



Lead with Heart.™

Class of 2016 Valedictorian Speech

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Welcome Sr. Jean, Sr. Joanne, Mrs. Sullivan, Mrs. Perfetti, Mrs. Baulch-Zullo, faculty, parents, family, friends, and my favorite 211 girls in the world who make up the class of 2016.

Let me start with congratulations! The day that we have been anticipating with both fear and excitement since the first day of freshman year has finally arrived! I remember the best piece of advice I was given before starting my high school journey: "Enjoy high school while you can; the days are long but the years are short." Back then, I could not possibly imagine how quickly the past four years would fly by. Knowing what I know now, I wish that I had better heeded that wise advice. High School is a unique period in everyone's life. It can be simultaneously the toughest, the most dramatic, and the most fun time. It seems that once we finally figure out how to make the most of our time here, once we finally get really good at the high school experience, it is over and we are forced to step a little more deeply into the "real world". So much of our time here is spent thinking about and wishing for the future, where we will go to college, which major to choose, and what career path to follow, that it becomes almost too easy to forget about the present, too easy to under-appreciate the time we have here until it was too late. Thinking back on the past four years as I was composing my remarks for this ceremony made me more nostalgic than I thought possible, for I realized that, by the end of this day, each of us will be on her own uniquely carved path to the future. The past four years at Sacred Heart Academy have given us a completely unique high school experience, one that we could not have received at any other high school, and one that was all too easy to take for granted.

Freshman year was a whirlwind of both enthusiasm and anxiety, as we were all eager to meet the new friends we would make yet fearful of leaving the familiar pasts where we were comfortable for so long. It was a year of firsts: our first Walkathon, our first Christmas dance, our first Red and Gold and, of course, along with these came some of our first mental meltdowns. Everything was new and exciting and that made things just as stressful as they were fun. We were all fearful of making the senior in the locker above us angry, nervous about passing all our classes, and so anxious to make the friends that we were told we would keep for a lifetime. Together we learned that change can be a good thing and that these four years would be a time to learn more about ourselves and about others, a lesson that we will soon be learning yet again this upcoming fall as we arrive at our respective college campuses.

Sophomore year seems to be a blur in my memory, the year that everyone just has to get through. Nothing was new any longer but, on the bright side, we did not have to worry about the SAT's or college decisions at that point. We were repeatedly told to enjoy our last underclass year while it lasted because after it was over, the real challenges would begin. We got to know the remaining few people with whom we might not have become acquainted the year before, and we joined a few more clubs as we came to better manage our time. We made new friends, and kept the old, and for the first time had to face the horrors of having mixed lunches and sitting at long tables rather than the cozy little square groups of four that we had become accustomed to. All in all, Sophomore year allowed us to come out of our shells as we became more comfortable and more appreciative of Sacred Heart Academy as our home away from home.

By Junior year, as we graduated from maroon to navy socks and blazers, we started to realize that our time here would eventually come to an end and so began the upperclass stress with the unavoidable pressure to keep our grades up, achieve high SAT scores, and up our leadership roles in extracurricular activities, all while trying to maintain the joyous atmosphere that we had known during the prior two years. Of course, we were able to have a very memorable year despite those rigorous demands, beginning with our hippie-themed junior Walkathon,

continuing with our junior dinner-dance that we had eagerly awaited the whole year to attend, and of course the unforgettable anti-bullying concert featuring Meredith O'Connor, everyone's favorite singer-songwriter. By the end of the year we were dismayed by the farewell we were forced to say to our beloved dean, Mrs. Laurice, as she moved to Tennessee, but were all a-jitter with excitement about the thought of becoming the oldest girls in school.

And that brings us to senior year. Each event this year somehow seemed bittersweet, as amid the excitement, we realized that each would be our last time experiencing something together. We had our very own senior overnight retreat, senior tree lighting where we danced and sang our hearts out to "All I Want for Christmas Is You," a visit from the Nesquik bunny, and of course the senior prom. We were introduced to two new deans, Mr. Conway and then Ms. Shirreffs, both as wonderful as Mrs. Laurice. As summer weather arrived a bit earlier than usual, we sat in our last few classes smelling the chicken of "Pollo Campero" from across the street, and finally, last evening, participated in our last liturgy together at St. Anne's. And now here we are, standing together for the first and last time on the stage of the Sr. Virginia Crowley theatre in our white caps and gowns waiting for our names to be called, eager to be handed our diplomas, and sad to be saying our farewell, yet excited to begin the next chapter of our lives as we venture off to college.

To quote the acclaimed sitcom, "The Office," "I wish there was a way to know you're in the good ol' days before you've actually left them." The high school years are short, and our time together at Sacred Heart Academy was no exception to this reality. It was over in the blink of an eye. It still feels as if I should be coming back next year to continue my time here. High school is only what we make of it, and I hope that I speak for everyone when I say that Sacred Heart Academy is the home of some of our most meaningful friendships, fondest memories, and most impacting lessons. We have been given the tools we need to find our own success in this world, and have been taught that we have to define our success for ourselves. Some of the most important lessons that we have learned from our teachers at Sacred Heart were not written in any textbook, and those are the lessons that we will come to cherish the most. Sacred Heart Academy has given us some amazing opportunities to learn about ourselves and our ability and obligation to "Lead with Heart." Although we will no longer wear our skirts and blazers that make our affiliation evident, the positive attitude and values that we will take from our time here will forever distinguish us as alums of Sacred Heart Academy. Because of these, we are prepared to take on any challenge that we may face. Thank you, Class of 2016! And Congratulations again! We did it!