

Aiden Stevens –Salutatorian

Greetings, faculty, family, and friends. One of the greatest human emotions that can be felt or shared with others is gratitude. It is with great honor that I stand before you today with the ability to express my own gratitude for the lasting lesson in perseverance that I've learned throughout my four years of high school. This lesson is best displayed in a short story attributed to Henry Miller about a boy and a butterfly:

A young boy in India walked up to a guru – a wise man—who was sitting and looking at something in his hand. “What is that?” the boy asked. “It’s a cocoon.” the guru told him. “Inside is a butterfly. Soon the cocoon will split and the butterfly will come out.” “Could I have it?” asked the little boy. “Yes,” said the guru, “but you must promise me that when the cocoon splits and the butterfly is beating its wings to get out of the cocoon, you won’t help it.” Don’t help the butterfly by breaking the cocoon apart. Let the insect do get out by itself.” The little boy promised, took the cocoon, went home with it, and then sat and watched. Finally, he saw it begin to vibrate, move and quiver. At last the cocoon split. Inside was a beautiful damp butterfly, frantically beating its wings against the cocoon, trying to get out. The butterfly did not seem to be able to get free. The little boy desperately wanted to help. Finally he gave in and disobeyed the guru’s orders. He pushed the two halves apart and the butterfly sprang out. As soon as it got up into the air, it fell down to the ground and was killed. The little boy picked up the dead butterfly and, in tears, went back to the guru and showed him. “You see, little boy,” the guru said, “You pushed open the cocoon, didn’t you?” “Yes,” said the boy, “I did.” “You don’t understand. When the butterfly comes out of the cocoon, the only way it can strengthen its wings is by beating them against the cocoon. It beats against the cocoon so its muscles will grow. When you help it the way you did, you prevented it from getting strong enough to fly. That’s why the butterfly fell to the ground and was killed. *Students* are like butterflies. Doing the work for your *student* tends to weaken the “muscles” a *student* should develop to help him or her think, solve problems, take responsibility, and fly away to become a successful person.

I will never forget the afternoon when a classmate came to me and asked “could you help me with the precalculus homework after school?”. He didn’t want to just type in the answers into his laptop. He wanted to *understand* the questions and how to answer them. We continued to work on multiple precalculus assignments together after that afternoon, struggling through each question together. I will not forget the countless days that we walked into Ms. Baker’s classroom with homework from the night before that we didn’t quite understand but still had to write out on the whiteboard. Answers never came easy in her class. I also won’t forget the morning that Daniel and I spent hours studying for the AP U.S. History exam at the bistro, sipping down some coffee in the process. Nor will I forget the night I stayed up until three in the morning cranking out the third quarter research paper for Mr. Fletcher’s Economics class, wondering at times, “why is he doing this to us?”. And of course, I will never forget Orange, White and Blue Day. With every team cry of “Orange!” or “White Team!” comes a call to persevere and push through the field day activities, drawing out the very best in each of us.

Each of these past experiences has helped shape me into the person that I am today through their enduring lessons in perseverance. They have given me a chance to strengthen my wings so that I may face the world head-on, dauntless and unwavering. I am grateful for all those who never split the cocoon of high school apart for me, but instead challenged me to be the best that I can be. It’s with this in mind that I would now like to congratulate my fellow graduates for their own perseverance and would also like to encourage future graduates to keep beating their wings against the cocoon, never doubting, but always believing in themselves and the bright future ahead. Thank you.