

My Challenge to You

Jake Swank

I've known about having to write this speech for a long time. However, anybody that knows me knows I am definitely a procrastinator, with most of my work being done late at night right before its due. And with that being said, this speech was completely finished shortly after 2 A.M. yesterday, or today actually. However, it wasn't too hard for me to really decide what I wanted to speak about. Of course a few weeks ago there were the typical "graduation speech ideas" Google searches, but I really had a pretty good idea of what I wanted to share. I wanted to talk tonight about something that's really important to me that I've learned during my time here.

For many of my years at Portage, I couldn't wait to get out. Honestly, I just thought Portage wasn't good enough for me. I didn't think living in this small town and going to a small school with not as many opportunities as there were elsewhere would allow me to achieve what I wanted to. These things I wanted to achieve were always measurable, tangible things. I wanted to get perfect grades and go to an elite college. I wanted to win championships in sports and receive a scholarship to play in college. I wanted a career that made me wealthy. However, as I've grown older and a little wiser, I began to realize I had it all wrong. Portage is full of great teachers and I received a great education and that's proven by the Blue Ribbon we received during my time here, or the other awards we annually receive. There are also great extracurricular activities here, with many dedicated advisors or coaches. During my time here, I've been a part of a lot of athletic success and have made some of the best memories of my life in these sports. However, there are still those "better" places out there with more money, more opportunities, and so on. But during my time here, I came to realize that there is something more important than any of these goals I had been so focused on, and that is people. People and relationships are the most important thing in this world, and that is why Portage is such a special place. Portage, as both a school and community, is full of great people who truly care about each other,

and that is something that many of these “better” places can not offer. And that is why I sit here today and think I could not have been any more wrong about wanting to go somewhere else. So many people in this school and community have impacted my life, and that is something I truly will be thankful for for the rest of my life. Such small things such as being greeted happily in the morning by the security officers or by the janitors in the hallway may seem so minor but are what makes this place so special. The teachers are great at what they do as far as teaching, but more importantly they connect with the students and care about them in ways more meaningful than just textbooks and grades.

Jackie Robinson once said “A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives”. That leads me to my challenge to all of you: impact the lives of others. To the Class of 2017, I hope you are all tremendously successful in whatever endeavors you pursue. But more importantly, I hope you are able to impact the lives of others wherever life takes you. That right there, is real success.

Once again, I just want to thank all of you. You have all impacted my life in some way and I wish I had the time to individually thank everyone, but just know I am greatly appreciative for you all. I do want to thank my family, for none of what I have achieved could have been possible without your endless love and support. Specifically, I would like to thank my uncles for all that they have done for me in my time here and being fatherly figures to me. Although, it will be awesome to be able to walk to a class next year without seeing a relative. Lastly, I would like to thank my mother and my grandmother who are the two greatest women I will ever know, who have sacrificed so much for me and have done everything possible to support me and ensure I am happy.

A Movie in the Making

Abigail Chobany

For those of you who really know me, you know my 2 favorite things in life are doing homework and watching movies. You might think only one of those things is really beneficial, but over the countless films I've watched in my life, I would have to disagree. As strange as it sounds, I've learned so much from the movies I grew up with *and* the ones I continue to watch today. I even use the films to help me shape my own "life's movie". We are all the director *and* stars of our own lives. If I need a little help along the way for my upcoming movie, sequel, or the remake, I look to the films we have today. They can help me with tips on making the right decisions, what to do at an interview, or what not to do on a first date. Everyone has their own up and coming life's movies that can begin right now. To start screenwriting, keep in mind that every great film needs its plot, actors, and a good soundtrack.

Personally, I love any science fiction movie. Whether it be superheroes like Captain America, Jedi like Obi Wan Kenobi, or Vulcans like Spock, I will be sitting in the front row anticipating the next scene. What do these movies give us besides entertainment and a desire to use the Force? The answer is role models. You can learn a lot from the triumphs and failures of these main characters. One of my favorite characters was once asked "Why do we fall?" And the response was "So that we can learn to pick ourselves up". This small quote has stuck with me and reminded me that its ok to fail, but we must learn from our mistakes. Another favorite quote, and you can probably guess where this is from, states that "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger, anger leads to hate, and hate leads to suffering". What is to be taken away from this is we shouldn't be afraid of anything, whether it be failing or trying something new. We need to use the gifts that each one of possess to thrive in our life's movie because even if you don't know it, your talents are power. And we all know, with great power comes great responsibility.

The second component of your life's movie is the main character. In our own films, we are the heroes. This doesn't mean we have to be the biggest, smartest or fastest person in the galaxy, but it does mean we should strive to show hero characteristics such as kindness, compassion, determination, and generosity. My favorite hero was built on the words of a friend who told him "A true hero isn't measured by the size of their strength, but by the strength of their heart". Show these characteristics and you will succeed in being the hero. Always remember to be the problem solver and not the problem maker. Watch any movie and you'll see that this is the person who always wins in the end. Take Rocky for example. He never gave up on his goals and trained endlessly to achieve them. What would the hero in your life's movie do right now? Whatever it is, do that! Be the Rocky Balboa, or the Indiana Jones or even the Harry Potter in your life! It's your choice on who you want your main character to be.

