

Anna Calame

Hi everyone. Before I begin, I just want to thank everyone who has made this day possible in every sense - to all of my teachers over the last four years, to the administrators, particularly Mr. Swanson, to the guidance counselors, to the custodial staff and everyone else who keeps the school running smoothly behind the scenes, to all coaches and parent volunteers, to my peers, and to my family, thank you. I very literally couldn't be here without all of you, and I am so incredibly grateful for all the work you've done, and continue to do. Of course, I also want to say a huge congratulations to my fellow classmates, the class of 2019 - we did it!

When I found out I would be giving this speech, the first thing I did was Google "how to write a good graduation speech." [Actually, the *first* thing I did was go to my family for help, but all of their suggestions included some very specific inside jokes that would have been really confusing for a general audience. So I turned to Google instead.] And all the results included two main ideas - have a message, and be funny. As for the first thing, I found that to be very vague and not at all helpful. And as for the second, well, as anyone who witnessed my stand up routine in satire last semester can attest, comedy isn't necessarily my strong suit.

So I was relieved when I finally stumbled across a quote from a commencement speech delivered by Jim Carrey that struck me. He said, "So many of us choose our path out of fear disguised as practicality." This quote seems to me to be particularly relevant to this point in our lives, as we leave high school and begin to make some pretty important decisions about our futures and ambitions. As much as this graduation signals an end, it is also a beginning - we'll suddenly have a lot more freedom to dictate the direction of our lives and our educations. That's exciting, but it's also a little scary. The intimidation that comes with feeling like you have to choose the focus of your education or professional life makes it that much easier to simply settle for what's more familiar. I'm sure everyone here has at least one really big dream that they're hesitant to pursue or share with others for fear of failure or judgement. It's perfectly fine to keep your goals to yourself - I'm not about to reveal my highest ambitions in life to all of you - but don't let the fear of embarrassment prevent you from pursuing what you're truly passionate about.

I've been guilty of this for a long time. Back when I was only 8 or so, I wrote a song called "I'm Going to Sing My Heart Out." Those were also the only words in the song. It was very bad. Don't worry, I'm not going to sing it. But I had a great time writing it, and to me it seemed like the beginning of a long and illustrious career as a pop star. But even at such a young age I was conscious of the criticism and the risks involved with a life in show business, and so I never performed my song in front of others. Instead, I made a very drastic career change and decided I would be a marine biologist. While sure, this might have provided me with a more stable life in the long run, my heart wasn't in it. Reading about sharks didn't give me the same joy as writing lyrics to painfully repetitive songs.

So yes, failure is embarrassing! Anyone who says it isn't is lying. But it happens to everyone and, unfortunately, it will happen to you on *whatever* path you take, so you might as well do what you want. It's a lot easier to get up after falling down if you like where you're headed. And of course, I know that,

realistically, there are going to be times where you have to be pragmatic, and of course there's nothing wrong with making the smart, practical decision! That's admirable. But don't completely abandon your true passions and ambitions for the wrong reasons, for reasons motivated by fear and insecurity, and justify this sacrifice as practical. I genuinely no longer have any desire to be a singer/songwriter, or a marine biologist for that matter. But the same fears of failure and judgement that originally prevented me from pursuing my dreams of stardom still persist. This time, I'm determined to overcome these, to recognize the inevitability of making mistakes, and to take on this next phase of my life with total authenticity. I hope you will join me in that. I can't wait to see what you all go on to do.

But I know today is the culmination of four years of incredible effort for all of us, and for now, it's enough to just take pride in that. We've all worked so hard, and achievement like this - graduating - is a well-deserved reward. We can worry about determining our life callings tomorrow. For today, let's celebrate. Thank you, and congratulations.