**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ROBERTA PALUMBO**

Hello everyone and welcome to this year’s graduation ceremony for the Aaron School Class of 2018. I want to thank all of the parents, family and friends that are present today as well as our teachers, administrators and distinguished guests. We made a great team as we shared a common goal. In special ways, we are **ALL** graduates today and we will always share that common bond through the accomplishments of this class. You have supported and encouraged our students in your own unique ways and that is a real cause for celebration! I am sure our six graduates would whole heartedly agree.

I have now been at the Aaron School for just about six years and every year I am fascinated by the energy, enthusiasm, and efforts demonstrated by the graduates as they begin their term as seniors. Although each year the lessons tend to be fairly uniform and all requirements are taught and met, with each ensuing year, I have noticed the class develops a collective, unique personality. This year’s graduates proved to be thoughtful, filled with purpose, and very persistent in their determination to complete their courses and exams in order to graduate..... and **GUESS WHAT**??? They **DID IT**!!! Graduates, you were presented with challenges.... you approached each one with careful consideration.... you worked with your mentors, you were motivated and encouraged by your family and friends outside of school, and you fulfilled the promises made to yourselves, and to us here at Aaron, and we are all very impressed with your success.

You are now ready to “leave the nest” known as high school, and though things will change... there might be bigger schools, longer assignments, greater challenges, please never forget that you received a strong foundation here at school, and that knowledge will stay with you and protect and advise you as you travel on your own unique path to the next adventures in your lives.

While you attended classes here at Aaron, you had many mentors and people who cared about your progress, your problems, and their solutions. I encourage you to continue to find mentors to guide and advise you as you move on to college and even further beyond. None of us goes through life on his or her own. It is always important to have someone to go to that can see a situation from a fresh perspective or point of view that you might not have thought about. While you think about who might mentor you as you move on to college, remember that you have your family and friends as well. Remember the feeling you have had when you needed support from a member of the faculty or staff here at school.... what you will want to do is find people that encourage you.... that listen to you... and that make suggestions you can understand and use. Also, you are **your own** best friend. Learn to pay attention to the feelings you may have, and if you’re uncomfortable about an issue or something that challenges you, think about what bothers you and work with others to learn from each experience.

Someone once said, “A lot of people have gone further than they thought they could because **someone else** thought they could.” A mentor is also a person that provides the opportunity for you to see possibilities where you think there may not be any. The film director, Steven Spielberg reminds us, “ The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image, but giving them the opportunity to create **themselves.”** I’m sure that after you leave today and think about what you have achieved, thoughts will come to mind of the people who worked with you to help pave the way to your success..... and someday... maybe in the not too distant future, someone will come along and ask for **YOUR ADVICE** and suggestions, and then you will find the true value and growth in having a mentor and **being one**....

About twenty years ago, a man named Mitch Albom wrote a book called, “Tuesdays with Morrie.” The book was originally written with a very selfless purpose... you see Morrie Schwartz was the author’s professor when he attended Brandeis University. Mitch Albom heard that Morrie was very sick and they began a series of meetings.... yes... on **TUESDAYS**... (**If you want, say that with enthusiasm and wait for the laugh**) and with the purpose of raising money to help Morrie pay for his mounting medical bills, he thought of writing a book containing Morrie’s mentoring advice and wisdom. Clearly there was some **GREAT** advice shared... the book was a New York Times bestseller and stayed on the list for almost **FOUR YEARS**. It was translated into **FORTY-FIVE** languages and people have been inspired by Morrie’s wisdom and advice all over the world. It was also adapted into a Broadway play and a television movie. I would like to share some of Morrie’s advice with all of you:

* “**Accept who you are and revel in it**.” Be proud of your accomplishments. Have faith in your determination. Know that others have their own challenges in life. Everyone has **SOMETHING** to deal with. There’s **ONLY ONE YOU**. Place one foot in front of the other and you will find your path in life.
* “**Society teaches us to be number one. But who ever said there was something wrong with being number two?**” Do your **best**. Be your **best**... and if that means you’re in second, third, or even **TENTH** place, **THAT’S GREAT**!!! That’s what is called a **GROWTH OPPORTUNITY**!!! That gives you something to aim for.... challenges to conquer... goals to meet!! Just never give up and encourage yourself to improve with every chance you take.
* “**If you’re trying to show off for people at the top, forget it. ... If you’re trying to show off for people at the bottom, forget it. They will envy you. Status will get you nowhere. Only an open heart will allow you to float equally between everyone**.” Be **yourself**. Don’t covet someone else’s achievements or possessions. You are your own best competition, your **biggest cheerleader**, and your greatest teacher. Remember the lessons in the past... keep in mind what you have been

taught and **be confident** in **who you are** when you meet new people. Whether you think they are above you or below you doesn’t matter. They are human, just like you and they deserve your respect.

* “**Do what the Buddhists do. Every day, have a little bird on your shoulder that asks, ‘Am I ready? Am I doing all I need to do? Am I being the person I want to be?**” Keep a checklist of what you want to accomplish.... for the day, the week, the month, the year. Even being able to check off the smallest item on the list will give you a sense of achievement.... and you’ll want to naturally do more!!! Crossing items off a “to do” list is envigorating!!
* “**Learn to forgive yourself and to forgive others. Ask for forgiveness from others. Forgiveness can soften the heart, drain the bitterness, and dissolve guilt**.” We **ALL** make mistakes. No one is perfect, but it is the mistakes we make that are our best teachers. Some very famous and accomplished people agree that making mistakes is better than doing nothing. Just learn from them and don’t make the same mistake twice.
* (**Do you want to add this one? If you don’t think it’s appropriate, I think the above comments are sufficient**) “Don’t stay preoccupied with your body or your illness (**change to condition?**). That is only a **part of you** and **not your whole self**.” Each one of you graduates is a fine young person, capable of making a positive difference in this world. It is time for you to go out into this world, continue to learn, continue to grow, and keep on your own special, unique path to **personal** success.

Once again, I want to offer my most sincere congratulations to all of you graduates. Thank you for allowing all of us at the Aaron School contribute to your education. It has been a privilege to **teach** you and to **learn** from all of you. We look forward to following your future adventures in education and in life. You will always be part of our history. Thank you all!!!