Lastly, our movie is missing the soundtrack. Music is timeless and some songs can be applied to specific points in our scenes of life. I'm sure we've all wanted to sing the lyrics to "Bad Day", when nothing was going right and you try to "sing a sad song just to turn it around". At those moments, I like to think of Bill Withers's *Lean on Me*, where he sings "Sometimes in our life, we all have pain, we all have sorrow. But, if we are wise, we know that there's always tomorrow". Now, we need songs to play through our big decisions in the movie such as the first day of college or applying for a job. You could think of Cat Stevens singing "Don't be shy, just let your feelings roll on by. Don't wear fear, or nobody will know you're there." And after you succeed, what song should be playing in the background? Instead of playing *We are the Champions*, I hope you play *Humble and Kind* by Tim McGraw where he says "When the dreams you're dreamin' come to you, when the work you put in is realized, let yourself feel the pride but always stay humble and kind". Finally, if you ever wanna make the world a better place, revert to Michael Jackson's *Man in the Mirror* and take a look at yourself and make a change.

In conclusion, we can take a lot away from movies even though it includes us not moving for 3 hours at a time. Just remember to be the hero in your life because you don't want to let yourself

become the villain. We must also remember to embrace our life, through the good times *and* the bad. Forrest Gump says it best when he recalls “Life is like a box of chocolates- you never know what you’re gonna get”. Try to enjoy every aspect of life. Growing up I always remembered Robin Williams as Teddy Roosevelt saying, “The secret of life is doing what you love with people you love”. Finally, don’t be afraid if you don’t have specific goals in mind for the future. Gandalf reminds us that “Not all those who wander are lost”. Adventure is out there! Brad Paisley sings about writing a letter to his 17-year old self and says “You got so much up ahead. You’ll make new friends. You should see your kids and wife. And I’d end by saying have no fear, these are nowhere near the best years of your life”. So, for your life’s movie, go experience your rising action, find your climax, and delight in your resolution. I want to leave you with a simple “Live long and Prosper”.

Congratulations Class of 2017 and good luck!

A Letter to My Peers

Hayley Denwood

Good evening. Before I begin, I would like to thank some of the most influential people in my life. Thank you to all of my teachers who have dealt with me rolling into school at 7:34.5 every morning and dealing with my class of 2017's constant complaints. Thank you to Mr. Shuck and Kassick for somehow figuring out a way to feed all of us hangry library workers even when it seemed like there wasn't enough buffalo chicken dip in the world to feed us. Thank you to everyone who has doubted my capabilities. You have motivated me along the way to prove each of you wrong. Finally on a more serious note, I'd like to thank my grandmother who flew all the way from St. Croix and my mother. You have been my biggest inspirations, and everything I do is to make both of you proud. I hope one day to be able to prove to both of you that every sacrifice was worth it. I love both of you with all of my heart.

Now with that out of the way, I seriously can't believe we are here right now. When we were younger, we never thought that we would get this far. Personally, I didn't think I'd make it past the fourth grade, let alone survive 8 more years of schooling. Anyways, I remember being obnoxious elementary kids who couldn't wait to go to pep rallies at the high school. We screamed our lungs out half because we thought screeching was the cool thing to do, and half because we want the good looking high schoolers to notice us. It's so weird to think that even though many years have gone by, half of us still have the same freshmen crushes. It may seem incredibly embarrassing now when we look back at it, but one of my fondest memories is walking next to Maddy and Emily while making weird noises at every senior we thought was hot (which were a lot). Thankfully, we are all those good-looking seniors now. Even though embarrassment is part of high school, I decided that for humanities sake, I would give the underclassmen advice that I wish I had. This advice even applies to my classmates and I for any of our future endeavors.

First of all, I want to clear some things up, even if it's going to burst some of your bubbles. These next couple of years will be nothing like High School Musical. You will not experience any flash mobs and Zac Efron is probably not going to be your boyfriend. On a more realistic note, there are some experiences that you can correlate with reality. Think about your friend group right now. I bet you have all promised to be besties for life and that nothing will tear you apart. I know this because we did the exact same thing. You may not want to believe me right now, but more likely than not, you will be friends with completely different people by the time you are my age. I know this isn't what you want to hear, but I promise that when it happens, it will not be the end of the world. Party Next Door once said, "Things change, people change, feelings do too." Everything is going to change one way or another, you just need to stay focused and remember who you are. Also, stop trying to impress people by talking behind your friend's back. Some people only know how to stab people in the back, but don't you dare become that type of person. You will lose everything, including yourself.

