**AWARDS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**LARK WILL**

Hello everyone!!! To all of you... parents, friends, teachers, administrators, distinguished guests, and of course, graduates, it’s great to be here to celebrate the class of 2021 here at Bishop Kenny High School. I  want to acknowledge all of you for your enthusiasm and involvement in supporting and encouraging this year’s seniors to realize this goal. For those of you that may not know me, I am Lark Will. I graduated from Bishop Kenny, class of 1977. I am proud to say that I’m privileged to have experienced being on **BOTH** sides of this podium, so graduates of Bishop Kenny High School, please accept my sincere congratulations!   I know what you’ve been through!!! I’m so happy you **MADE IT**!!!

This year, in particular, you prevailed through some extraordinary circumstances and challenges. We’ve witnessed and experienced how life changes.... curve balls get tossed.... sometimes at maddening speed.... and all we can do is hone our reflexes to make sure we are able to sustain ourselves and maintain as much balance as possible. I think it’s safe to say that what we faced and endured this past year was more like the **WORLD SERIES** of weird, unpredictable, shape shifting events. While fate may have dealt us a **WHOPPER** of a hand that none of us anticipated, graduates, never forget that you did what was needed and got through all of it, to be here, at your commencement exercises. You are the class of 2021... **NOT** the class of COVID-19. While we all went through so much this past year... the strangeness.... the isolation.... the confusion.... mainly because of what to wear and how to look alert during Zoom classes (**you can add....** ) business on the top... party on the bottom??? ... (**Wait for the laugh**), it is so important to remember to **REALLY** acknowledge yourselves for managing to get through. It’s crucial to realize that even in the strangest of conditions, there are blessings and incredible lessons to be learned. We all learned invaluable some things... we learned what’s really important to us... we learned how to adapt when life changes course... we learned to appreciate what we have, what we need, and who is really important to us.

And thanks to these times, we have been “encouraged” to ask deeper questions and search for more creative solutions.  In a way, every aspect of life is a mathematic equation.... every challenge is some sort of science experiment, and every  revelation has the power to ignite a burst of realization.  Challenges and unpredictability cannot be avoided... or under-estimated. They serve as our guides to greater awareness. As an example, a few years ago, I was speaking to a friend. She had just gone through unexpected heart surgery. One of her arteries was blocked and she needed to have a stent placed to keep it open. She said something so simple to me, yet it made an impact. When the stent was in place, she felt a pain under her left shoulder blade disappear. She said she never even realized she had that pain until it was gone. In many ways, we may not even realize what we’ve been through until it’s behind us, but know this... you have and **WILL** come out stronger for the experience.

Speaking of “**Will**,” the Will Family is so fortunate to have had a patriarch that really cared about people and doing something to right the inequities in the world.  First of all, I think it’s safe to say that every member of our family is grateful that our last name and legacy is “**WILL**” and not “**WON’T**” (**Wait for the laugh**). Somehow, maybe our last name gave us a chance to consider opportunities.... to face challenges.... to share the gifts and blessing we’ve been given. We certainly had a fine example. My father, John Will, dedicated himself to addressing and balancing iniquities in life that challenged equality and diversity. When he was not much older than you, graduates, he too, was faced with an unforeseen circumstance that would impact his life.  On December 7, 1941, while Dad was busy studying math and engineering at Drexel University in Pennsylvania, a message came on the radio.  The Japanese had just bombed Pearl Harbor.  Dad told me years later that he knew in that moment, his life would not be the same.  While he “should have been” studying for exams, he found himself in the middle of the Pacific, defending American territories from enemy attacks.  In moments of what what must have been pure terror,  he  learned big lessons about resilience, persistence, and above all caring about the person to your left and your right no matter their background, religion, education, heritage, or gender.

Throughout his life, John J. Will was devoted to three things:  his family, his love of science, and his belief in the power of women and the potential impact they wield. My father was definitely our champion... He watched out for, and guided, both my sister, Mary Lou, and me, so that we had confidence, common sense, and the innate knowledge that we were capable of achieving whatever we set our minds to.  John Will spent an admirable amount of energy and ingenuity fighting for a level playing field... one in which girls had... and **have** the freedom and the respect to participate as equally and completely as their male counterparts. Please don’t misinterpret this concept.... my father was equally respectful of boys. For him, it was about **representation**, sharing unique perspectives, and, as the saying goes, “having a seat at the table.” Knowing that a gathering of diverse voices makes the sweetest music is the greatest lesson....  to all of the fathers, grandfather’s, big brothers, and male influences here today, know that your encouragement of young women goes a long way and has a multi-pronged effect....most importantly, validation. Your support provides the opportunity for greater discoveries in the STEM sector, and an authentic sense that **YOU, TOO**, are a part of a bigger, more positive shift in the workforce.

This year’s recipient of the sixth annual John J. Will Science and Technology Memorial Scholarship is someone who has distinguished herself with her intelligence, enthusiasm, and incredible curiosity.  She shares a key trait with my father – a love for that final frontier - space.  While Dad was presented with the possibility of joining NASA in the early 1960s, he opted for another career... he rarely looked down... he always had his eye in the sky during the Apollo and space shuttle missions. I'm thrilled that the 6th recipient of this scholarship in his honor is literally reaching for the stars!  We are eager to encourage this young woman’s continuing academic explorations and are confident that, with the future in **HER** hands, there will be continued discoveries that will, in turn, allow for other smart, innovative young women to **join the “party.**”  It is my pleasure to present the 2021 John J. Will Science and Technology Memorial Scholarship to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ . Thank you all!!