

# **Huntington High School's 150<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

## **Valedictorian Carolyn Fante's Address**

Thank you so much Danni. I want to once again welcome everyone to tonight's long awaited ceremony. Tonight is the end of a long journey, and the start of the new one. Some people have been going to Huntington schools for 12 years, others less, but tonight we will all be leaving together.

As some of you know I came to Huntington four years ago from Brooklyn. Now standing here after living in the suburbs for four years, I can still remember what Huntington looks like to an outsider: crazy and blonde, an interesting place for a Brooklyn redhead!

The first time I was ever in Huntington was the day of the St. Patrick's Day parade when we were looking for houses during eighth grade. I remember seeing mobs of people painted green and wondering what kind of place I was moving to.

My first experience with this school was soccer tryouts. The number of girls with long straight hair that ranged from blonde to brown confused me and made me believe that I was stepping into the suburban land of blonde cheerleaders that all my city friends had warned me about.

Before I moved I thought homecoming was just something that happened in Hilary Duff movies, and I had no idea what lacrosse was. Although I have to say, people in Huntington are equally misinformed about the city. I had one person, during my first weeks in Huntington look at me in complete confusion as I explained that in the city, houses are connected to the house next to them.

But, now as I look back, I see how assumptions and pre-conceived notions can be wrong and how important it is to keep an open mind for new experiences.

It turns out Huntington doesn't have a cheerleading team anymore, homecoming is actually pretty fun and I wouldn't go back and trade being on the soccer team, even to skip the dreaded two-a-days. There are truly incredible people in Huntington who I have loved knowing over the past four years. They have impressed me so much and while I may have initially thought there were too many people with blonde hair, I have discovered that Huntington is rich with diversity – diversity of views, personalities, styles, interests and backgrounds – more than I can count! The talents of my classmates have never ceased to amaze me, whether in theater, athletics, art, music or academics, we all have so much that we bring to the table. I am surprised everyday by the things my classmates have done. Don't forget about what you have achieved in high school and keep building on it because each of us has the ability to do something great and wonderful with our futures.

However, it's not just the successes that we must learn from and carry with us. There is just as much that we can learn from our failures. In college and in life we are going to have to be prepared to deal with failure – we have to learn from it and not be discouraged by it. We don't have to be perfect at something to enjoy doing it. I can easily admit that I will never be a professional soccer player or even a varsity soccer player in college, but I still love playing soccer and want to keep playing. I am also not the stereotypical valedictorian who has never gotten a bad grade in her life. When something happens, such as getting a 13 on a chemistry quiz, the only thing you can do is study harder for the next one, or take a different approach to studying. Never be afraid to ask for help if you need it and never be discouraged because something didn't work out the first time. Everyone sitting here today has some amazing talent that they will find, if they are willing to keep looking.

Over the past four years our teachers have been so supportive. They truly want us to succeed and figure out our strengths. I want to thank each and every teacher in Huntington, because without them the school would not be what it is. I want to thank Mr. Finello and Dr. Leonardi for all the time and effort they put into our school.

And then there are my friends. They are the ones I could not have made it through high school without. They are the ones who I have texted when I was up at 3 a.m. finishing a paper or who studied with me the night before an AP, though sometimes the amount of studying that got done is questionable. Tonight is bittersweet, mostly because next year, I will not get to see them everyday. Most importantly, I need to thank my parents, who have been there every step of the way and were the ones who encouraged me to make the most of my new school. I hope I have. To all the parents here tonight, thank you so much for everything that you've given us.

Now four years since we have started high school, I think we have all changed tremendously, and we will continue to change and grow in college. I am now so grateful for my experiences at Huntington High School, both the good and the not so good. I hope my classmates can say the same. Congratulations to the Class of 2011!