

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen!

Welcome all students, Class of 2012, friends, family and staff members to the Commencement Ceremony of Patrick Henry High School. Here we stand together to celebrate the accomplishments and journeys of our Class of 2012. My name is Thuy An Tran. I would like to share a few words with you on our behalf.

As Napoleon Hill said, "Patience, persistence and perspiration make an unbeatable combination for success", I would like to begin my speech by emphasizing that life is a journey filled with hardships and difficulties to overcome. To all my fellow classmates, we have made it. We are graduating and leaving high school to explore the larger world, no matter if we are going to college next year, joining the military, starting a career, or even travelling to gather more experience. Congratulations and the deepest gratitude to all our families, educators and staff members who have accompanied us this far. Our success is your success. You have always been there and supported us academically and emotionally, lifting us up in the darkest moments and guiding us with helpful and genuine advice.

Our class has overcome many tough times during the last four years. Many families endured the devastating tornado, lost their homes and were forced to move to other neighborhoods. Many classmates transferred; many stayed and persevered through taking 2 to 3 city buses or driving long distances to school. Many have lost their relatives, yet those loved ones always remain in our hearts. Many struggled with family responsibilities and multiple jobs while studying hard and taking challenging exams to earn good grades and walk across the stage with us today. There were times when we did not get what we aimed for, but we gained experience and enjoyed the bittersweet and meaningful ride. We all stand strong with talent and grace, having overcome the obstacles with burning resilience, appreciating the past failures, and taking pride in today's celebration.

To tell you my story that many families here would identify with... When I first came to America five years ago, I saw all my classmates speaking English so well, understanding the lessons easily and enjoying their time with friends. Meanwhile, I struggled to learn English and translate for my family as much as I could, because I was the only one who knew at least some English. To admit the truth, I became a little jealous of my friends having easier lives and upbringings. My parents strongly believed that my brother and I would have better opportunities and brighter future in the United States. But little did we know that the beginning was definitely not going to be pretty. We literally started with empty hands, nothing. My parents struggled to find jobs and provide for the family. Many relatives contributed their help, but we could not rely on them forever. I was trying to adapt to the new environment, support my family through paperwork and translating, finishing difficult homework and learning English late into the night at the same time. Then I managed to participate in extracurricular activities and volunteer in school. The difficult and worthwhile experience taught me the value of responsibility, caring and maturity. Through them, I learned to appreciate my strength, and to never regret my mistakes and weaknesses as well. The imperfect life encourages me to improve nonstop and grow

tremendously. Who would have imagined that a new American like me would graduate from high school as the valedictorian with 4.0 GPA, take rigorous classes and challenging IB exams, receive various recognitions and make wonderful friends who have given her unforgettable lifetime memories? That was when I realized that there was no need to be jealous. Those who appear to have everything prepared for them might not develop the inner fortitude that those of us who struggle possess. Just because one starts with everything does not mean that they will end with everything. Just because someone appears successful, it does not mean that we are less successful. Nobody is perfect. We work hard, smile optimistically and attempt our best to achieve our goals every day. It is not necessarily where we come from, but it's how we play the game. We may start with a little dream and inspiration, yet that dream can blossom into a profound and long-lasting reality. Life is magical, unexpected and promising; our imagination is important and endless. Nothing is impossible.

If there is one thing we should remember from this speech, it is "Don't you dare give up!" Graduation is not the end, but the beginning of our adventures in which we are the playmakers. We can do anything and be anyone. "Life isn't about learning how to weather the storm. It's about learning how to dance in the rain." Going through sweat and tears, the ultimate goal is to make that hard work worthwhile. Dreams are hidden motivations of our lives, and we should pursue our ambitions unconditionally. The road of life may be full of rocks blocking our path and manipulating our characters, yet there is no sign forbidding the pedestrians. We will continue to walk, each individual with our personal strengths, lifting each other up and constructing a better future. Therefore, keep learning, earning and yearning.

Education is the key that opens the gate of countless possibilities that one must work hard to achieve. We know that our education and experience will lead us on a wonderful mysterious journey with potential and promises, and that we will receive the opportunities and support to achieve our goals. Education does not only mean facts and books, but it also represents the ultimate adventure. We must acquire a good education and fulfill ourselves before we can effectively support our community, our peers and our family. To all my fellow classmates, believe in the beauty and wisdom that are uniquely yours, yet keep a childlike sense of wonder. No one can replace us, and this community needs us just as we are. We are all capable of becoming leaders, scholars and most importantly, healers in order to make differences in this world.

Today, we gather here in confidence, honor and excitement, all of us sharing the unified hope and inspiration of a higher education and brighter future, all of us being proud to graduate from Patrick Henry high school in the little area of Minnesota called North Minneapolis. With Patriot pride, congratulations, Class of 2012, and may we have the best opportunities and victories in the future. Thank you!

*By: Thuy An Hoang Tran / PHHS Valedictorian Class of 2012*