**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**AMY ATKINSON**

Hello everyone... Governor \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, the member’s of the Georgia Federation of Women’s Clubs, family, friends, students, graduates, faculty, administrators, and distinguished guests, thank you for being here and for doing your part to honor the Tallulah Falls School and it’s graduating class of 2018. We all stand here literally drenched in history, legacy, natural beauty, and the rare, incredible opportunity to participate in probably the greatest process life has to offer... and that is to learn, to grow, and to share the richness of nature’s gifts in every sense of the concept. It has been one of the most meaningful aspects of my life to have had the privilege to serve as Chairman of the Board of Directors of this incredible school for the past four years and as we welcome a new chairman, and as I reflect back on my tenure, I am almost as proud of all that I have **learned** as I am impressed by the performance, dedication, and potential of this year’s graduating class.

Of professional accomplishments, someone once said that “If you do what you love, you’ll never work a day in your life.” I have to say that I truly believe that sentiment. I began as Chairman four years ago, and the very first time I addressed the student body, it was to **this** class as you were entering eighth graders. We’ve accompanied each other through the past cycles of orientation, concentration, and celebration, and we’ve all come a long way since then. In many ways, today marks a “graduation” of sorts for me as well. Where the distinction comes in, however, is in the details.... you are among the most impressive, smartest, nicest, most honorable and one of the most extraordinary classes to graduate during my term as Chairman and tenure on the board. Actually, judging by articles in the local papers and social media postings and by the many class accomplishments; such as the superb capstone presentations, exceptional plays and music performances, outstanding athletic seasons, scholarships won and remarkable acts of public service, you’ve raised the stakes when it comes to describing what **excellence** looks like. You are a brilliant group of young people.  You came here to learn. In the process, you’ve shared your heart and soul with everyone at this school and beyond. We are all so blessed to have learned from all of you as well.

So what makes this group so special? All of you, our sixty-one graduates, have collectively earned **6 million dollars in scholarships.** The relative number varies from year to year but it is alwaysastonishing and encouraging to note. While this is not unusual for our school, it is impressive and noteworthy, especially, while in the process of attaining a quality education, each one of you enthusiastically and dedicatedly respect the principles fostered here at TFS.... you’re smart, curious, respectful, honest, talented.... I could go on and on, but you’ve all got places to be and impressive plans to fulfill!! (**Wait for the laugh**) . **ONE HUNDRED PERCENT** of this class is going on to university. We have a Bill Gates scholar in our midst. Some of the most revered colleges in the country will soon be home to the members of this class and I know that the lessons you’ve learned will be put to good use as you broaden your horizons in the next steps of your lives. The school mission statement is “Preparing each student to thrive in life by elevating character and intellect in a challenging and diverse college preparatory environment.” (**If you want, you can add**) Okay, **confession** time.... this all sounds great, but we know there’s **ONE THING** I didn’t mention..**.no marching band**...which might be a blessing for this group of students... can you **IMAGINE** the **THUNDEROUS** noise you’d have made??? Who knows if the mountains and falls could have **endured** such spirited reverberations!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). Let’s just say that your goodness and uniqueness has been music enough for **MY** ears!!!

It’s been said that “life is the most patient teacher.” It has been a really gratifying experience to interact on more personal levels with you, and as I observed you absorbing life’s lessons, I marveled at your poise and willingness to participate.... like when I invited all of you to join us in the school board meeting... (**Do you want to say**) Who expected such great “**deer in the headlights**” impersonations??? (**Wait for the laugh**)... all jokes aside, you handled yourselves with grace as you got the chance to see for yourselves the details and planning that go on behind the scenes in order to provide you with the tools you’ll need in the future as you go on to lead, mentor, plan and implement your marks on this world.

And while life patiently ... or maybe not so patiently, teaches you, remember, don’t let anyone think less of you because you are young, but at the same time, maintain respect, an open mind, and the positive attitude that you can do **anything**. All it takes is hard work, determination, and faith. As we learn in the Bible,

“Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.”

1 Timothy 4:12, NLT

Life is a lot of work and it’s up to each one of us to find and regenerate our own enthusiasm to go forward. An inspirational idea can help us renew ourselves and fill us with strength to achieve our life's purpose. Inspiration comes in many forms, however, the root of all inspiration is the idea that our lives are **meaningful** and that knowing that **what you do matters**. Another thing I encourage you to do is to **PAY ATTENTION** to the world around you and to what you’re doing. Remember that “A smart man learns from his mistakes. A **WISE** man learns from the mistakes of others.” The moment when you are called up to the stage to receive your diploma, resplendent in your cap and gown, is a moment to savor. You can never lose what has now been given to you. This achievement is yours forever. You’ve **EARNED** your education. Consider your lessons as the foundation of your lifelong investment in **yourselves**, and do what is necessary to grow and expand that investment. Read... write...explore... create... be active... keep your eyes and ears open... indulge your minds while you stretch your bodies... give back to others.... Remember, wherever you go, every path connects you not only to where you are going, but to where you have been.

Throughout my life, I have been moved and motivated by the insights of others. My wonderful family.... my husband, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and my three sons, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, keep me on my toes and remind me of the power that love, support, respect, and honoring a legacy can create. When I first joined the board, I felt it was important to have a “mother’s voice” represented. It was my intention to bring that nurturing point of view to the “wheelhouse” of this institution. As my sons and family taught me, I wanted to bring those observations to all of you. I hope that my intention has been fulfilled, and while I will still be around, it’s time for new eyes and new perspectives to add color to this magnificent educational landscape.

As I prepare to “pack my own pencils” and move on, I would like to share a bit of a poem that inspires me.... it’s called, “What Life Should Be” and was written by Pat A. Fleming: (**I’ve placed the full poem here, but if time is an issue, you may want to edit down to the most salient verses**)

To learn while still a child

What this life is meant to be.

To know it goes beyond myself,

It's so much more than me.

To overcome the tragedies,

To survive the hardest times.

To face those moments filled with pain,

And still manage to be kind.

To fight for those who can't themselves,

To always share my light.

With those who wander in the dark,

To love with all my might.

To still stand up with courage,

Though standing on my own.

To still get up and face each day,

Even when I feel alone.

To try to understand the ones

That no one cares to know.

And make them feel some value

When the world has let them go.

To be an anchor, strong and true,

That person loyal to the end.

To be a constant source of hope

To my family and my friends.

To live a life of decency,

To share my heart and soul.

To always say I'm sorry

When I've harmed both friend and foe.

To be proud of whom I've tried to be,

And this life I chose to live.

To make the most of every day

By giving all I have to give.

To me that's what this life should be,

To me that's what it's for.

To take what God has given me

And make it so much more

To live a life that matters,

To be someone of great worth.

To love and be loved in return

And make my mark on Earth.

Thank you all for this experience of a lifetime and CONGRATULATIONS, Graduates!!!