GRADUATION SPEECH

FOR

SWAPNA BIRDSALL

(**If it is appropriate, introduce yourself and offer brief congratulations**). Hello everyone. I am Swapna Birdsall, and I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s mother. I would like to extend congratulations to the graduates and their parents and family members.

(**Daughter’s name**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I feel proud to be here to support you in attaining the goal of graduating from this program. This is a significant achievement and this graduation ceremony acknowledges all of the hard work and focus you have dedicated to reach this point. I feel that as we all go through this process, we view the challenges and accomplishments from different vantage points. I feel that every day provides me with an opportunity to learn more about the disease of addiction and I am willing to do whatever is necessary to find positive and constructive ways to support you through your rehabilitation. You’re on a path of discovery and growth, and I will be there to support you to get through the pain as well as the positive moments. I feel hurt and frustrated that you have had to go through this personal war of addiction, and if I could make it go away I would, but life is not so simple, so I may say and do things that might be misinterpreted. (**Turn to your daughter and say**), \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, please know that sometimes love and support do not look the way you think it **should** look. I love you with all of my heart, no matter what. I feel that your anger towards me comes from expectations of me that I haven’t met, and you know what? That means we have something in common. Maybe we’ve both expected things from each other that we haven’t received, and maybe it’s time for both of us to really communicate with each other and really listen to each other and suspend unrealistic expectations in order to survive. Believe me, it is my intention that you survive, and learn and grow through this struggle.

**THE FOUR R’S:**

1. I respect the courage and commitment that you’ve brought to completing this program, and I respect how you have had to fight the urges and compulsions that torture you every day.
2. I regret that you have had to go through this process. I regret that you have had to struggle with addiction, especially at such a young age, and I regret that I didn’t have the knowledge and tools to properly deal with the seriousness of this issue when you were younger. I regret that it was necessary to have a transportation team on stand by to rescue you when you would get angry and run away in the middle of the night. I regret that my attempts to help were perceived as “rescuing” you or “fixing things.” I see now that my actions did not support your health and well-being. I regret having doubts that things may not stay better once you return home, but there’s no guarantee things will stay ok. Every minute of every day will be a challenge, but I have so much love for you and I refuse to give in to those doubts. I also regret making you feel as if you weren’t good enough for me as you’ve said in many letters (**Turn to your daughter and say**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, you will realize, as you get older, that the responsibility for not feeling good enough comes from within yourself. If you really took a good long look at all you have to offer as a person, I know that you would recognize that you possess many qualities others would want, and if you really took a good long and honest look at ME as a person, you would know that my children-yes YOU, are my world, and my commitment to your well-being should be very clear.
3. I resent the hurtful and disrespectful things that you’ve said to me. No one wants to hear anyone wish her dead, and those words coming from one’s own child cut like a knife. It was never my intention to damage you. I only wanted to make sure you would survive, because, as corny as it may sound, very simply, where there is life, there’s hope. You are way too young to succumb to this disease. I resent that you have had to deal with this awful addiction at all, but really, life is NOT FAIR, and we will conquer this.
4. As I said, I am very proud of your accomplishments in this program, and I have some requests. (**Turn to your daughter and say**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I request that, no matter what, you remember that I am your MOTHER and not the enemy. I request that when you get angry, and you will, that you take a breath, pause, and think about what is upsetting you, and speak to me. Before expressing that you “wish that I were dead,” think of the consequences of your request and what you are actually saying. Think if you really, really mean what you are saying. I request that you learn to express yourself more clearly. Before wishing harm to someone else, think of what you really want to say, and please find a way to express the pain and frustration you are feeling at that given moment. I am doing whatever I can to respect YOU, and I request the same.

I have been encouraged by the letters I have been receiving from you, and I see a new level of respect and commitment. My heart breaks when I think of all that you have had to go through, and I know that witnessing your father’s deterioration is almost too much to bear. It’s impossible for anyone to imagine the sense of hopelessness you must feel. Life is so fragile and so easily lost, but we have to believe things will get better. It’s really all any one of us has. Everyone deserves a chance in life, and to have and appreciate that chance requires a clear head and the courage to face what comes, one step at a time. Sometimes it’s too painful to look at the big picture, but if we can find one small, positive thing to hold on to, we just might make it through to the next moment, the next hour, the next day. It is my intention that you find the way to connect to and discover the positive moments in life, and to have the strength to endure and learn from, life’s tests. Congratulations. You **ARE** good enough and I love you no matter what.