

Good afternoon everyone, and welcome. Teachers, coaches, administrators, members of the community, family, and friends. Each of you are here today because one of us in the Class of 2017 holds a special place in your life, as you do in ours, so thank you for taking time to share in this day with us.

As I look at my classmates, I'm filled with a sense of peace knowing that, though we may go our separate ways...this day, this school, and our long-shared experiences and memories will bond us together in a way that not many other experiences can. I look out and see some of you whose parents, grandparents, and even great grandparents have graduated from Westville High School.

We are Blackhawks, my friends, and our roots run deep.

This is where this speech gets a little interactive today. As I say your name, please rise and remain standing – we've stood together this long – what's a few more minutes?

On August 19, 2004, Denim Bennett, Peyton Bennitt, Austin Bohle, Chlarissa Combs, Jimmy Coros, Bryce Creutzburg, Aaron Cunningham, Jadon Dick, Abby Elkins, Becca Emerick, Logan Enos, Chayse Glista, Allie Janas, Delia Jessop, Liz Larson, Tommy Lemon, Bethany Morgan, Mary Parkman, Julianne Toth, Brandon Watkins, Kaleb Weissert, Gabby West, and myself began our first day of kindergarten. We were 23 of 63 in our class today. Little tree saplings who

slowly began to plant our own roots in the Blackhawk tradition. Dressed in our first day of school best, with Velcro sneakers, and excitingly themed lunch boxes, we reported that day to Miss Kosnik, Mrs. Freese, or Miss Romero's classrooms. Our days in Elementary school were relatively carefree; filled with fun field trips, art projects, the wax museum, class parties, and Christmas concerts.

By sixth grade, we had been joined by Nathan Albers, Lizzie Arceri, Max Correa, Caleb Crawford, Drake Cruse, Jacob DeChantal, Madison Doss, Mariah Held, Angel Hodum, Austin Jackson, Kera Jevyak, Madelyn Klimek, Alyssa Lehman, Michelle McEnterfer, Ace Pancer, Alyssa Rhodes, Ronnie Sibley, Brittnie Sowards, and Ellie Wolfe. We were no longer the little saplings from kindergarten. We'd grown stronger, branched out, and we'd even grown into the stage where we would throw some occasional "shade."

Sixth grade ended with our trip to Camp Tecumseh, where we stayed up way too late, played hide and seek in the dark, braved the rickety bridge to get to the campfire, and went zooming down the Bullet slide.

But like so many other young trees, we found ourselves suddenly transplanted. We went from ruling the elementary school, to being bottom of the food chain middle schoolers – plagued with braces, pimples, bad hair, and some pretty questionable fashion choices. In middle school, we were joined by Lydia Clemons, Cody Combs, Bryce Jones, Lynnea Marthen, Kaycee Pease, Thadius

Sheffer, Britney Sparks, and Leah Willis. Together we somehow survived Mrs. Alber's tests, and learned that seeing Swanny on the last page may have helped make them less intimidating. We all actively participated in spirit week, and in 8<sup>th</sup> grade had the chance to go to Washington D.C., where we learned the value of not leaving people behind at the mall, the expense of room to room calls, and just how much fun you could have with a jar of Nutella.

As we branched out further into high school, we were joined by Brandon Andrews, Tristan Bussie, MacKenzie Couchman, Grant Gorrell, Julia Hart, Jaret James, Scott Lohman, Nick Nieves, Lexi Odle, Kelly Rucker, Alex Schmitt, Spencer Skaggs, and Ashley Wilkerson. We got to go to fall balls, proms, and participate in and enjoy competitive high school sports.

As our senior year came, I think I can speak for many of us when I say that we have been filled with excitement, and also disbelief. How can 13 years have gone by so quickly? But this year too, certainly came with its own memories. As each of us made our own plans for what we'll be doing after graduation, we still got to enjoy lots of wonderful times together. We celebrated as our boys basketball team won the keg and defended it with every game, and WE were smart enough to follow PCC rules and never leave it unguarded while at a rival school. On the road to the PCC victory, tons of us came dressed to the nines for every theme in our Hollywood attire, pajamas, hippie gear, and of course orange and

black, ready to cheer on our team. Winning the PCC Championship made losing our voices at nearly every game, and cheering in a crowded, 90 degree student section totally worth it.

As this year wound down, we have to give props to Mrs. Koehm, Mr. Smith, and the Fashion Police for possibly the most fun and creative prom in Westville's history. We danced and laughed all night, and had some sore feet and great photo booth pictures to prove it.

No matter what grade we joined the Class of 2017, each of us is now deeply rooted in our school's history and tradition. We stand here now together, not alone. We have, and always will be, protected and supported by this forest of alumni, faculty, family, and friends who surround us. We are all Blackhawks, and our roots run deep. As we have shouted together many times before, "We Are Westville!" My friends, in whatever you do, Go, Fight, and Win.