

I know a lot of people start their speeches by saying you might not know who I am, but in my case that actually may be true. So hi, you may not know who I am. My name is Lorelei King, and I am the valedictorian of the class of 2022.

If you are one of those who does not know me, I moved here about two years ago right before my junior year from the town of North Haven. It's not very far, you've probably been there; it's the one with the good movie theater with the really nice reclining seats. That's really all it's known for. I didn't know it at the time, but moving here would bring me into a community that would really push me and undoubtedly shape me into the person I am today, a community that would welcome me with open arms, something that is immensely meaningful to me. If I had known that maybe I wouldn't have been so mad at my parents for doing it to me.

I was introduced to Guilford by way of a summer cross country captain's practice. It was supposed to be a fun practice held at one of the captains' beach houses. We started with a half mile warmup which I found a little excessive but manageable, until I received my workout which was kindly modified since it was my first practice from 8 miles down to "just 5."

We are all at the end of our own grueling 5 mile runs here today, and I would like to say, first and foremost, congratulations. You have made it. You can take a deep breath, and relish in the fact that you will never again take the SAT, or the PSAT which may be even worse. You will never again sit in a very hot, packed gym or on very cold bleachers on the day before a holiday vacation and watch your principal dressed up as a bear fight a student in a tiger costume. All jokes aside, I feel like these days it is expected that you graduate high school but that does not mean that it is not difficult and that does not undermine how proud you should be to have made it to this point. You are all a part of an incredible class full of academic, athletic, artistic, musical, and all-around talent. You have earned this, celebrate yourselves, and while you do that, acknowledge those who have helped you get to this point.

On behalf of the class I would like to thank our principal, Mrs. Chaffe, the assistant principal assigned to our class, Mr. Buno, and the entire administration, the teachers, and the staff that have supported us through this journey. I would personally like to thank my parents and family for all of their support, but also to extend that thanks to all the parents and family sitting here today who made an impact on their child's life and education. You are valued. And finally, thank you to a few other people who would kill me if they were not mentioned. My IB cohort, my friends, my girlfriend, the cross country, indoor track, and lacrosse teams. Thank you, you have been my network of support and I am eternally grateful for the part you all had in welcoming me to this town. I could not have done it without you.

And now comes the sappy part of my speech. I had a conversation with a friend recently, after our exams were over, and she told me that now that school was ending, really ending, she felt

like she had no purpose. Some of you may understand that unsettling feeling of being done, and not the typical feeling of being out for the summer, but truly done. There are no summer reading books, no math packets, no essays. To some of you that is fantastic news, and to some that is a completely terrifying idea.

I think whichever category you fall into, almost all of us can understand this sort of trepidation surrounding what is to come. No matter if you're going off to college, into the workforce, the military, trade school, or taking a gap year. Whatever you're doing, it was a choice you made. This is one of the first really big choices that we make that contributes to building our future. Since kindergarten we have gone to school because we had to be there, and whether you enjoyed it or not you showed up, and you did the things you were told to do, and ultimately that led to this. To you sitting right here, ready to get your diploma. But once you leave this stage you are entering a part of your life that belongs to you, a part that you chose. And I think this is part of what my friend found scary, because once we have a choice, there is always the danger that we choose wrong.

We, as humans, really like the idea of having a purpose, a reason for doing the things that we are doing. The choice that you made for your future likely had some higher purpose behind it. Going to college and majoring in something to eventually get a job in that field. Going to trade school to get the skills to enter the workforce in that trade. For me, part of the reason I am going to college and majoring in biology is that I am truly interested in medicine and I think that I want to be a doctor. But admittedly, part of it is because school is what I've always known, and college has always seemed like the next step after high school.

I've had the experience recently, and many of you probably share in this experience, of many people asking what my plans are, what I'm going to do in the future, how I'm going to contribute to society. What I want to say is that it is okay not to know. Right now we are allowed to not know. It is okay for now if your purpose is to just be a good friend, to create art that you enjoy, to learn because you want to and because you are interested in it. Yes, we have big choices to make for our future, and yes, we are now adults and have more responsibility than ever on our shoulders, but we also get the freedom to explore, to experiment, to mess up, and to figure out what we don't like and what we do. I feel like from the very start we've been told that we are meant to do amazing things, and I am sure that this graduating class will do just that. But I want to say that no matter what people are telling you, you do not have to save the world, and if you have the chance as we embark on this next chapter of our lives, just try to find (or continue to do) the things that make you happy, the things that light a spark in you. We have graduated high school, and although I don't think it's about to get easier, at least what comes next is ours, we chose it.

Today is a day to celebrate your accomplishments, to reflect on everything that made your high school experience what it was. Maybe it was the academics, but maybe it was the bonds you created on your sports teams, the music you made with your classmates in orchestra, band, or chorus, the plays you helped put on, the art that you created, or the service you've given to your community. Whatever you chose to do, you made an immeasurable impact on our school and our town, and I hope you enjoyed it at the same time. So, today reminisce on what high school has given you, what this community has given you, and tomorrow, take all of that and use it to look forward and to start on your next journey, whatever that may be.

So I, in a very cliché manner, will leave you with a quote by none other than Oprah Winfrey who says it much better than I ever could. "There is no greater gift you can give or receive than to honor your calling. It's why you were born. And how you became most truly alive." Thank you.