

Providence Day School  
Commencement Address, Katelyn Horne '08  
June 2, 2023

Thank you very much, Dr. Cowlshaw, and thank you to the Board of Trustees, faculty, family, friends, and of course to the great Class of 2023. It is such an honor to celebrate this special day with you.

I'd like to begin by addressing what may be an elephant in the room. Some of you may have seen news articles about a recent trend in graduation speeches. Just a few days ago, the CEO of a telecommunications company gave each member of the graduating class of the University of Massachusetts a cash prize at the end of his commencement address. Let me end the suspense now. There will be no cash prize at the end of this address.

In lieu of cash, what I can offer is some advice. I have literally sat where you are sitting, as I attended my own graduation in this very building a number of years ago—although I'll choose not to be specific as to exactly how many years. I recall how surreal it was to put on the robe and to be saying goodbye. The reality, as you will learn, is that this ending is no more than the beginning. In the years since my own new beginning, I have received and benefited from a great deal of advice. I'd like to pass that along to you, in hopes that it will serve you as well as it has served me.

First, if you have parents or guardians in your lives, thank them. Especially today. In fact, let's do that now. I'm going to ask every graduate to find their family in the audience and wave your thanks to them. Your parents have experienced every step of this journey with you. Your triumphs have been their triumphs. But also, and perhaps more importantly, your bad days have been their bad days. That began with your playground scuffles, continued when Instagram became so much more interesting than dinner conversation, persisted throughout your teenage angst, and will remain as you develop your own life and career. I am eternally grateful to my own parents. Be grateful to yours.

Relatedly, if you are lucky enough to have one or more siblings, appreciate them. I have heard it said that the older you get, the more you will want around you the people who knew you when you were young. Nothing could be more true. I have the great fortune of having an older brother. He and I were both lifers at Providence Day. He was only one grade above me—and I say only, because I think that the age gap was a little too close for our comfort. I think he thought that he was too cool to hang out with me, and I certainly felt that I was too cool to hang out with him. Turns out, we were both wrong. My brother John made the incredibly difficult and remarkably selfless decision not to attend a traditional college, but to enroll at the United States Naval Academy, and with it to sign up for a life of service in the United States Navy. He is now a Lieutenant Commander, and we have at times lived with a thirteen-hour time difference. But I cherish our time together, and I encourage you to do the same with your siblings.

Next, travel. I took my first trip to Europe with my Providence Day classmates. Our French class traveled to Paris and Italy together during the summer of the World Cup, and we enjoyed every minute. Our chaperones perhaps less so, as we occasionally found ourselves on the streets of Paris past curfew. But I have loved traveling ever since, and my fondest memories are of unexpected adventures in the countries where I have lived and worked. I have gone motorcycling through the countryside of Ghana, worked in a palace in the Netherlands, tried oyster pancakes in the hawker stalls of Singapore, climbed the mountains of Colombia, and accidentally gone surfing with great whites off the coast of South Africa. As a disclaimer, let me make clear the last one I do not recommend. But if you have the opportunity to study or work abroad, take it.

Value and learn from your teachers. There is something incredibly special about people who devote their lives and careers to teaching others. You all have benefitted from the knowledge and guidance of a particularly special set of teachers and staff. Many of them also taught me. I had Mr. Bynum as my adviser, and I have the utmost sympathy for his plight in shepherding a group of giggling sophomore girls for an entire year. Poor Mr. Hedinger dealt with me in English class, on the Honor Council, and as coach of the varsity soccer team. Let me just say here for the record—H, I'll never forgive you for all of that running. And many of you may know my mother, Lecia Horne, who does an incredible job of running the school store.

Just like my teachers, yours have tolerated your class's eccentricities, from your unique slang to your pretty embarrassing TikTok dances. It is only in hindsight that we learn to appreciate the invaluable role that those teachers play. But in the present, you can take advantage of every opportunity you have to learn. In college, find a professor whose work you are interested, and ask if you can help with research. I did that in law school, and seven years later, I was helping to prepare my former professor for her hearing as a White House political appointee before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. She is a lifelong mentor and friend. Find yourself a mentor.

Understand that life will not always be fair. This class, your generation, has already faced enormous adversity. Your school careers and social lives were upended by an unforeseen global pandemic. The impact was devastating. Put simply, that was not fair. But remember that generations before you have experienced their own share of hardships. Students invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in their educations, but had the simple bad luck of graduating in 2008, when there were no jobs to be had. Decades before that, more than two million young Americans were selected for mandatory military service through the draft. Maintaining perspective will not prevent adversity, but it will allow you to better survive it.

Try new things. When reflecting on this adage, the first thing that popped into my head was that my senior class at Providence Day managed to set the senior lounge on fire on the first day of the school year. I wish that I was kidding. Before I make the Headmaster faint, let me make clear that I do not encourage pyrotechnics of any kind. My class was a test case in another respect, as we were one of the first classes to be offered the Global Studies Diploma program. The program was untested, and seemed to entail a lot of additional work without any certainty

as to a reward. I am so glad that we tried it anyway. I could not have imagined at the time that it would launch a career in international law, propelling me to law school, to positions at the White House and the United Nations, and now to a law practice representing sovereign States. So, try new things.

Next, fail. It has been said that winners are not afraid of losing, but losers are. Take that to heart. Apply for the internship or graduate school or job, even—and perhaps especially—if you think that it is out of your reach. If you don't get it, follow up and find out why. In some instances, the mere act of following up can open new opportunities. In others, you will learn from the experience, and be able to draw upon that knowledge next time.

Finally, fight for what you believe is right. Some hard times, like the global pandemic, are the result of forces beyond our control. Others, however, are firmly within our grasp. This country's history has been compared to the swing of a pendulum, with periods of extremism eventually followed by a return to the middle, thanks to the pull of gravity. But we cannot take the trajectory of that arc for granted.

Generations before you have imparted this message in terms far more eloquent than I will attempt. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. told us that “[i]njustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Dr. Maya Angelou charged us to “[p]ick up the battle and make it a better world[,] just where you are.” And the words on the wall at the United States Holocaust Museum remind us that if we don't speak up for those who are persecuted, then in the end, there will be no one left to speak up for us.

You all have the great fortune and privilege of having had an outstanding education here at Providence Day School. We cannot wait to see what you will do with it. Congratulations to the Class of 2023.