**Mistakes are Made**

American General George S. Patton once said, “Where there is the fear of failure, there will be failure.” As a society, we view failure as a taboo. Something we avoid at all costs, but is failure really that scary? It’s impossible to go through life without failing, and the last twelve years of our lives can attest to that. Our journey from preschool to graduation has been full of failures and triumphs for all of us. As preschoolers, some of us eagerly ran into our first class, excited for an adventure, while others cried in our parents’ arms, afraid to leave the safety of our homes. Those of us who ran into our classroom without a second thought had a successful first day of preschool, while those of us who refused to leave our parents were considered less successful. Nevertheless, in elementary school, we didn’t really comprehend the idea of failure. We simply adapted to our circumstances and tried our best to do what was expected of us.

As we began seventh grade, we changed buildings and our fears changed too. The first day of seventh grade was similar to our first day of preschool. An entirely new experience full of different things to fear. While we no longer feared leaving our parents for the day, we were suddenly overwhelmed by all the expectations that high school brought. Fear of failure began to take root in our minds. No one wanted to fail tests or fail at fitting in… but despite our initial fears, we adapted and navigated middle school and high school. Yes, along the way we were disorganized and procrastinated, failed power point presentations, biology tests and math assignments. However, our time at Portage Area has provided us with a safe space to make mistakes and learn from our failures. Every mistake was an opportunity to grow, and we overcame every obstacle we faced.

I was a preschooler who was afraid to leave my home and my parents. However, I have learned to be independent and do things for myself... which is why I still have my mom come to the doctor with me, and why I always have my dad cut up my cucumbers, and why I’m commuting next fall. Okay, so maybe I'm not entirely independent yet, but that’s okay. We are all still young and shouldn’t be afraid to depend on other people at times.

Today, as I look at each of my classmates, I see a mixture of emotions. I see excitement that we finally made it to our graduation day. I also see some of the fear I remember seeing in seventh grade. As we move into another stage of our lives, we once again have new worries: what if we can’t decide on a career path? What if we have already chosen the wrong career path? What if we can’t successfully live away from home?

Remember General Patton’s quote “Where there is the fear of failure, there will be failure”? Let’s shift our focus away from our fear of failure. In those moments we question ourselves, remember that we are resilient. We have experienced failure, yet we have also triumphed. Failure is sometimes our greatest teacher. Each mistake is a steppingstone necessary to becoming the people we are supposed to be.

Author Spencer Johnson once posed the question, “What would you do if you weren’t afraid?” As we embark on our new journey that will be both exciting and daunting, I challenge you to ask yourself what you would do if you weren’t afraid? In asking yourself this question, remember we must take chances in spite of our fears. In doing so, we may make mistakes, but we can embrace life’s lessons. By embracing life’s lessons, we will no longer have to wonder what we would do if we weren’t afraid. Thoughts of failure will no longer hold us back. When we embrace failure we will be much more willing to take chances in our lives.

Why are you all still sitting here? Get up. Take risks and embrace failure.