

Trissa Smith

Persistence

Good evening faculty, staff, school board members, family, friends, and fellow graduates. It is an amazing accomplishment that we, as a class, have got to this point. After long nights of studying and early mornings we finally made it! Thank you all for coming to support us today and every day through our journeys. Our time in high school started in 7th grade. We were 12 and 13, having no idea what to expect when we first started in this building. “What are the older kids going to say?”, “Is this what the older kids wear?”, “What if I don’t fit in?”. These were the types of questions we asked ourselves the night before the first day of seventh grade. It was a nerve- wracking experience. We were going from ruling the elementary school, to being at the bottom of the food chain. But then, we did it. We walked through the doors, we made it through that scary day, and realized it wasn’t as bad as we thought. We were persistent. The nerves were there, but we didn’t let that stop us. This is just one example of how we have been persistent

and how we can use this idea of persistence to help us get through new experiences in the future.

The end of our 8th grade year was cut short, and our freshman year was not normal by any means. The school year started later, we weren't able to sit close to our friends at lunch, and we had shields on our desks. There was no way of knowing when this was going to end. Just when we thought it was getting better, it got worse. Personally, I lost my uncle and my grandmother during this hard and isolated time. It turned my family and I's world upside down. Going through this hardship, on top of not being able to hang out with my friends and interact normally with others, I can say whole heartedly, was the most difficult time in my life. Many of my fellow classmates had similar experiences during this time. Many loved ones were sick and in pain which took a toll on all of us. We had to watch those we love suffer and had no idea when it would stop. Although, we persisted. It was a tough path and some of the aftermath is still felt today, but we made it through. We eventually made it back to normal school, even though it was hard to tell when we would ever

experience that again. Our heads stayed held high when our emotions were everywhere. We persisted. We made it to the happier times that we knew were ahead. Sporting events with lots of fans, pep rallies, and field trips. It is hard to see how much was taken from us during that time, but we pushed through. We kept going to school, we took the precautions needed, and we made it to the other side. We made it to senior year, senior sunrise, senior picnic, and even senior skip day. Another way to say this is we made it to all the “lasts”. Last first day of school, last football Friday, and last school dance.

This is a sad yet exciting concept to think about. We are jumping into the real world, but we are leaving the people and relationships we have always known. We will need this strong-minded spirit as we move through life. In our next step of life, we are once again the new kids. We are going from being at the top of the school to being the youngest and the least experienced. Some of us will move on to college and must go to big universities with other students from everywhere in the world that know their way around and have amazing friend groups. We will be

leaving our safety circle of Portage friends and starting all over. It will be overwhelming at first, but just like in the 7th grade, we will persist despite the nerves and “what ifs” and figure out our way around. Others will go to the work force or the military and experience the same thing. No matter what circumstance you find yourself in, after you walk out these doors, it will be new, scary, and exciting all at the same time.

Every step we will take in our lives from here on out will be a new one. First internship, first job, all the way to starting a family and having your first child. Those same nerves we felt starting the 7th grade will be there during all these major life events. But now that we have made it to this point, and can see that we all made it out okay, it will be a lot easier to tackle them with the mindset of being and staying persistent. If we continue to keep this mindset, then life’s biggest problems won’t be as bad as we think.

I would, again, like to thank you all for coming out tonight to support us in this monumental moment in our lives. I would also like to give a very special thank you to the girl I get the best laughs from, my

sister, the man who has taught me the best work ethic, my dad, and the woman who is my best friend and shoulder to lean on throughout life, my beautiful mom. As we all part ways and leave the place that we have built the most memories, I would like you all to remember that we will be okay even through the rough and scary times...just be persistent!

Thank you