

Doug Read

“Rough Draft”

Good morning everybody. Firstly, thank you to Dr. Stimmel and Dr. Criscione and the Board of Education for allowing me to speak today. I’m very proud to stand up here along with Phil and Chris representing the class of 2018.

I would like to start off by congratulating the class of 2018 thanking all the people in my life who made it possible for me to become Salutatorian and speak up here today. Thank you to all my teachers who had to deal with me in class. Though it may be a stereotype that the Salutatorian is a teacher’s pet or role model for the rest of the class, I’m not sure this applies too much to me (but don’t worry too much if that is who you expected to hear from though, Phil is still speaking after me). Thank you for putting up with my disruptions and thank you for always going beyond what I expected in helping me reach my goals. Mrs. Anderson, I will never forget our APES class. Thank you for putting up with all of us even as we started a water gun fight with your lab equipment. For those of you who think her job with high school seniors is a break from her two little kids at home, you clearly have not seen Mrs. Anderson’s room, where her beautiful potted plants are being overtaken by the radish and pumpkin seeds my class planted as a joke. Mrs. Hart, thank you for continuing your lesson and finishing all the curriculum despite all the distractions. Even turning the board off behind you could not stop you once you were into a lecture. I don’t think anyone will ever forget the time you lectured our class on the Persian Empire with a black screen behind you as you pointed to the map you thought was there. To the rest of my teachers, most importantly, thank you for always being my first scapegoat when my grade was suffering. I reluctantly admit that I have on many occasions called all of you crazy and

bad at your jobs to defend a bad grade to my parents. Thank you to the Class of 2018 for giving me sanity these past four years. Whether it was Moira's lunchbox beeping and flashing, Alexa's daily screaming on issues where she would dare others to try and match her volume, or Tina who had the honor of being my google profile picture for the past 4 years, thank you to everyone for making each day a little bit funnier and a little bit better. Don't worry too much Tina, that picture of you from 8th grade will finally be deleted when our google accounts get wiped next week. Lastly, thank you to my parents for being my biggest supporters in life and helping me gain an unwarranted sense of confidence that allows me to talk in front of the thousands of people here today. From elementary band concerts where you proclaimed me the next Louis Armstrong to the U-5 soccer team you coached where you touted me as the "star player" despite once refusing to re-enter the game until I finished my half time snack of doritos, thank you for making me feel as if I could tackle anything. And a last quick thank you to the Fitzpatrick's for the doritos instead of the standard orange slices that week. My parents were never the cool parents, but for at least that soccer game you were.

As I began to reflect on what I wanted to say today at graduation. I couldn't help but be overwhelmed by the bizzare year we have had so far. I think it is safe to say no class has had to graduate in a weirder year than the class of 2018. The year was filled with overwhelmingly negative stories in the news. As the year started off, news networks finally warned parents that their kids weren't taking flash drives to school because no one has used a flash drive in school since 2012, they were smoking. On a more serious note, 2018 was filled with some of the largest tragedies in recent memory. This year we saw an average of over 1 school shooting a week as gun violence continues to plague our country. We, the class of 2018, have been forced to become

politically active, walking out of our schools begging to be kept safe. Even Sayville hasn't remained isolated with threats causing all of us to be late to first period, being patted down by the police and the school's "crisis response team."

With such adversity it often makes me wonder how it is possible for us to keep our heads up. We could focus on the more positive stories in the news because we have seen a few triumphs in the face of this year's news. It makes us appreciate when we work together to solve difficult and pressing issues. Our current president has, for example, dared to meet with people previous presidents, including Obama, wouldn't have had the guts to. One particular summit this year will certainly go down in history for its potential long-lasting effects in bettering the world. We were all truly happy to call ourselves Americans when Trump finally met with Kim Kardashian. Together they will tackle the many problems facing our overcrowded and privately-owned prisons. While Kim and Trump were taking on prison reform, we were also reassured about our future. And if our country's future was at all in doubt, Kanye's return to twitter after his brief mental health scare and reaffirmation that he will indeed run for president has quelled any fears of an unstable America.

We can also, instead of focussing on the triumphs of this year or focussing on the future, focus on today and remember how to appreciate life. With all that has happened this year, I find it easy to lose sight of how wonderful life can be. I, however, have made it my mission to not lose sight of this fact. I first began to appreciate this joy and the silliness of life on my yearly trips to Florida to visit my Grandpa. He loved to make my sisters and me laugh by doing the most absurd things. We would always beg him to make us lunch. Sometimes, however, this became an entire process. Once, he asked us if we would like some PB and J sandwiches. After

we gleefully responded yes, he insisted on constructing our PB and J sandwiches inside out, placing 2 pieces of bread in the middle and peanut butter and jelly on opposite sides. Per usual, this created an argument between my sisters and him. My grandpa vehemently defended his sandwich because there was of course sound logic behind it. According to him, the science behind an inside out sandwich was quite clear: “When the bread is in the middle the flavors do not touch,” he proclaimed, “This makes the sandwich far easier to digest.” I’m not *sure* he truly eats his sandwiches like this when he is alone, but I know he loved the ridiculous argument he would find himself in with my sisters and me.

Also on these trips, my sisters and I would plead with him to let us drive the golf cart he used to get around his community. He, however, would only let us do that after he licensed us. What I would soon discover is that this test was harder than the DMV’s. It took me one try to pass my real driving test, but countless times to pass his. When it was my turn to take the test I hopped into the cart full of excitement wearing my flip flops. As I would soon discover from my grandpa, it is illegal to drive in those in Florida. Even when I finally got to take the test, it was filled with antics. I had to signal with my arms, properly park the cart in his driveway, and more as he sat in the passenger seat pretending to scribble notes on his clipboard. At one stop sign, after forgetting to signal, I was forced to move to the passenger seat due to “reckless driving.” Needless to say, I had failed again. After one of these ridiculous jokes, I finally asked my grandpa, “Why all the jokes?” He smiled and said, “When I’m silly, I remember that life is wonderful. Sometimes people forget that.”

From that moment in my childhood on, I have realized the power of going through life with a smile. It’s a message that I hope lasts beyond the walls of high school. There are countless

things everyday that make it easy to mope around. This is especially true in the stresses of high school where more of us found ourselves thrown into several AP classes being expected to handle the workload.

In many ways I have taken after my grandpa. Not many people would stand in front of thousands of people and say, “You know that guy that makes his sandwiches backwards and invents driving tests to fail his grandkids? That’s exactly like me!” I, however, do it with an overwhelming sense of pride. There are many people who think these successes of mine have come despite my sense of humor and happy demeanor. I, however, must admit I have found success in high school largely because of it. Keeping my grandpa’s advice in mind I’ve always strove to do what is most important: finding happiness and laughter in the boring, mundane rut that everyday life can turn into. In times like these, it’s best when we laugh at ourselves and make other people laugh too. Though some teachers may argue this is the worst advice I could give, sometimes you just need to start a water fight with lab supplies or even turn your teacher’s board off.

We can’t always take life too seriously. It’s easy to go through life in our middle class white town and do everything that’s expected and be completely normal, but normal can get really boring. Occasionally, we have to take our sandwiches inside out even if the people at Sayville Sandwich look at us strangely.

Thank you again to everyone and congratulations to the class of 2018! I wish everyone successes in the years to come and hope