My next piece of advice is about life. I know certain things may happen like losing a loved one or moving from your hometown may seem like Karma is out to get you, but I promise it's not. If you ever feel down, there will always be someone there to put a smile on your face, including me. When the good times are here though, cherish every second. I know I wished away my senior year by counting down every single day, but remember to appreciate all of it as well. I would kill for one more prom or food day in Mr.J's. While I may have complained about never getting enough sleep and wishing I was home already, don't take anything for granted.

My final piece of advice comes from the purest of minds. I was lucky enough to be allowed to go over to the elementary school and ask some kindergarten students for advice. While I am mostly trying to help you poor underclassmen, this is mostly for my class of 2017. They may have been slightly mesmerized or terrified, I couldn't really tell the difference, but I was able to get some incredible advice. It may be simple, but these kids look at life completely differently than we do. One adorable little girl

told me that as we become adults, we should “be helpful, be nice, be pretty, and do whatever makes you happiest,” which I couldn’t have said better myself. Two kids, after internally fighting each other on who was going to talk first, explained to me that to be a good person you must “help anyone who fell down on the playground” and “help someone in a wheelchair if they can’t push themselves.” While they were telling me this, their cuteness melted my heart. Finally, a little boy told me to tell all of you, “Good luck, have fun, and be a cool scientist that does things.” To my class of 2017, thank you for all of the weird and crazy memories you have given me. Also, thank you for dealing with my tardiness and grumpiness even when that was the last thing any of you wanted to do. I wish every single one of you good luck in your future endeavors. Finally to the underclassmen, good luck. Do yourselves a favor and don’t forget, life isn’t about how many likes you get on your insta pic or who has the hottest boyfriend. Always respect the upperclassmen, and never forget- the class of 2017 will always rule PAHS.

Small but Mighty

Emily Kunko

William Shakespeare wrote “And though she be but little, she is fierce”. While Shakespeare used this line in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, I can’t help but think that he wrote it with our class in mind. With a total of 51 members, the graduating class of 2017 is far from big. We barely fill group photos, and we can easily fit inside Room 111 (with desks to spare). Because there are so few of us, one may think to write us off. Some might say that a class of our size would never leave an impact on the school. Over the past 12 years, we have proved these statements wrong time and time again.

Our size (or lack thereof) has proved to be beneficial in many ways. From an academic perspective, the class of 2017’s test scores have soared above those with large numbers. Because of our small size, we turned into a dominating force of multi-sport athletes. From regular season sports like football, baseball and golf, to the far more important athletic events such as Powderpuff and Volley for Prom, our class has quite frankly kicked butt and took names. But most of all, living and learning each day with a small group gave us the opportunity to get to know every member of our class. Not many recent graduates can tell you how many people they graduated with, let alone the name of every person in that class. Our small size allowed our class to become especially close with one another, and I will always be thankful for the memories and friendships I made during my years here. For example, I will never forget when rainy powderpuff practices turned into giant mudslides, or when I accidentally broke Alex Gates’ nose during the game (so sorry!!). Or maybe you can recall being given cockroaches in the seventh grade, and some of said cockroaches being tossed out the window. I’m sure we can all remember a certain someone’s passion for blue icing in tenth grade. Freshman year would not have been complete without the imaginary alligators outside Miss Yingling’s room. No matter how many times she told us the story of when she was bit by a zebra, we still found it hilarious every time. I think I can speak for everyone on this stage when I say that her memory and spirit will live on within our hearts.

The memories we made together as a class gave us a bond unique to only us. Circumstances beyond our control made us into an abnormality. Instead of letting this get the best of us, we took it, ran with it, and succeeded like no other class before us.

In many ways, the successes of the class of 2017 are a reflection of the town we grew up in. Like us, Portage is exceptionally small and often written off as “insignificant” or “too small to contribute”. I do believe the people in this town take those negative comments as a personal challenge. The spirit surrounding the Portage community is unlike any other. There are approximately 2,000 residents in our town. And every Friday, I swear, all 2,000 of us pack into our football stadium to cheer on the team. If you were to judge the population of Portage based on the crowd we take to sporting events, you would think we are much bigger than we really are. This sense of community pride does not stop with athletics. Much like our athletes who play multiple sports, the members of this community participate in as much as they can to benefit Portage for all. The people of Portage feel the need to help one another, even if they may not personally know the ones in need, which is something you just won’t find anywhere else.

To conclude, I would like to give everyone a piece of advice a wise gym teacher once told me. “Do not count the reps, make the reps count.” While this may sound like general lifting advice, I think its general message is about life. Class of 2017, do not muddle through each day only to reach the next. Instead, make as much good as you can with each day you are given on this earth. Then you will truly be living. After all, how important is it to survive to be 100 if you do not live your life to the fullest extent? Quality over quantity is the secret to a fulfilling life, and I really do believe that the people sharing this stage with me, and the ones in the town beyond the auditorium doors are an example of that. Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you the graduating Class of 2017, proof that great things come in small packages.