

By Evan Gruss, 2016 Class Valedictorian

Hi everyone, at this point you are probably tired of speeches, so I will try to make this quick. I'm not gonna stand up here and talk about how these days at Portage will end up being the best of our lives because I know that myself and most of my classmates will go on to do much greater things than what we did here. But, when I say "greater" I don't necessarily mean that any one of us will become the president of the U.S. or the CEO of some major multi-million-dollar business, even though both of those are awesome feats. Instead, I use "greater" to represent each individual's own goals and passions they have within them. I believe that every person has at least one thing that makes them happy and that they truly care about although it seems the cool thing to do now is to "not care." People need to get rid of this "I don't care" attitude and instead take pride in their passions.

In today's world, young adults are pushed into choosing careers that are money-making fields rather than into what they want to do. Too many kids are scared of becoming who they really want to be and of doing what they may actually be really good at because the field may not be "high-paying". But let's face it, the chances are none of us graduating today will ever be billionaires or even millionaires, so you might as well do what you want to do. Maybe someone up here dreams of becoming a lawyer and having a family, while someone else may dream of moving to the arctic and living on their own and another may just want to spend their days working in construction. All three of these people will be perfectly fine if they just be who they want to be.

When each of us look back on our lives someday down the road, including those of you that aren't graduating tonight, we're going to want our life to be a reflection of us, not of those who influenced your decisions. Don't put yourself in a position where you're disappointed in the career you chose or in the types of people you kept close to you.

Instead, every one of us can and should give ourselves the opportunity to accomplish the great things we were meant to do, no matter what they are. In order to do this, we must

First: Figure out what it is that each of us truly care about, not what those around us care about.

Second: we need to actually go out and do what makes us happy. Go be the person you always dreamed of being and do whatever is needed to become that person, no matter what it takes.

Now, before I end, I just wanna congratulate the Class of 2016 and wish all of you the best of luck as you get the opportunity to move on with your lives. I can't wait to see what we do. But, I might as well leave you with the last and most important step to accomplishing great things in your life, just **Be You.**

By Katie Nolan

Sweet to be the Class of '16

Three years ago, I sat in this auditorium watching my brother, Zach announce the graduating class of 2013 and present his graduation speech all while I was thinking to myself, better him than me. Back then, I was more comfortable playing in front of people than talking to a crowd. Well obviously my memory was short because here I am today doing the same thing. Almost 13 years ago to this date we were standing on the stage at the Elementary school graduating from Kindergarten. Some of us were singing at the top of our lungs while others stood there scared to death to open their mouths. George W. Bush was our president, Facebook was just launched, the Pens lost 12 consecutive home games, it was the last season for the TV show *Friends*, and gas was \$1.54. Here we are center stage again about to close the door that has been our second home and say goodbye to teachers and school staff who have helped mold us into the people we are today. Our class has represented our school district and community well both in the classroom and on the playing fields. Because our school district is small, the upper and under classmen really have to work together for us to succeed. PAHS is unique, think about this, most of us can say we have talked to everyone in our class at least a few times. We know all of our classmate's names, and upperclassmen and underclassmen are often close friends. Living in a small town allows people to create a lasting relationship. Just the other day I was driving through town when my mom asked if that was a classmate. Sure enough there she was, riding down main street hanging out of the back window of her car waving to me while her mom was trying to navigate the traffic patterns on Main Street. Going to such a small school gave us the opportunity to not just know our teachers but truly become friends with them. "Don't frolic till you fail," I think many of us know what teacher claims that saying. Her trash talking before the student- faculty game made the seniors win all the much sweeter.

Now for the fun stuff of the class of 2016, I have had great memories as a Mustang. One of my favorite things to look back on was a project we did in kindergarten about what we wanted to be when we grew up. I wanted to be Shania Twain, Kacie wanted to be a mechanic, Luke wanted to be a zookeeper, and Cody wanted to be a nascar driver. We have in our grade the only person so far that has wrecked the Drivers Ed car, Allison. I remember winning the

championship game in summer league our 7th grade year, we were all celebrating, all while Kacie Baker thought we lost. Moments like these will be something to laugh about for a lifetime. We have been fortunate with being able to go on multiple trips such as last week traveling to Washington, DC to the National Zoo and the Smithsonian. Trips like that one will be a memory that will never be forgotten. We were an athletically inclined grade, shown through multiple achievements such as winning powder not just our senior year but also our junior year, let's hear it for our girls. As well as being the only senior class to beat the teachers in the teachers versus seniors basketball game. Yes, we will go down in history. We can say that we were the only senior class to successfully host a tailgate during the school day and wrap the entire hall way with wrapping paper.

As we come to the close of this chapter in our lives, I would like to thank all who have made high school so enjoyable and memorable. Underclassmen, we wish you all the best. Remember young is what we all are. Youth and dreams, hope and promise are what we all have right now. It is a mystery, how time escapes us, why does it and where does it go. Our youth/school days might be the finest days of our life, so as Dr. Seuss said, "Don't cry cause it is over, smile because it happened." To my classmates, thank you for such a memorable senior year and lasting relationships. Let's never forget where we came from because as our Alma Mater states, Green and White, Our Colors true. We did it, we are the graduation class of 2016!

By Courtney Harbaugh

Our Time Is Now

Can you believe it? It has been six years since we ventured across the parking lot to an unknown and mysterious new world. We left the safety and comfort of the school we knew and grew up in for 6 long years to be thrown into one where we didn't belong. We went from being the oldest and largest of the school, right back to being the youngest and smallest. Again, we had to slowly make our way up the ladder, moving from the 7th and 8th grade hallway to the senior wing. Over those six long years, we had to face countless struggles but we have resiliently overcame them. We fought hard battles, whether they were the tests in the subject we struggled most with, or finding time in our busy schedules to get our reading points done on time. We have followed the paths of those before us, but we have also forged our own. We have a lot to be proud of, as we were able to beat the teachers in the Seniors vs Faculty basketball game, which hasn't happened for a long time. We also were able to win Powderpuff, not only one but two years in a row. We had to balance sports, dance, extracurricular activities, and work with projects, classwork, homework, and studying. But, now the struggles have come to an end. We have finally made it. "We met as strangers, grew as classmates, and leave as friends."

Class of 2016, our time here is up. We must take the next step in our lives and graduate from high school. Looking back we cannot forget all the memories we made along our journey. But as we take this important step, we must realize that the road ahead is very different than our previous one. We will have to face many new challenges and struggles that come our way.

Up until now nothing was easy and we cannot expect it to get any easier. As Rahm Emanuel once said, “you will have failures in your life, but it is what you do during those valleys that will determine the height of your peaks.” Take every failure you may encounter as a lesson and learn from your mistakes. We are not perfect. We are human, and that is perfectly alright.

Our time is now. It is our time to leave our homes where we felt the most comfortable, where we have depended on the help of our family, friends and teachers. Now it is our time to move out into the unknown. It is our time to take on responsibilities and feel important. It is our time to change the world. We must go our own ways. Just remember, this is not the end, this is just the beginning. Congratulations Class of 2016! The best is yet to come!