd, because for the past four years, twelve even, like me, I am sure you have wanted nothing but to escape the narrow confines of the school grounds, and begin your life in the real world. But we have learned much more than how to simply read and write in these now empty halls behind me.

Lesson #1: Pay attention in class- keep your ears and eyes open to the people and the world around you. There is so much beauty and wonder in this world of ours, it would be a shame to let it go unnoticed.

Lesson #2: Do your homework. Apply the lessons you have learned to your life, be kind, be brave, be inquisitive. Do not simply let life pass by you. Everyone dies, but not everyone lives. Be an active player in this game of life. Define your own life, make it something worth living.

Finally, we have Lesson #3: Respect your peers. Our abilities may not be equal, but we are all human. We all feel, we all ache, and we all live one life here on earth. Isn't it just marvelous to think that the person sitting next to you has thoughts of their running through their beautiful minds at this very moment, thoughts that may be similar to your own? That they may be sitting beside you, seeing the same person stand before you, hearing the same words she is speaking but may be experiencing something very different from you. You have no idea how impactful one person can be on one's life. Be that one person to another.

“...no matter how you get there or where you end up, human beings have this miraculous gift to make that place home.” - Creed Bratton, *The Office*.

Standing here before you, I must take a quick moment while I have your attention to thank you. Thank you for helping me discover a home here at Huntington High School, thank you for welcoming me, for being that person to impact me in a most profound way. When I moved here four years ago, you did not have any obligation to me, you did not have to take me in as you did. But you did not cast me aside, or leave me to learn the ins and outs of the crazy world of high school by myself; you taught me how to laugh even when it seemed that I could not muster a smile, taught me that grades do not define me, which hallways to avoid and when, and of course, how to properly do an air squat. I can honestly say that each and every one of you have impacted me throughout these four years, whether you were aware of that or not.

All that I am today, I owe to you, my peers, my friends, my teachers, my mentors, and to this wonderful, wonderful school that brought us all together. Even though we might not be able to decide on a class t-shirt, I hardly think that matters in the grand scheme of things. I'll be honest, I won't remember what our float looked like from homecoming, and I won't remember which team won the volleyball tournament, and for that matter, you all probably won't remember this speech I am giving today. But I will forever remember this moment right now, looking out across all of you today. I have no right to be up here speaking to you all. This is *our* graduation, this is our moment. Together.

As we head into the great wide world, we will go our separate ways. We may use some of the knowledge we learned here in our future, and some things we will forget. Some memories will forever glisten in our minds and others will be lost

deep in the archives of our subconscious. Perhaps the friendships we made here will endure, perhaps they will not. But one thing will endure: this class. All of us, sitting here together today, on the brink of becoming Class of 2016, graduates of Huntington High School. Our sun has finally set, so rejoice in the fading light, revel in the coming night, and know that your tomorrow will be bright.