

“An Opportunity”
By Lauren Flaumenhaft

Good evening. To start, I would just like to take a moment to thank everyone who worked so hard to give us this graduation ceremony under such trying circumstances. I would also like to thank all of Sayville’s teachers, staff, and coaches. Additionally, I would like to thank my family for their support over the years. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends, teammates, and the entire class of 2020. And anyone who asked me for a shoutout, consider this your shoutout. I wouldn’t be up here without all of you.

So obviously times are really unprecedented and challenging and uncomfortable and devastating and uncertain and frankly, weird right now, and I’m supposed to stand up here and tell you guys some combination of super positive words to inspire you all to go out and change the world or something. But here’s the thing, I, like you all, am only 18 years old, and I don’t see why I am any better equipped than any of you to provide those kinds of words.

So I’ll just tell you what I know. Our class has been through a lot. We were born into a world reeling in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11. We attended school and witnessed the rising devastation of school shootings in places like Sandy Hook and Parkland. We have endured devastating storms, like Superstorm Sandy. And, the Yankees have not won a World Series in over ten years. All of these events have brought on societal change--TSA is now a thing, schools are constantly developing protocols in the event of a shooting, steps are being taken to quell climate change (you know, paper straws), and now everyone hates the Astros.

It is an upsetting reality that in many instances, tragedies must occur before society experiences a change, but that is, in fact, the nature of change and invention. It never occurs without a need, and once the need arises, people often unify to find solutions. For example, in recent years, millions of teens found themselves with way too much free time, and thus, TikTok was invented.

Now, we are being thrust into a world that is dealing with not only a devastating pandemic, but also significant social uproar. While I, and I’m sure many of you, am deeply disturbed and frustrated with the current state of our society, we should also be encouraged by the opportunity that is before us. We have the opportunity to be part of a generation that creates change in many facets of our society. There is no doubt that our lives, especially this year, have so far been populated with disasters, tragedies, cancellations, and for many, heartbreaks, but all of this leaves us with the potential to create a better society.

I know this whole “change the world” stuff may sound a little overwhelming right now, so now I would like to share a different message to help us all out. The message I want to convey is one which I first learned in elementary school at Cherry Avenue. As those of you who also went to Cherry Avenue know, our classmate, Cameron Riccomini, was a very funny kid and an astute observer of the human condition. We also all know that throughout our time at Cherry Avenue, Cameron battled a rare form of brain cancer. He handled his terrible condition courageously and with a sharp, and sometimes wicked, sense of humor, made up of an endless supply of hysterical jokes. While Cameron lost his battle in fifth grade, I think that we can all take a lesson from him to deal with the times we are living through right now. The lesson is that we should all laugh and joke

whenever we can and we should not allow our current circumstances to get us down, but we should also pay close attention and handle our challenges with humanity.

So try to keep your focus on the good in your life. In the wise words of my guy, Ferris Bueller, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." So as we are all navigating the uncertainty that is our society right now, just remember to take a look around you and find something to smile about or to laugh at. Take in a sunset with your friends, eat an extra dessert, spend time with your family, and maybe even tell a joke.

At this point, there is no telling what may happen next. After all, we are living through some of the most unprecedented times in human history right now. But as we all head off to the next chapters of our lives, whether it be college, the military, or the workforce, I hope that you all look for ways to create change in our society, and of course, continue to laugh and smile. It has been an honor to get to know all of you, and I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavours. Congratulations, class of 2020!