**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ROBERTA PALUMBO**

Good morning everyone and welcome to the 2017 commencement ceremony for this year's graduating class of the Aaron School. All of the hard work, studying and incredible partnership that has impressed me so much... I find myself so gratified to have witnessed the quality of work and the level of connection that has come so naturally with these students. They have given us wonderful results this year and I am so proud of all of our graduates, as are all of you, I am sure. I want to acknowledge the parents, family members, and friends of this year's seniors. Your dedication and support have been immeasurable. We are all thankful for the love, encouragement and "mirrors" you have provided in endless amounts. The teachers and staff have done a really admirable job as well, and it all shows. This year's class is bright, enthusiastic, and promising, and with your continued commitment and caring, I am confident that our students are well on their way to enriching new experiences and future success and growth.

To our students.... in no particular order... you are all champions in our eyes... : Benjamin, Natenal, Michael, Ginny, Austin, Zio, Riley, Dylan, Jason, Alex, Rebecca and Douglas, it has been a privilege to work with, observe, and cheer you on throughout your "careers" here at the Aaron School, and I want you to know that I speak for the faculty and staff when I tell you that it has been rewarding for us to learn from all of **YOU**. You began this course six years ago, and as you entered this portion of the program, you demonstrated the magic that happens when education, partnership, and a strong sense of community come together. I have been so gratified watching the friendships bloom and blossom as you stood by one another in every aspect of school life. From daily activities to special class trips... from group projects like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to the very special dances, I have to say it, you young people shine. You have completed the required work admirably and you've earned your diplomas. The next steps in your lives will be toward a world not yet fully known, but one that will be revealed and will embrace you soon enough..... as long as you work really hard, ask questions when needed, and trust in your own abilities and self confidence.

Benjamin Franklin may have said, "An investment in knowledge pays the best dividends," but Albert Einstein reminds us, "I have no special talent. I am only **passionately curious**." Wellllll.... it turns out that he **DID HAVE** some **very special talents** (**Wait for the laugh**) **AND** his genius encouraged his passion for curiosity. I know you all possess that natural desire to know as well. As you prepare to move on to the next chapters in your lives, (**Do you want to name some of the students and where they'll be going? I would select 2 or 3 that are going in different geographic directions...**  **to bring out the point that deep down inside they are still together**)... Austin, you're headed off to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Ginny, it's so exciting that you will be attending \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, Douglas, you'll be going to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and the rest of you will also soon be on your way to new schools of your choosing, I have one final request of all of you.... **please remain curious**...no matter what we do and no matter where we might find ourselves, there is **ALWAYS** something new to learn. Once you leave Aaron and you're on the road that takes you into adulthood and your professional lives- wherever that might be, keep an open mind and an inquisitive nature.

When you arrived that first day six years ago, you didn't know what was waiting for you. Looking back, I think it's safe to say that **YOU KNOW NOW!!!** (**Say this with enthusiasm and wait for the laugh**). Little by little, you got used to the schedule, you began to learn to deal with the unfamiliar, you tackled the hard lessons that we all have to learn, and each of you made precious friendships and connections that will last a lifetime. Although you may be going off in separate directions and you will be traveling on different paths, I don't have to tell **YOU** that you **STILL** have **each other.** The bonds you've made will not be broken that easily! The only difference might be that instead of being a cluster or a pack of close friends and comrades that meet each day, you are evolving into a **network** of colleagues with different challenges in different places, but always joined to each other through the bonds of friendship. (**If you want to make a joke you can say**) And let me tell you.... in ten... twenty... probably even **THIRTY** years, I bet you'll **STILL** be great friends with each other!! (**Wait for the laugh**). ... and I'm not guessing about this. I **KNOW**. Ask the adults in your life... ask your parents and grandparents if they are still in touch with their school friends... and I would bet that most of them have at least one or two people that **knew them when**....and that kind of friendship is **PRICELESS** . (**Maybe mention one or two of your oldest friends**)... I know in my life that's the case.... I've known my friend \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years and my friend \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for even **LONGER**!! Sometimes It feels like I can't get **RID OF THEM!!** (**Wait for the laugh**). Of course I'm kidding. As we get older, we start to realize that our good friends become family to us... and each one of you is moving on with a great team of friends beside you.... and make no mistake about it, whether or not they are physically next to you is not the issue. They will remain with you in your memories you will recall as you begin your new adventures... after all, you've known each other for almost **HALF** your lives!!! What a wonderful way to begin the next phases of your lives... with the support of good, genuine friends.

Graduates, I know that you're all excited today, and rightfully so, and I am also sure that you might be a little concerned as you leave Aaron for new stops on your life's journey. It's perfectly normal to be concerned but don't allow fear to keep you from doing what you know you can do... or what you **THINK** you can do. Of course, if you don't try, you don't know. Use that excited adrenaline to motivate you... once again, I know that's not easy, but when things look harder than they should be, remember us... and remember your friends and families... you have a lot of people in your corner rooting for you. And remember something else.... you are ready. You are ready to move on. You're ready to accept new challenges, and most of all, you are ready to find your voices and strengths as you set an example for others to follow. Nelson Mandela, a man who was no stranger to overwhelming personal challenges said, "I never lose. I either win or I learn." Remember I said a little while ago to keep an open mind and never stop learning? I hope Mr. Mandela's words reinforce the importance of remembering that simple tip. If you do, you will never lose and you will gain strength, wisdom, and experience. I also want to tell you that it's so important to know that you make a difference in this world. It's urgent that you understand that we never know who might be watching and learning from **US**, so it's really important to know your strength, share your gifts... your caring, your humor, your knowledge, your generosity, and understand the impact you do, and will, make in this world. Each one of us is a unique, special, one of a kind individual and we each have our own "superpower." If someone asked me to identify mine, I would say maybe (**Think of a trait you possess that will inspire them**) mine would be my ability to observe and understand a situation.... but I want you to think.. what is **YOUR** superpower? Identify it, practice it, and use it to make this world a better place. No matter what your beliefs or point of view is in this life, we all see how important it is to work together to make a difference in the world. It's why we do what we do. It's why you go to school and study and push to excel. Just like your parents and families made sure you had a meaningful upbringing, the time is coming for you to prepare to take your place in life.

You've done it! You've met the requirements, you have your diplomas, you've cleaned out your lockers, and it's time to set forth on those next steps in life. Remember the saying from the poet Robert Browning, "A person's reach should exceed his grasp." In other words, **DREAM BIG**. Have goals. Achieve them and move on to newer, bigger goals. Don't plan the impossible.... shoot for the improbable and remember- you will either win or you will learn.

I am so thrilled for all of you. It has been my privilege to have guided you over the past \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years, and the lessons and insights that the faculty and I have attained in working with you will allow us to "dream big" for future students and classes of the Aaron School. Congratulations and thank you all!