

Graduation Remarks – Class of 2017

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Thank you, Karen, for starting us off today, that was truly beautiful Dot. I should tell you I have wanted to be graduation speaker since I was in the 8th grade, so thank you to my ladies for believing in me. So here we go! I hope that I don't let you down.

“Small and fuzzy, it crawled around miniature confinement looking and searching beyond its tiny world for a future it could not even begin to conceive. Soon it was time for this tiny, fuzzy being to wrap itself tightly in its own haven. While some may think that the young being was past its prime, short lived and anticlimactic, the little creature knew better, it just had some growing that needed to be done. After long days and long nights, slowly cracks started to appear. Slowly but surely, the same being which had crawled in flew out. Emerging as a beautiful colorful creature. With seemingly dainty wings, those wings would carry this creature to great heights. Contributing to the lives around it, making this earth a better place. This being had undergone a most beautiful transformation, metamorphosis.”

When I was in the second grade we had a project where we watched beautiful caterpillars develop and form into something much larger. I became fascinated with these butterflies, because I wondered how such a life altering drastic change could be made. I imagined myself as a beautiful monarch majestic and free to the whims of the world: the good, the bad, and the ugly. The monarch was only protected as an egg and a caterpillar in its cocoon. When the monarch

hatched, born anew, it was ready and was equipped with all it needed to weather whatever storms life threw at it. It had struggled to free itself from the entanglements of its cocoon, and that struggle was essential in making the butterfly strong and mighty. Its size was no indication of its strength.

Before you today stand 103 beautiful butterflies in white; ready to shed our plaid cocoon and experience the sunshine and the rain. Our cocoon, our plaid, is a network. Each color, each stripe molding us indefinitely.

So, to our broadest stripe and greatest guiding light...to our families...

We have you to thank for this priceless (but pricey) experience. A roller coaster ride of an experience; one filled with our pre-teen angst and our teenage rage. You have guided and comforted us because you know as much as we do about how much we have been pushed. Right when we think we can do no more, you reassure us that we can. When we are disappointed with an over-all outcome, you remind us of the small victories that we had along the way. You have fearlessly lead by example and have showed us that an education is truly the greatest necessity, and that a Harpeth Hall education is the greatest gift. Since birth you have worked hard to prepare us for the unforgiving world that is ready to snatch us up, but take pride that we have made it here on this day, May 29th 2017, in one piece. At least for my parents that is a paramount accomplishment. Trust in the work that you've done and believe in us fearlessly, courageously. We are starting a new chapter, bursting out of our cocoon – clumsy at first, but when we get our footing, fear not: We will soar. Know that there is no distance that will erase our love for you and there is no distance far enough from home to keep us from coming back...eventually. We will spend the rest of our lives thanking you for the experience of a life time, trying to pay you back with terrible birthday presents because we are broke, and late night phone calls just because we miss

you. You taught us our first life lessons, and those life lessons got us where we are today. From our first words to opening a diaper late at night filled with a lovely surprise - to our first fender bender and seeing us off to our last high school dance. Never forget that our victories are also your victories, and while we're at it you can take credit in our some of our failures as well. Your baby girls are all grown up, but never forget we will always be your baby girls. Now watch how we fly and take the world by storm.

51% of the population ladies...women we are powerful. My own mother taught me that first, but Harpeth Hall reinforced it. People have differing opinions on single gender education. Some say that it's not needed when so many schools are co-ed and what will these girls do when they enter the workforce with men? Cower afraid?! Any person who knows a Harpeth Hall student or alumnae can tell from her confidence and work ethic that this is an important place. Educating our 51% is essential. We are confident and free to be our true selves. We are inquisitive and ready to question information before assuming it as fact. And we are in a setting that puts our education as its highest goal.

In 2017, when there are 65 million girls in the world who are deprived of the right to an education, there is something so special about attending a school that was founded in the heart of the south after the 19th amendment was passed with a goal to do just that.

In 2017, when women (on average) still earn 77 cents to a man's dollar, there is something so special about a place that educates women who can do that math and can decide for themselves that 77 cents to 100 cents isn't a good enough proportion with which to be satisfied.

In 2017, when 15% of engineers are women, it's special to attend a school that stresses the importance of STEM and the necessity of having women work in those fields.

In 2017, when 4.8% of fortune 500 CEO's are women, there is something special about attending a school that teaches you to lead confidently.

In 2017, there are 103 beautiful young women here, poised and ready to take the world by force, and there's something special about attending a school that has guided us to be the women of the world.

So, I'll let you decide for yourself how you feel about all girls education. I'm sure it's not a hard choice to make.

The plaid that we wore every day of every school year toughened us so that we can stand here in front of you all with our solid white shields on. Super women in the making. Standing in front of you, we are 103 strong, brave, and resilient women who are ready to fearlessly take on the world. The light blue hallways acted as a refreshing rinse of opportunity that we see in our distinguished alumnae and their amazing accolades. There's something about walking down the hall and seeing Reese Witherspoon, Amy Grant, and Marcie Allen Van Mol's portraits hanging on the wall that never cease to inspire you to change the world. All the while, reminding you that you are totally capable of it. What brings the learning to life is our amazing teachers who tirelessly share their wisdom, knowledge, and passion with us hoping that just a fraction of what they do impacts our lives. Every day they do what so many don't have the patience to do, and we are forever grateful for you all. On behalf of the entire senior class, thank you for never giving up on us. For reminding us that education is important and giving us the courage to try again because we must never give up.

In this school, I have created my closest friends and fondest memories. When I started in this sacred place I was 10, and I was fiery – always talking about things I didn't know. Wide eyed and skirt super high, I was excited for my new school and my new crisp plaid. I had no idea that by the end of almost a decade I would be graduating with 102 sisters. Girls, I now can't imagine my life without you. Girls, I would never have known had I not had this place to bring us together, and I am forever thankful for that. You see, although we make up different backgrounds, different zip codes, different hobbies, different weaknesses and strengths, we all still have a couple of things in common. On one hot August day, whether by our own choice or the choice of someone who really loves us, we found ourselves in the first all school assembly with our fearless head of school asking us a very important question: "Class of 2017, Are. You. Ready?!" As the years went on, the screams grew louder and less shrill, but they were always unified. While the school mission statement, the honor code, and the plaid guide us, that call to action brought us together. We were bright young women who were looking for a challenge, looking to make the world a better place, that commonality would forever seal our love for this place and the infinite opportunities it has provided us.

So, to my girls, I want you to remember this: Remember how we felt when we signed the college wall to boisterous applause and cheers – the proof of our years of hard work. Remember how scared you were to tackle your term paper and remember how it felt when you'd turned in the longest paper you had ever written. And remember how it feels right now. It was all worth it, every late night and early morning. None of us are any better nor are any worse. Together we are all great. Tomorrow we will wake up and be alumnae, so please never forget this. Whatever successes we experience in the future, they are due in part to the time we spent

roaming the halls in our plaid. It may take 4 years or 40 years to migrate back to our cocoon, but just as butterflies must, so will we. We are rare and beautiful. We are strong and ready. Let me leave you with advice from three people much wiser than myself.

1. There is a special place in hell for women who don't support other women. (Madeline Albright)
2. Think Like a queen. A queen is not afraid to fail. Failure is another steppingstone to greatness. (Oprah Winfrey)
3. If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. (Desmond Tutu)

These years we spent together may seem like a blink of an eye at our 25th year reunion in 2042, but it will never be forgotten because for 8 years ladies, you were my world. And for the rest of my life you will be my family. Thank you to all 102 of you who have impacted my life beyond comprehension. Thank you for the laughs and thank you for the tears. I love you.