

Salutatorian Remarks --- June 2, 2018

Colden Auditorium, Queens College

Vassilia Plakas, *Class of 2018*

Good afternoon, Mr. Karsten, Mr. Penikas, administration, teachers, faculty, family & friends...

And, most importantly,
hello class of 2018!

September 8, 2014 - June 2, 2018.

1,363 days together as Stanners.

From day one we were faced with many decisions.

What clubs should we join? What friends would we make?
This transformed into...what degrees will we pursue and what college will we attend?

All our decisions have led us to this point.

And, the decisions we make in the coming years will shape the people we become, the impact we will have on our families and communities, and the legacy we will leave.

For a long time, we had little control over what defined us. In the year 2000, a young couple learned their newborn had a rare medical condition. For months, she was the baby in Bed 5 awaiting surgery. In her community, she was the baby with all the medical issues, and for the years after, she was the little girl who survived.

Around my 6th birthday, I decided those images were not going to define me.

Smiles hid the past, because the world did not need to know my history, just my present. Instead, I would let my experience fuel my passion to help and serve others in their most vulnerable times.

We cannot let trials and tribulations define who we are.

Instead, we can learn from them and prevail.

We can decide to reflect on our faith and allow it to comfort us.

As we dive into this new phase in our lives, we need to ask ourselves: what will define us now?

How we will utilize our present and future skills?

Our scholastic careers have instilled in us the value of a college education, the importance of earning impressive degrees.

However, we know a degree is simply a piece of paper. It is what we do with that knowledge and our passion that will define who we are.

Will we use our abilities to serve our community?

Molloy encouraged us to share our skills to help others, whether it was tutoring at the Briarwood Shelter or volunteering at the local hospital.

As a Girl Scout I was reminded of the importance of giving back to those in need and serving others. You don't need to be a scout to follow the Girl Scout Law each day: to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong, responsible for what we say and do, and to make the world a better place.

We should strive to make our world a better place.

We should continue to give back.

We should keep sharing our time and skills with those who may be struggling.

We should choose to inspire those around us, so they too will pay forward.

We also have the power to decide what role technology will play in our lives.

We are the first graduating class to use iPads, transforming our high school experience.

With advanced technology came greater responsibilities, such as participating on social media while maintaining our privacy. We have already practiced deciding what defines us through these new mediums, as we “Snap” and “Instagram” images and comments that stay with us forever.

But, should we allow our social media posts to define us?

Those images and posts reflect our character and our values.

We have the power to decide what information we want to share.

Do we want our profile to reflect who we truly are?

We must decide if we want to live our lives through these filters.

Remember, we are more than a post.

We are more than a comment.

Let's be mindful of the words and actions we decide will represent us. Experiences in the past eighteen years have presented us with a map of right and wrong, so we must always decide to take the "right" path, **despite** peer pressure or cultural expectations.

Always remember our core values and hold onto the lessons learned at home and at school.

Trust in these values, as they will guide and serve us well in the future.

Our lives would not be complete without the family and friends around us. Be generous and genuine in your praises towards those you admire and appreciate.

Our friendships and relationships will continue to blossom as we mature.

Our friends today may not be the ones from freshman year, and that's okay. We need to surround ourselves with those who encourage us and bring out the best in us.

Our friends are reflections of who we are.

Don't be just a friend.

Be a great friend.

Roy Disney said: “It’s not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are.”

Stanners,

I challenge us:

to decide what defines us;

to decide what experiences will best hone our skills and personalities;

to decide what values will shape the people we strive to be.

Remember to work hard, stay focused, and,
most importantly, have fun!

We will decide to do amazing things!

Thank you and congratulations to the class of 2018!!