

Cassidy Bell – Salutatorian Speech 2016

Good evening to the class of 2016! Oh, uh, and also to the families, staff members, and everyone else who made this event possible. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you *all* for your attendance and to say to my fellow graduates this: we did it, guys. I know. Wow. I wasn't sure we would all pull through but we made it, so while I lost the "who's going to have to repeat senior year" betting pool, you can count me as impressed.

Though I hesitate to even bring up this cliché, it should be noted that my second thought after learning that I was salutatorian, since of course the first thought was shock and excitement, was "Oh no. I have to write (and deliver) a speech." Not that the problem was that I didn't have enough to say, but rather that I wasn't certain how to say it. How does one fully encapsulate the experiences of our class; the fear of asbestos poisoning in the old school (don't worry; I checked the symptoms on WebMD and I *think* we're all safe), the widespread pandemonium that actually *was* a symptom of the Fradiani Fever (again, trust me. I checked WebMD), the absolute honor of attending school with a Governor's Scholar (!), the jumpiness of being in a mildly explosive construction zone, the joy of the successes and groans at the *complications* of our new 92 million dollar school? That is a lot to talk about. But I decided that even though it was a hard job, it was also a tremendous honor, so hopefully the fact that I finished writing this speech on the drive over here already gives me a head start on doing justice to our class values.

I am the luckiest salutatorian in the state of Connecticut to walk the halls with these students every day. I want to thank all of you for being my constant companions these many years and for helping me get to where I am today: not at this podium, per se, though the friendly competition that pushed me harder in all our classes was always appreciated, but rather at this pivotal moment in our lives when we are suddenly faced with a change greater than any we've faced before, the end of an era. Without the constant support of all of the relationships we've made along the way, it would be quite impossible for us to have the courage to step forth into the world and leave our quaint little town in the dust.

Now, *many* of you requested a more specific thank you, so here we go: to my family, I wouldn't have gotten here without your endless love and support; to Mr. Misenti, if somehow anyone does forget you were our principal at our 30 year reunion, I will personally sing the fluffernutter song and try to jog their memories; to all of the at least thirty other people that requested a shout out, I suppose your love and support was a help too.

Our class was the first in a lot of things: the first to graduate from the new high school, the first to be forced to do CMTs *every* year in elementary school, the first and the last to take the mandatory Smarter Balanced test as juniors. It's easy, or as easy as any public speaking can be, to stand up here and say that the next step in life should be simple, but I know, obviously from personal connection, that this leap into adulthood is a little scary, if also incredibly exciting. So, as it's my job to give you some parting advice, and as I am neither the first nor the last salutatorian to try and dole out life pointers to my peers, I think we should hear some more qualified people's thoughts before we are let loose into the realer world of college and beyond. First, Benjamin Franklin reminds us to cherish our time at high school and college because "an investment in knowledge pays the best interest." Wait, uh, sorry, that line was supposed to be

delivered to the banks giving out student loans. Oh, here's one. Dr. Seuss, my personal source of inspiration, said in his graduation instruction manual *Oh the Places You'll Go*: "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose." Even though it may seem hard to take this final step away from Guilford and childhood, each of you has the potential to do so, the potential to step out into the world and change it for the better.

Though our senior class mantra may have been more or less "at least we're leaving soon," looking out into the crowd, I confess that I wish we weren't leaving just yet. Seeing all of you here sitting beside me is bittersweet because it is not only a reminder that we are parting ways in a few short hours, but also an assurance that no matter where we end up in our careers, in the world, in life in general, we are armed with the tools we need to succeed and thrive. I know all of you will be able to find happiness and success in your futures and I encourage you to always do your best in every part of your lives, no matter what.

That's all I have to say for now, so, again, congratulations to the class of 2016! I will miss you all so much. And remember, no matter where you end up in life, get your homework done.