

Salutatory Address 2005

Jennifer Tillson

Welcome ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all for coming today. I would like to recognize all of the family members and friends who are here to support us, along with the Ridgeview faculty, the school board, our special guest Mayor Hutchinson, and especially my graduating class.

To be honest, I had an extremely difficult time writing this speech. I started over many times only to get frustrated and give up again. I even considered giving up for good and asking someone else to make this speech for me. Several days ago, however, I finally understood why this speech was so hard to write. For me, this speech was a recognition of the fact that my time at Ridgeview has ended and that the time to move on has come. At first, this was a recognition that I wanted to run away from, for Ridgeview has meant so much to me that leaving seemed impossible. The people here at Ridgeview have become my family and a home away from home. No matter what has happened in my life, for the past four years I have known that these people standing in front of you would be there to support me. Everyone here has helped me through the hardest times of my life, often without even realizing it.

Although I will carry what I have learned here with me forever, I cannot take the people at Ridgeview with me, which is a fact that is extremely hard to accept. I never would have been able to excel had it not been for all of my classmates and the faculty. I have learned so much more through our classroom discussions and my attempts to understand and accept the opinions of my fellow students than I ever could have learned on my own. Although our class may have constantly debated amongst ourselves, we learned from these struggles and all of us have become much stronger. Finally, I realized that although this speech may be a goodbye to the past four years and all the times we have shared together, it is a welcoming of the future as well.

All of us are about to move on to entirely new places in our lives. We will become engineers, politicians, school teachers, police officers, world travelers and microbiologists. This class has achieved so much and has gained such great potential that moving on to do bigger things in life is an amazing blessing. We came to Ridgeview four years ago as a group of rowdy adolescents and we will leave today as a group of mature and responsible young men and women. Every single person here has grown up and changed so much that I can hardly recognize them as the people I met when I first came to Ridgeview. I can honestly say that everyone in this class will leave Ridgeview a better and more understanding person than they were when they came.

Looking towards the future, a quote from Marcus Aurelius describes perfectly what we are capable of achieving. "If you perform the task before you and follow the right rule of reason steadfastly, vigorously, with kindness; if you allow no distraction but preserve the spirit within you in its pure state as if you had to surrender it at any moment; if you concentrate on this, expecting nothing and shirking nothing, content to do any natural action which is at hand, heroically truthful in every word you utter, you will lead the good life. There is no one who could prevent you". There is no doubt in my heart that the future of these young men and women will be both beautiful and true and that each person here will have every opportunity to create something beautiful in life. Ridgeview has given us all this opportunity and I am eternally grateful for everything I have learned here. I love you guys.