

## Persistence

*Christy Smith*

Writing a speech was difficult for me because I am more of a math person than an English person. As I was looking for suggestions and getting ideas persistence is what stuck out the most.

Persistence is defined as a firm or obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition. I believe that we have to be persistent to succeed.

I found a poem that defines persistence very well. It is called "Don't Quit" by anonymous.

"When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,  
When the road your climbing seems all up hill,  
When funds are low and debts are high,  
When you want to smile but you have to sigh,  
When care is getting you down a bit,  
Rest if you must - but don't you quit.

Life is queer with its twists and its turns,  
As everyone of us sometimes learns,  
And many a failure turns about  
When they might have won, had they stuck it out.  
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,  
You may succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than,  
It seems to a faint and faltering man,  
Often the struggler has given up  
When he might have captured the victor's cup;  
And he learned too late when the night came down,  
How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out  
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt  
And you never can tell how close you are,  
It may be near when it seems so far;  
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,  
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit!"

We must stand up in the hard times and like the poem says "never quit." We will face struggle and hardships. Those of us who can stand up and face those struggles and hardships are the ones who will succeed. Being persistent is how we accomplish our dreams. If we give up just because one thing goes wrong, we will never see our dreams come true. Through persistence and hard work, I am seeing my dreams come true. In the fall I will be attending Waynesburg University to study secondary education with a focus in math. I want to become a math teacher and I will not be able to do that if I am not persistent. There will be times when being persistent will get hard; that is when we can look to friends and family for help or advice. Those who are religious look to God and, His word, the Bible. A verse that has helped me through the hard times is Philippians 4:13, I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.

So whatever your dreams are and whatever you inspire to do, be persistent and never quit so you can achieve your dreams.

## A Walk Down Memory Lane

*Jamie Koston*

Beginning at a very young age, all of us couldn't wait to grow up. We would sit and talk about how cool it was to be in high school and how those days couldn't come soon enough. We dreamt about walking the halls with the older kids, turning 16 and getting our drivers license, turning 18 and finally being legal adults, and lastly, standing on this stage this very day. Countdowns each year seemed to go quicker and quicker. Our journeys were slowly coming to an end. Everyone had the same goal: to get out of high school. But what we didn't realize was that that day would come so soon.

From 6<sup>th</sup> grade to 7<sup>th</sup> grade was a huge step for us all. This was the year we moved into the high school building. It marked the beginning of what we thought was going to be the hardest years of our lives. Although we were in Junior High, we still called ourselves high schoolers. We thought that since we were in the same building as those who were technically high school students meant that we were one of them too. Everyone pretty much joined a sport and signed up for every club possible. We all wanted to be involved in some way. I can remember the excitement that would run through our bodies whenever we would switch periods and catch a glimpse of an upperclassmen. We would turn and whisper to our friends with a big smile and a giggle, "Did you see them?" Our mouths draped open and our books clenched tight to our chests, we would walk into our next class thinking about how that soon was going to be us. We couldn't wait for that day. They were role models to us, even though we were secretly terrified of every single one of them.

8<sup>th</sup> grade year was the year that we felt like we were finally in charge. We were the big dogs in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade hallway. In one more year we were going to be an official high

school student playing varsity sports, singing in the senior high chorus, playing in the senior high band, and much more. We started to open up more and get brave with things. We began to test our limits. Chewing gum was not allowed as a student in junior high. But do you think that rule stopped us 8<sup>th</sup> graders? This was the year rebellion set in, so, doing what we do best, we didn't listen. Some teachers had a keen eye when it came to spotting gum. It didn't matter if you hid it under your tongue, on the roof of your mouth, or pressed up against your teeth, they were going to notice it. I won't name specific names, but one time a student in a classroom across the hall was chomping away at his gum. My teacher, in a completely different classroom as the other student, simply walked across the doorway and saw him happily chewing his gum. She instantly yelled for him to spit it out and went and got the demerit slip. That put the fear of god in us all at that moment and our way of rebelling came to an end.

