

Hello. First off, I'd like to congratulate everyone here today. Graduating high school is no small feat, especially in the midst of a global pandemic. You should be proud of all that you've accomplished during this time, and I can say with confidence that your success, which is evident at today's ceremony, is well deserved.

I'd additionally like to recognize all of the people who have helped us get here today: Superintendent Regalbuto, Principal Carpenter, all of our fantastic, dynamic, patient teachers, and our loving and supportive families. We can all breathe a sigh of relief now.

I came to Mount Everett at the beginning of seventh grade. It's likely that if you knew me back then, you remember me as being very, very quiet. I was the type of person who easily faded in the background. I did what was expected of me, because I never wanted to fail, but I never went above and beyond. I never called attention to myself. I'd sit down, do my work, and quietly walk out of the room each day. I became well-acquainted with the recurring parent-teacher conference comments: "Well, she does good work,

but she's so quiet!" In fact, my ninth grade history teacher, in October, told my mother that he didn't think he'd ever heard my voice before.

For so long, I felt as though I'd been marked from the beginning of my life as the shy one. That was my place, and I was comfortable there. The thing is, though, I wasn't happy. I didn't talk because I wasn't confident in myself, and I wasn't confident because I didn't know who I was.

I had my first lead role in a play in 11th grade, playing Hermia in A Midsummer Night's Dream. I remember that after the show, a community member I had known for several years came up to me, astounded. She said that I seemed like an entirely different person on the stage. She was impressed with my confidence and the way I projected my voice in front of a couple hundred audience members. The thing is, I didn't step into a new identity when I hopped on the stage. I felt, for the first time, that I was finally living my truth. My face may have been caked with makeup and I may have been strapped into a corset, but I knew that the person I was up there was the real me. She was passionate, and outspoken, and knew herself and what she believed in. "Though she be but little, she is fierce." I kept a little bit of

Hermia with me, because I could see myself in her more than I could see myself in me.

Needless to say, I'm a much different person than I was in seventh grade. If you've seen me in the hallway recently, you can probably tell from the bright orange corduroy pants I often wear that I no longer feel the need to hide. As I grew up, I grew into my identity. I'm not scared anymore. I know who I am.

One of the greatest privileges of being a student at this school is that I've gotten to watch you all go through similar transformations. I've seen quiet kids like myself blossom into outspoken students and passionate citizens. I've gotten to see kids with loads of talent but not-so-much ambition learn how powerful they can be when they put in some effort. I've gotten to see kids fight through tough mental health struggles, tough exams, and a really, really tough global pandemic.

And the amazing thing is, we're not done yet. This bittersweet ending is also a similarly bittersweet beginning. We're about to embark on new journeys, be it college, career, the military, or who-knows-what. We're constantly

changing and evolving, always incrementally more mature, more experienced, and more well-rounded than we were the day before, so lean into that. Here's some advice to get you started:

First, be yourself. You've likely been told this throughout your life, but it's true. Life is too short to conform for conformity's sake, because it's what everybody else is doing. You'll never truly achieve happiness that way. Wear what makes you feel best. Chase after the life you want to live, no matter unconventional it may seem. Speak your truth. No matter what, just be unapologetically you.

Second, I want to encourage you to be tenacious. Be absolutely, wholeheartedly relentless. Go after what you want in life. When you're faced with obstacles, which you undoubtedly will be at times, remember to keep fighting. Put yourself into everything you do. Speak out against injustice. Even if your hands shake, like mine are *definitely* doing now, I promise you won't regret it. Passion trumps perfection, always.

Lastly, I want to encourage you to appreciate those around you. I'm sure that you've been especially aware of this over the last few days. Things are coming to a close, and today may be the last day we're all together like this. Some of these faces you'll never get a chance to see again. So savor it. Express love, joy and gratitude for those who have helped you grow and who have grown with you. Say the things that need to be said. Now is the time to value everything we have and everything we are as a cohort.

So, go forth in life. I wish you all the best. I wish you healthy friendships, college experiences, and careers. I hope you'll remember to always be true to yourself and to embrace what makes you special.

We've come a long way from our seventh grade selves, and we'll come a long way from where we are today. I'm so incredibly proud of you all.

Thank you.

