

Alexandrea Pouliot: “Have the confidence to be true to ourselves.”

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, wonderful people of all ages.

One week ago today, during a conversation with Mrs. Bernardi, I asked, “Do I have to speak at graduation?” “Yes! No one told you?” she asked, surprised. And so began the last mad rush of my high school career.

I say this with the caveat that I did basically know that the speech would happen. I’d been putting off working on it for months, waiting for someone to tell me it was time. Peers and family asked what my speech would be about, and I honestly replied, “I have no clue”.

So, one week ago today, I got home and stared at a blank screen, waiting for inspiration to strike. I was then immediately distracted by a text from my wonderful friend, Sara McCaffrey, saying “We only have to get up for school four more times!” and the panic set in. While not quite the inspiration I had hoped for, it did the job. Yet, I digress. I eventually got back to work. At a loss for good, non-cliche’ ideas, I naturally turned to my saving grace: Google. I looked up sample speeches, searching for the right topic. However, my best idea came when I chanced upon a book I read all the time as a child: *Who are you, Sue Snue?* by Tish Rabe, from the Doctor Seuss collection.

Now, I know we are familiar with the Doctor Seuss quotes frequently featured in such speeches as this. However, this little-known story with its humorous rhymes spoke to me. For those of you not familiar with it, the basic premise of the book is that a young girl, Sue Snue, is celebrating her second birthday while being barraged with questions and suggestions about her future occupation. After she is provided with an extensive list of increasingly ridiculous job ideas, including making left-footed red socks or poking cows, she states that she just doesn’t know yet, and doesn’t have to at age two. While a slight exaggeration, essentially the same thing happened to all of us.

For years, we have been asked: “What do you want to do when you grow up?” And we have dreamed and dreamed of all of the possibilities. Doctor or police officer, astronaut or teacher; there are so many different occupations that a young child imagines holding. Yet, few of us end up with those same dreams as we age.

We’ve been on a path that was set out for us long ago. At age 5, we entered kindergarten, and began learning the skills that someone, somewhere deemed “necessary.” For the next twelve years we continued down the same route, with few deviations. We struggled among the monotony to make a name for ourselves, to find out who we are as people. Some of us excelled as athletes, while others got great grades, and still others honed their artistic talents. Toward the end of senior year, our peers predicted our future in senior superlatives; Mary Dolan and Will Sanders are expected to be president of the USA, while Chris Kenney and I are supposed to return to Pilgrim as teachers. Though some of these may seem near the opposite of the journey we claim to be embarking in, none of these speculations are incredibly out of reach; I began high school with the goal

of being a teacher, and both my parents have worked in the classroom. But I, like many of us have and will, changed my mind. Either way, all of this occurs in the continuous quest to develop our personalities and shape our lives before our brains are even fully developed.

We've all heard the stories of those people who know what they want from their birth and work hard to get it. For most of us, like myself, it isn't that simple. As a young girl, I wanted to be a veterinarian. Then I realized that I would have to put down sick animals. Then I was convinced I was destined to be a high school Italian teacher, inspired by the amazing people who taught me. Upon realizing that I do not have the patience that the saints we call teachers seem to possess, I was inspired to become a lawyer, like my uncle. Now, due to intense interest in science classes after having some awesome teachers, I plan to pursue a degree in biochemical engineering! That's close to where I began, right?

Around junior year of high school, the whole situation became much more intense, as all the doors in the world opened before us. At age sixteen, we were asked, again, to choose a path to follow in life, one that we will continue down for a long time. We are told to decide whether we are military material or bound for trade school, going straight to work, or destined to be in school for years to come. From there, the tough decisions continue. Which school will provide the best education and the most opportunities for the money it will cost? What do our friends and family want or expect for us?

Now, as we leave high school, the story changes once more. Although it may seem that our paths are set in stone, we have barely cracked the surface of our adult lives. Our lives are clay that we can mold and change. As the years continue to pass, know this: as long as we have breath in our bodies, there is still time to change our minds. We must follow our passions, not the expectations that we or others have placed upon us. Change is okay, and it is incredibly important that we realize that, in order to live a life that is truly our own.

So, tonight, I want each of us to realize that we are still much like Susan Bocks Dutter Docks Berklummer Snue. She decides: "I'll just be myself, my whole self and not you. I'll be true to myself. That's JUST what I'll do... I'll do what I want to do, that's what I'll do,". We are young, with our whole lives ahead of us, to do with what we please. So, as we leave here tonight, I want for us all, whatever path we may take, to have the confidence to be true to ourselves, and do what speaks to us, wherever that leads. If we are all our amazing selves, we will shine and all find our own ways to change the world.

Congratulations, Pilgrim High School Class of 2017. Be wonderful and be you.