Freshman year. The year that we should have been the underdogs and forced to do whatever the seniors told us to do. However, for the class of 2018 that wasn't exactly how it went. We were known as the "Freshman Takeover". You can imagine how mad this made the seniors and even the juniors and sophomores. We thought we ran the school and we made it known that that was what we wanted. When a freshman girl stood up in the middle of lunch and walked over to a senior boy and dumped a whole pint of iced tea on his head that signified that we were serious about ruling the school. We excelled in the classroom, sports, and clubs. This was the year that truly made our class one to watch. It was also the year that everyone got along and we all were friends. "Flamin Fam" was just one of the titles we gave ourselves. It was a group of us who spent every moment we possibly could together. We were inseparable. The amount of fires we had was honestly insane. It got to the point that people began egging us at every one. We had no idea why or who it was, but we didn't care. We always had tons of fun.

Freshman year was the year that our class became too comfortable with each other because of how close we got. I think we all can say that it was one of the best years we experienced in high school.

We were now into our sophomore year of high school. This year seemed to be full of complete chaos. Sadly, we drifted apart. We tried to keep contact and stay close, but it seemed that drama was always getting in the way. I guess you could say that sophomore year was the year that taught us that some friends would come and go. We got senioritis a few years early because it got hard for us to come to school. We even had a sophomore skip day. Something that I think that everyone will remember is the fight club that the boys used to have. To them it was a big deal because it told them who were the strongest and the toughest. For the girls, they had issues with the senior boys. If they weren't dating them they were constantly being picked on by them. They used to fling carrots at us and mock us. Sophomore year was the year that we weren't afraid to speak our truth.

Junior year we started to get more serious. We realized that our grades mattered and that we had big things coming up in the near future. Senior year was finally in view. It was the year full of many new things like the first prom for most people, college visits, SAT's and ACT's, jobs, and many more. Friendships got hard to maintain because of the amount of work we had and the pressure that was on us. Everyone was always stressed out. It became the year we all complained. It didn't matter if we had multiple days to study for a test or if it was open notes, we still were mad about it. Something that stuck with us was what happened on the very first day of our junior year. As we all gathered in the auditorium our principal, Mr. Cecere, began to speak to us. However, he was in great need of some lemon juice and lets just say he was a little squeaky

without it. As the year came to an end, the reality set in that we had one more year left in this place. All of a sudden it didn't seem real.

Just like that it was senior year. We were the big kids now. We set examples for the underclassmen and it seemed as if someone was always watching us. Everyone was deciding on what college they were going to attend and what their major was going to be or where they were going to work. Once everyone had their future plans figured out, the idea that "we were already accepted into a college so what do we need to do well in school for" set in. Lots of people slacked off and let senior year slide by. It was definitely the year that caring was not in our vocabulary anymore. I think we all can agree that some of the things that happened this year were memorable as well as comical. For example, backing into our parking spots was no longer an option. There is one word that sums up senior year and that word is fun. No matter what class we were in or what kind of day it was, something always made it fun. Senior year was full of surprises, excitement, and entertainment. We couldn't have asked for it to go any better.

Here we are at Graduation day. Today is the day that we have been wishing for since we were in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. It is supposed to be one of the happiest moments of our lives; at least that's what we have been telling ourselves for years now. But what we didn't realize is that this day signifies the end of a chapter, a chapter that will forever remain in our memories. Sitting at pep rallies, running to lunch, taking personal days, having incentives, substitute teachers, and getting double chicken puff pastry are all things that we won't ever experience again. We didn't think that those small things would leave such a big impact on us. Leaving them behind is harder than what we had ever imagined. At this moment right now we are all wishing that we didn't want to grow up and that life had a pause button. The next time we enter this school we will be a visitor and no longer a student. We have come a long way and have grown tremendously over the years. We

leave this school as strong, beautiful, and unique individuals. In the 6 years we spent here, we had the chance to write our own stories. For the class of 2018, I can't thank you all enough for being a part of my story and for letting me be apart of yours. I wish you all the best of luck in your future and to always remember that time flies, but the memories last forever.

