

## **Huntington High School's 155<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

### **Salutatorian Olivia Stamatatos' Address**

Good evening everybody. Thank you all so much for coming to this momentous occasion! Before I begin, I would like to thank my Mom, Dad, brother and sisters, grandparents, and the rest of my family members for their undulating love and support. Without them, I would be nowhere close to the person I am today. I would also like to thank Mrs. Croke, Mr. Cusack, Mr. Caleca, Mr. Smith, Mr. DeTroia, the academic, musical, and custodial staff of Huntington High School, and, most of all, the students of Huntington High School's Class of 2016 and this year's valedictorian, Miss Rachel Carpenter.

Although I have only attended the high school for three short years, I have made unforgettable memories and met extraordinary people who have touched my life in ways that I never thought were possible. I cannot thank you enough for the experiences, and I will always cherish the time we have spent together.

As our time at Huntington High School draws to a close and we embark on our journeys into that vast, abysmal abstraction that we call "the future," we have often been asked two ostensibly simple questions: "What career do you intend to have?" and "What do you plan to do with the rest of your life?" Although these questions seem relatively straightforward, they are difficult for high school seniors or a person of any age to answer, unless you have had that "aha" moment and you have your future precisely planned out. If any one of you is so certain, I salute you; I wish I could be so certain. For others, the answer may be very simple: "I'll do whatever makes me the most money."

However, even if you have already made a decision about how you intend to live your life, you should remain open to all the endless possibilities. We are at a critical juncture at this point in our lives: the world is ours to explore regardless of whether or not we will attend college this upcoming Fall. At no other time have we had as much control and responsibility for what happens to us as we do now. Why would we choose to restrain ourselves to one career, one field of study, one possibility for our futures? With the world at our disposal, there is no reason to do this to ourselves. Instead, we should focus on finding the answer to this question: “What makes you happy?”

Now, I know that some of you may be groaning in your seats and saying to yourselves, “Oh, here we go again... I’ve heard this all before,” but the truth is, this is an important question to answer and it’s an exigent topic that needs to be addressed. If we live our lives unhappily, then what’s the point? What’s the point of having a lucrative job and a nice car if you aren’t happy?

Albeit this novel is fictional, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* exemplifies the concept of money not being equivalent to happiness. I’m pretty sure that we all know the story of Jay Gatsby, the mystery man in the pink suit who hosts lavish parties every weekend and serves champagne in glasses larger than finger-bowls. Despite his wealth and luxurious life, he pines every night for the woman he will never have: Daisy Buchanan. In the end, when Daisy’s husband becomes cognizant of the affair, Daisy refuses to spend her life with Gatsby, and any hope of Gatsby obtaining his happiness is dispelled. So what happens to the protagonist after he has no hope of living a happy life? F. Scott Fitzgerald has him murdered in one of the final chapters.

Regardless of whether or not you agree with my interpretation of the novel or with what I have said about the importance of happiness, I think we can all agree that life is too short to be replete with regrets and unhappiness. Therefore, as you proceed forth into the worlds of academic and experiential learning, discover your passions, enjoy everything that life has to offer and never let anyone tell you that you don't deserve what you want!! You are all such exceptionally talented people whose futures are exorbitantly bright, and you all deserve to be happy, whether that happiness comes from performing on stage, making music from a bunch of dots on lined pieces of paper, trading stocks on Wall Street (if you find the high stress environment to be pleasurable), or something as simple as watching a great movie with your family.

Once you discover the activities and people that flood your hearts with immense joy, make sure that you hold onto them tightly and find a way to support yourselves financially by doing the things that you love. If you live your lives in such a manner, then you'll come to realize that, although you only live once, if you do it right, once is more than enough. Thank you!