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June 2021 – Emily Pelz Address to the Class of 2021

## You Made It!

Class of 2021, you have made it! You are here today, together as one group for the first time in a very long time, being honored for your achievements! Graduation day is a major step in the journey of your lives, one you should be immensely proud of and one we should celebrate for its significance.

I am certain that you are experiencing a variety of emotions and feelings today. There are feelings of excitement, apprehension, relief, happiness. Perhaps some of you are thinking I can't believe I finally made it!" and some of you may be thinking, "Finally, this day is here!" Some of you may be ready to say goodbye and good riddance to this crazy year, but I implore you to take a moment to center yourself and reflect on all that you've done because it is tremendous.

## It's Been A Journey

What you have done this year and over the past 15 months has never been done before, so whatever you are feeling as you are sitting here today, it is all part of the journey. A journey that does not end today; in fact, it's a journey that is just beginning. I am honored to be here today with you, your family, and your friends celebrating your monumental achievement of graduating high school during unprecedented times. There is so much for you to be proud of today. What you've overcome, and your experiences are only preparing you for the next step in your life.

## You Persevered

Though we feel lucky to be here today because we are together celebrating, luck did not get you here. You are here intentionally, on purpose, because you worked hard to be here. As uncertainty swirled around you, you stayed focused. You finished your assignments, you passed your tests, you supported one another, and you persevered with grit and tenacity even when the end seemed out of reach. You overcame obstacles, disappointments, and hard times. But you made a conscious decision in your journey to persevere and be resilient. And that's how your life's journey will continue to go.

## Always Show Up

You will always experience highs and lows, good times and bad, but what is important is how you show up. Reflect on your experiences and learn from them. Do not be discouraged or defeated by the challenges you have faced and will continue to face. They are learning experiences, experiences that have helped mold and shape how you approach the next challenge and life in general.





## Follow Your Path

You all have chosen different pathways for your future. Some of you will enter into a career or trade, some of you will continue your education at a college or technical school, and some of you will enter the military. Whatever your journey is, as you move forward, think big, brightly, and boldly about your future. Continue to travel through your life's journey with purpose and intent.

## Know Your Gifts

Know your gifts and use them to make an impact. Seize opportunities and use your resources. Strive to make a better future for yourself and for the people around you. Graduation has already shown you how capable you are of accomplishing your goals when you commit to them. Use this accomplishment as a launching point into your future, knowing that you have acquired the skills and are equipped with the tools necessary to be successful and to make a difference. The world needs you. We need your fresh perspective, your talent, and your unwavering determination. Keep pushing forward because you are worth it, and I know you can achieve your dreams.

## Celebrate!

This is your day to celebrate, Class of 2021, and you deserve it! Congratulations and good luck with all that is ahead of you. And in the words of Michael Josephson, "Take pride in how far you've come. Have faith in how far you can go. But don't forget to enjoy the journey."