## Because of Them

*Alexa Glista*

This is it. We've made it, and I don't know if I should feel relived or terrified. There are so many clichés and analogies I could use to describe high school, but to put it simply high school is confusing. No one knows what they are doing, and we are all caught in this weird cycle where we can't decide if we are still kids or adults. For example, last week at our senior picnic we were all playing a very intense game where we chased each other with crayons and tried to pop balloons taped to our backs, and now here we are giving speeches and graduating a week later. My experiences in high school have taught me a lot, and tonight I would like to talk about what I've learned from this school and everyone in it.

Throughout elementary and middle school, our class left our mark, but we never really caused any problems. Something changed in us when we became freshman. We suddenly had massive egos, and a superiority complex that was extremely inappropriate because we were supposed to be at the bottom of the food chain. I'll never forget watching my classmates tell teachers and upperclassmen that we were having a "freshman take over", and no one could stop us. I could remember watching my classmates skip the lunch line in front of seniors and being terrified to do it myself because I didn't understand how they could be so bold. Most of the teachers just shook their heads at our antics and hoped we'd eventually calm down. One teacher however approached with a different tactic. Mr. Fox decided instead of teaching us English 9 that he was going to teach us life 101. He challenged us on everything, and he did everything in his power to get a rise out of us. At the time I thought he just liked to fight us, but now I understand what he was doing. He wasn't just trying to get under our skin. He was challenging us to state what we believed, and to back it up. That was the year I came out of my shell and

realized I loved to argue. I not only learn to unapologetically be myself from my classmates, but I also learned how to defend what I believed.

We spent the summer having the time of our lives and suddenly it was over, and we were sophomores. We came into school saying it was a “sophomore takeover”, but it just didn’t have the same ring to it. I think that was foreshadowing that we were about to be put in our place. We all knew what was coming, we heard the horror stories from the upperclassmen. We were about to take our hardest high school course, biology. Ms. Kenny wasted no time telling us her expectations for our class, and we got right to work. At the time I was terrified, but she was what our grade needed. She grounded us and didn’t let us get away with anything. She was not about to let us fail, but she wasn’t going to make it easy either. I remember watching everyone panic and study for the tests. I did poorly on a test early on because I thought I was above studying, but when I got a paper handed back to me with a billion red pen marks I realized I was going to have to work hard to keep up with everyone. That year I learned about importance of a work ethic and to respect my classmates and teachers.

Another summer came and went by in an instant, and we became juniors. There was no “junior take over” we simply just went about our business and started to grow up. Everyone was miserable. We all had senioritis before we were even seniors. We were anxious for school to be over and for some reason we were always irritated with each other. It seemed like we lost that spark we once had. Mrs. Panick wasn’t having it. She kept an enthusiastic smile on her face no matter how angry or grumpy we all were. She made jokes to keep us interested through class even when no one would laugh. She always had a way of boosting our morale, and her positivity spread throughout the entire school. The irritation started to go away, and everyone began to

forgive. I watched my classmates repair burnt bridges, and they inspired me to do the same. This was the year I learned the power of a positive attitude and forgiveness.

Now here we are, senior year. This has been a fantastic year, but it went by too quickly. I think everyone knew our time together was limited. I know I have friendships that will last a lifetime. I wish I could have mentioned every teacher because I have learned a valuable lesson from every single one, and I will always appreciate what they have done for me. Now I have a confession, I lied when I said I did not know how to feel. I'm not relieved or terrified, I'm grateful. The people on this stage and the teachers in this school have made me into who I am. Every good memory along with the bad ones have shaped me. I have learned so much from them. I am who I am because of them. The class of 2018 has left their mark here at Portage, and even though I'm sad to say goodbye, I couldn't be more excited to see what they are going to do with their lives. These are faces you soon won't forget. So, once again thank you to all my teachers, to all the staff, and most importantly to the class of 2018.

# The Illusion of Intelligence

*Kasey Chobany*

## Thanks:

I would like to start off this speech by saying thank you. Thank you to the administration, to the school board members, to the community, to one of the best faculties in the world, and to the parents and family. We couldn't have done any of this without you. But most of all, to the class of 2018. Thank you for the laughs, the memories, and for spending the last 12 years with me. There is truly no other class I would rather be with. It's sad that our journey has come to an end, but remember, a new one is just beginning. I can't wait to watch you all succeed and do great things.

