

Friends, professors, administrators, and parents, welcome. We are graduating.

Can you believe it? Four years ago, most of us walked into these halls as nervous as we were the first day of school. We were the freshmen, the low men on the totem pole. Now, those same four years later, we're leaving the school behind to a whole new crop of people, most of whom were just as nervous as we were when we arrived.

It has been a long four years and a short for years. Long because of all the drama and bad homework, the boring readings and early-morning extra credit projects, and all the other little pratfalls that hit us in high school. Short because of the lifelong friendships, the lasting memories, and the truly interesting and amazing things we learned between the occasional bits of drudgery.

Good or bad, long or short, I will always remember this place. While I'm thrilled to be our valedictorian, I can't say I've spent as many hours as some of us have between these halls: Our teachers, of course, spend an inhuman amount of time here, and many students do as well. Most of them even do it of their own choosing. I came by to get a book I forgot last night around 8 p.m. and found Rachel Earl, student head of the graduation planning committee, still here putting crepe paper on chairs and laying out programs in each and every seat. That's dedication.

It takes that kind of teamwork to survive anywhere in life, I've found. I know my experience is limited, but every problem I've overcome has been because someone has been there to help me. My support net ranged (and still ranges) from my parents to my friends to my teachers, depending on the kind of trouble I've had and its severity.

This isn't to say I've been a troublemaker—I only got sent to the office twice, and one of those times was a misunderstanding—but even for me, a relatively quiet student, a lot of help has been needed to get me through at times. This is where our high school truly excels, I think.

What's next? I will be going to college, as will many of my classmates. More of us yet will go to various branches of the armed forces to help keep our country safe home and abroad. Others may get right to work, or even take a year or more off to decide what they want to do. Leaving high school is such a brutal transition, as Principal Davis put it, that I don't know what the world has in store for any of us.

I do know how I'll deal with those life events, though: by using the skills and info I've picked up here. It all comes down to help, and I've got plenty of people to thank for that: parents, of course, teachers, friends... I guess that means the biggest thing I learned in high school is to lean on others when needed.

There's another, more important, side to that idea as well, and it's the one piece of advice I'd like to give you as we get ready to cross this stage for the last time: Make sure you're around when

other people need someone to lean on. They'll thank you for it. Heck, one of them might even mention you in his valedictorian speech.

Congratulations, Class of 2013! We did it!