**Sarah-Kate Welborn**

 Commencement-Graduation

 Valedictory

Sarah-Kate,

 Step to the microphone and make sure it is the right height. Bring the microphone to you, do not bend or stretch to it. This is your stage now, you own it. Stand with shoulders straight, yet relaxed. If you notice from anyone before you that there is an echo or slight delay, then adjust for that. Once you are introduced, stand and wait for the audience to settle and focus on you. This is a ceremony filled with fun, laughter, and talking back and forth. If they for any reason do not settle,….then just speak into the microphone, gently,…”THANK-YOU EVERYONE, THANK YOU”. If possible while you speak, make eye contact with folks throughout the audience. If this is difficult for you, (as it is for many of us), then pick out a spot behind the audience in the back of the auditorium. Such as a picture, trophy case, a plaque, or even a door. Then as you speak, look at that object, and that will give the audience the impression that you are looking right at them. I suggest you practice this speech by yourself twice at home, or even in the auditorium if allowed. Then practice it one more time to someone you trust who will listen. Then when you actually give the speech, you’ll be familiar with its cadence and flow. Speak slowly, yet at a pace you’re comfortable with. You will do just fine; this is your moment.

HELLO EVERYONE, HELLO AND WELCOME,..WELCOME!

*WOW, we did it, we’re here!*

I am very flattered to be standing before you today. Many of you know me, and for most whom I have not had the pleasure of meeting, my name is Sarah-Kate Welborn. I am honored to say that I am the **(your *school******name),*** *Class of*2019, Valedictorian.

I know as a member of this class, that this is a very exciting day, a day many of us will remember for a very long time. I have thought about what lies ahead for our class, and for so many young people just like us. And I want to share with you today my observations on both **success** and **happiness**.

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**But first:** We the class of 2019 are in this auditorium, not only by our own efforts, but from the tremendous efforts of *so many people* in each of our lives. And it is they too with whom we share these honors. First and foremost are our parents, who’s devotion, care, and patience, have provided the pathway to this ceremony. Every part of our lives up to this point, the academics, the sports, the clubs, the vacations and travel, the social growth, have been made possible by our parents or primary caregivers. Through successes as well as missteps, it was our parents who kept the momentum going forward. To our grandparents also, who gave us wisdom, as well as a place to hide, when we pushed our parents a bit too far. **(laughter).** And as unlikely as it may seem, an occasional thanks to our siblings, (yes even those younger brothers and sisters who can be a pain), **(laughter).** We want to acknowledge those outside our immediate circles, who we also consider family, such as friends, neighbors, co-workers, and those who give us spiritual guidance. And of course, to those on campus, we express our deepest thanks: To the administration, teachers, counselors, and coaches, as well as our bus drivers, custodians, security personnel, office staff, cafeteria, and everyone who makes this school function and go forward every single day. I know I speak for our whole class when I say to all of you, ***thank you*** from the bottom of our hearts. And to **my** family particularly, **(look towards where** **your family is seated),** for all you have done for me, for all the encouragement you have shown, and for all the love you have given, thank you.

 **( PAUSE)**

We have so many options available to us, yet of the literally hundreds of choices we are free to pick from, the end result will not be the destination, it will be our actions through the journey. In life there is **success** and **happiness**, it is how we combine the two that will define our futures.

Each and every one of us at this very moment have a hundred things running through our minds. What we’ll be doing an hour from now, tonight, tomorrow, and all summer. After all this celebration, we begin, we ***‘commence’***the next chapters of our lives. Many of us know where we are

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going next, some of us are still figuring that out. We are all so very fortunate to have the freedom as well as the opportunities to decide. From college, to trade schools, to the military, to full time jobs, the choices are diverse and almost unlimited.

And if you have a dream, follow it, follow it no matter the time or distance, until you walk through that canyon, up over that mountain pass, and see it stretched out before you. And while traditions in education and professions have their merit, some of the best and most rewarding roads to travel, are the roads less traveled. Never have tunnel vision, never limit your potential.

Some of us may want to be Forest Service Rangers in the remote wilderness of Alaska or Montana. Some of us may want to be editors in Manhattan for a publishing house. Or perhaps first responders in Hawaii, pilots, teachers, law enforcement, health care providers, over the road truckers. Whatever it is, it is yours, yours to go after, yours to accomplish. There is a very profound, yet very contemporary saying that holds very true to my message here. The author is unknown, but his/her words are practiced all throughout the word. It goes like this, and I paraphrase: **“*Find something you love to do every-day, find your passion, then get paid to do it”.***

In the **mid-eighteen hundreds**, Harriet Tubman, an American abolitionist and activist said, quote: “EVERY GREAT DREAM BEGINS WITH A DREAMER. ALWAYS REMEMBER, YOU HAVE WITHIN YOU THE STRENGTH, THE PATIENCE, AND THE PASSION TO REACH FOR THE STARS, TO CHANGE THE WORLD”, unquote.

Then ***one hundred and fifty years later***, we hear a very similar message from former Hewitt-Packard Chief Executive Officer, activist, and forward thinker, Carly Fiorina, when she said, quote: “DO NOT BE AFRAID TO MAKE DECISIONS, DO NOT BE AFRAID TO MAKE MISTAKES”, unquote.

These two thinkers, these two leaders, these two *women*, living in totally different eras, totally different national cultures, and certainly totally different times of tolerance, both had the same message. And that is to go, do, and accomplish your dreams, your ambitions, your goals. And knowing

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as well as I do, this class of 2019, I have every confidence, I have every expectation, that we all attain our own dreams.

If we are fortunate enough to see each other again, in five, ten, twenty-five, or even fifty years, we will have much to share, much to talk about, much to be proud of. And in all that conversation, what will stand head and shoulders above anything else, is not ***what*** we have, but rather ***who we are,*** as humans, people, men, women, and parents ourselves. It isn’t the diamonds or the fame you’ll bring to that reunion, it is the person you see in the mirror. So, therein lies the difference in **success** and **happiness**.

We can go through the rest of our lives with traits that are not flattering, **or** we can live our lives with practices and habits that are honorable and self-satisfying. ***Success***can be obtained without ***happiness***, but it is more fulfilling **with *happiness***. And **happiness** comes from within each of us, through living and doing the ***right thing***.

From day one we should find our own, personal, moral compass that shows us the way to good decisions and the right choices. We need to set our personal bar high, set our standards high, and keep them rock-solid through all the challenges and temptations we will face. We should show tolerance, understanding, and empathy to all we encounter. Treat those less fortunate with dignity and respect, offering a hand up when possible. Our word must be our bond. So, when in ten years we sit across from one another, what we see won’t be the glitter or gold, what we’ll see is the decency, the compassion, and how we have learned the differences between right from wrong, good and evil, narcissism and benevolence. We’ll see the respectful and caring husbands, wives, and partners we have become. And we’ll see through our own children the examples we have set for them.

So, I urge you, I urge myself, whatever you do, wherever you go, act and live with courage, tempered with tolerance. Take the high-road, be part of the solution, not the problem. Walk with your heads held high, walk with confidence, take every step with enthusiasm, display compassion, and

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always, always, do the right thing. That will **earn** you **success,** combined with **unlimited happiness**.

I know we all want to get on with our day, **me too**.

So,….Thank **You** for **these few minutes**, and thank you for what **surely** **will be,…. a** **lifetime of memories.**

Until we meet again,….**GOODBYE**.