## Speech:

I'm going to begin my speech with a little disclaimer: I am not smart. Now, this may seem like a surprise to most of you, and I bet you're wondering why I said that when I'm up here giving a speech as valedictorian of my class, but it's true! I am not naturally smart, never was and probably never will be. I am not naturally intuitive, knowledgeable, or full of wisdom. That's just not me, and I'll be the first to admit it. I mean I can remember looking at black and white photos when I was young and asking my dad when the world invented color. Or, when I realized that Milwaukee was not a Hawaiian island. I never saw myself as smart. The truth is, I had to work really hard for my grades. Nothing came easy. In fact, it's funny because it actually bothered me when people would call me smart and say things like, "How did you get that answer? Oh, well Kasey's just smart" or "How did you complete all of the homework last night? How did you pass that test? Oh, well you're just smart." When you put it like that, it seems almost effortless, like I didn't spend more than 5 minutes finding the derivative of 20 equations

implicitly while also deriving the trigonometric functions inside of them. In reality, it took me at least an hour. An hour spent rereading the lesson, looking over examples, and never quitting until I solved for the correct answer. And that's how I did it. That's how I was able to get the answer, complete the homework, and pass the test. Not simply by being naturally smart. Too many times I see people accepting the mediocre grade and not giving their best effort in school because they believe they just weren't born smart. Well, nothing can be further from the truth. Knowledge does not come naturally, at least for me it didn't. You have to earn it. You have to work for it. Like Ms. D always said, "Anybody can be smart!" And that's what I wanted to talk about today. I wanted to share 3 lessons on how I think you can become what people perceive as "smart", or at least what I think is smart. And that is to work hard, learn to fail, and be kind. Just 3 things that I think, if you follow through with them, you will not only look smart, but you will also become smart.

**Work Hard.** The biggest misconception of success is the amount of hard work that goes into it. If you want to be good at anything, and I mean anything in life, you have work for it. That is really the secret. I can remember being young and upset because I wasn't naturally good at basketball like my sister Emily, or naturally smart like my sister Abby, and when I would complain, my dad would simply tell me to work harder. It's true. You cannot sit around and wait for things to be handed to you because that day will never come. You see, when you work hard you will achieve, when work hard and discipline yourself you will succeed, and when you combine hard work, discipline, and consistency, you will move mountains. You will conquer things you never thought possible. I never thought this was possible for me. Theodore Roosevelt said, "Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." Find the work worth doing in your life.

Learn to fail. Success is 99% failure. Every single person in this room will fail at some point in their lives. But you know what the best part about failure is? Learning from it. You know what the hardest part is? Getting back up again. And that's what divides the weak from the strong. Who is willing to try again? Who is willing to learn from their mistakes and use that to make themselves better? Thomas Edison conducted 1000 failed experiments, but he never gave up. And, subsequently, the light bulb was invented. Every failed experiment was one step closer to success. You see, no one wants to fail, but it's inevitable. So why be afraid of it? Learn from it, grow from it, and never stop challenging yourself. Do not permit the fear of failure to prevent your effort.

Be Kind. Above all, be kind. In everything you say, everything you do, think of others. No matter how educated, talented, rich, or cool you believe you are, how you treat people ultimately tells all. Throughout the course of a lifetime, a person will interact with, on average, 80,000 people. That's a lot of people to impact. Even the smallest of words can make or break someone's day, so choose wisely. Be the difference you wish to see in the world and choose kindness. You never know how much someone may be suffering inside. Most importantly, whatever you achieve, or how far you go, stay humble. Stay humble and reach back to pull someone else up. You were once like them too. Don't just aspire to be a somebody, be the somebody that makes everybody feel like a somebody.

To conclude, I'm not up here today because I'm naturally smart. I'm up here today because I believe in hard work, failure, and kindness. If you take my advice, and put these 3 things into action, you will impact others and make a difference. This will not only help you, but also those around you. And that's what I think is truly smart. I would like to leave you all with a story called the Old Cherokee Tail:

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life. “A fight is going on inside me,” he said to the boy.

“It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, lies, false pride, and ego.” He continued, “The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, kindness, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you – and inside every other person, too.”

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, “Which wolf will win?”

The old Cherokee simply replied, “The one you feed.”

Thank you.