

## Spoilers

*By Sierra Crum*

Good evening faculty, loved ones, and graduates. I am honored to be standing in front of you giving this speech on this bittersweet evening. To the staff, on behalf of all the seniors, I thank you for your constant involvement and commitment to our education. Every morning students are greeted cheerily and have conversations with people who care about them. The staff here go above and beyond to lead every Mustang student to achieve their best, both mentally and academically. For instance, Mrs. Lutz happily gave up time to herself on her mornings, planning periods, and even her lunch to give all of the extra help we needed in calculus to reach our academic goals. To our loved ones, thank you for guiding us to achieve this accomplishment. To my mom and dad, thank you for reminding me that *everything will be okay* regardless of how I did when I was stressed about tests, and grades, and projects, (*clear throat*) you were right.

Senior year brings many questions: “What are you doing after high school?” “How is your senioritis?” “Where are you going to college?” each answered with the expectations we have set for ourselves. I think the most important question is, “Who do you want to become?” This night marks the beginning of the lifelong journey to fabricate the traits others will use to describe us, whether that be

ambitious, creative, humble, kind, generous, or resilient. On this stage, there is a diverse group of individuals. Some of them will make you laugh until your stomach hurts, some support every bad decision you make, some are a shoulder to cry on, some teach you new things, and some make you a better version of yourself. We seniors cheered on our classmates at every sporting event, academic competition, concerts, performances, and especially, the robotics competition. These characteristics are what make the class of 2024 so memorable, creating memories I am thrilled to carry. My fellow graduates are destined to do great things, and I can confidently say we will all aim to make a positive impact on the situations we interact with.

Now that you know a little bit more about what makes it so special to be a Portage Mustang, I would like to tell you a little more about this one. My family and I moved to Portage in August of 2017, right before the first day of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I was *not* thrilled to be leaving my home city and state, Phoenix, Arizona. At the time, I could not understand why my father could *ever* want to move from the busy, always exciting city to move into the smallest town known to man. I was enrolled and told my class sizes would be around 20 students, and, also, I was the only new student in the whole grade. On my first day, I was terrified. Where were my classes? Who will I talk to? Where I am I going to sit at lunch?! As I was trying to find my first period, I got lost in the chaos of students heading to class. I

knocked into a girl and dropped all my folders at her feet. She laughed and said, “You must be the new girl! I’m Annie, follow me and I’ll show you to our class.” This small surprise interaction of kindness was the first of many that made me realize small town life wasn’t so bad after all.

I mentioned previously this year’s calculus class. It consisted of 6 students and Mrs. Lutz. This holiday season we decided to play Secret Santa, and I stubbornly refused to tell whose Secret Santa I was every time someone would ask me which name I had pulled. My classmates will shake their heads and roll their eyes in agreement when I say, I. Hate. Spoilers. I hate movie spoilers, book spoilers, any kind of spoilers. Audience, I’d like you to think about the best surprise you’ve experienced. Whether it be a proposal, birthday party, your favorite musician’s album, I’m going to assume you thought of that memory because of how the element of surprise made you feel. Would that memory be a favorite if you knew it was coming? Would you have wanted to know? Maybe, but I think the surprise adds to the experience.

If I would have known how much this “smallest town known to man” would have impacted my life and had an integral part of my development into the young woman you see tonight, I would not have appreciated all the little surprises along the way. I would have never expected how this school has taught me many things: how to be flexible, how to be kind, how to be thoughtful, and how to appreciate

every little moment. Throughout this year, I was consciously soaking up my last first day of high school, last football game, last volleyball game, last test, last dances, and now, the last time my friends and I will all be in the same place at the same time. These memories were to be expected, but we never really thought that they'd ever come. Luckily, for all of us, life does not come with spoilers. Life will throw challenges, joy, and heartache our way, all creating who we are. As J. Paul Lombardo of the Post-Journal wrote, "If we entered this world with a book in our hands that mapped our lives page by page, and we followed it word by word, it wouldn't be worthy of being called 'life,' it would just be worthy of the term, existence. There's a huge difference between living a life and just existing day to day."

Becoming a Mustang has taught me the importance of taking risks and facing new scenarios and challenges with open arms. These people before you have taught me how to truly live. Living is not merely the passage of time or the ticking of a clock; it is the collection of moments, big and small, that shape our journey and define our existence. Throughout our time in these halls, we have grown not only academically but also emotionally and spiritually. We have forged friendships, overcome challenges, and discovered our passions. As we gather here today, on the brink of this monumental milestone, let us carry with us the lessons we have learned and the memories we have made. I choose to live rather than

simply existing by becoming the person I aim to be by being involved in this community full of people I love so dearly. I am also setting goals for my career as a Physician Assistant to one day return the kindness I have always been shown.

While I reminisce all of the memories my high school experience, I realize my extreme appreciation that I had no idea how much fun these past four years would be. From our first walk in the building as a 7<sup>th</sup> grader to the senior salute in the hall, from the first football game we could sit in the Herd to senior nights, from 13<sup>th</sup> birthdays to 18<sup>th</sup> birthdays, from the first pep rally to the senior picnic, we got to spend these times together laughing, cheering, and finding ourselves. We smiled big for pictures in our fancy dresses and tuxes, and we sang our senior song, Revival by Zach Bryan, obnoxiously loud as it played during prom. We got to surprise each other while playing Senior Assassins, giggling while hiding in each other's trunks or houses to get out our targets. We bonded over the secrecy and element of surprise, laughing as we soaked each other with water guns.

To the underclassmen in the crowd tonight, I have so much parting advice for you, but I'll make sure to keep it short. Embarrassment is a mindset. Most of my favorite memories are when my friends and I were laughing at the "embarrassing" things we did. Join that team. Go on that adventure. Go to that game. Take that class. Treat yourself. Take a break. Work hard. Treat your teachers with respect; they really do want what is best for you. Procrastination causes

missed opportunities. Go hang out with your friends. Drive with your windows down and music loud. Hug your parents. Make time for your family, they're getting older, too. As the band Rascal Flatts wisely wrote, "I hope the days come easy and the moments pass slow/ And each road leads you where you wanna go/ And if you're faced with a choice, and you have to choose/ I hope you choose the one that means the most to you... My wish, for you/ Is that this life becomes all that you want it to."

*(Look to classmates)* As we head our separate ways, I hope you all find what fulfills you, and the reason that validates that you are truly living. In the face of uncertainty, we've learned resilience, adaptability, and the courage to face the unknown. Each surprise, whether it brought joy or adversity, has been a catalyst for growth. It's in those moments of surprise that we find ourselves tested, but also where we find the hidden strengths and capabilities we never knew we possessed. Let us never forget the power we hold within us, the power to shape our own destiny, to inspire those around us, and to leave a legacy that will stand the test of time. As we step boldly into the future, may we carry with us the valuable lessons that surprises have taught us, knowing that within each surprise lies an opportunity waiting to be seized. All of this to say, the best things are always unexpected. May our journeys be filled with countless surprises that inspire and challenge us.

Seniors of 2024, we did it! Here's to all the surprises that await us. I wish all of you the best. Thank you so much for everything.