

## “The First Day”

To all of the people in this glorious gymnasium: family, friends, faculty, staff and administration members, random people who snuck in here to see if there's food, and, of course, the class of 2015, welcome to Newton South High School's class of 2015 Graduation! Taadaa! Classmates, look around you. This is probably one of the only times in your life where this many people will be dressed exactly like you. Ooh, awkward. But no matter who wore it best, and jokes aside, our caps and gowns unite us as one class. We are all graduating. Together.

But it would be insensitive not to recognize the one smiling face who is not with us today. Roe is not physically present, but I am sure he is here in spirit.

Now, I have a few words to share with the class of 2015. When I decided I wanted to write a graduation speech, I sat down with my laptop and tried to find a position that didn't make my senior skip day sunburn from the beach scream at me. Google suggested that I start with a joke. Here it goes: Why did the chicken cross Adeline Road? To get on school property so he could be in the safe zone for senior assassins! Yes? No? Ok, how about a quote just like all of the sappy graduation speeches have? **\*Clear throat\*** Abby Hoffman once said, “Today is the first day of the rest of your life.” So um, congratulations! Welcome to the first day of the rest of your life!

You know, I never really liked that quote very much. It never really moved me or made me reevaluate my life choices. It doesn't really mean anything. Of course today is the first day of the rest of my life, but yesterday was too, and tomorrow will be also! Every day of our lives is just as much of a jumping off point into our future as the next day will be, but some days seem to feel a bit more special, don't they? Life events like weddings, bar and bat mitzvahs, and graduations make us all feel the need to step back and say: “Wow. Look at what my life has led up to. Look at where my life is going.” But, just because we are all dressed up in our caps and

gowns today, ready to proudly accept our diplomas in front of our friends and family, doesn't mean that we are any more capable of greatness today than we are any other day.

Today should not be a day where people get up and speak and tell you that you could be sitting next to a future astronaut or the future president of the United States. You could be, but probably not. Graduation should not be a time to intimidate people and forcibly inspire the graduates to say to themselves "Wake up! Start doing something meaningful with your life!" Today should be a day where we acknowledge how awesome we all are every single day. Today we should celebrate what makes each and every one of us great: our individuality. Each of us does something meaningful everyday. For some of us it may be theatre and for others it could be playing sports. It could be doing art, building a robot, playing music, spending time with family and friends, or binge-watching Netflix on the couch. Whatever you love to do, keep doing it because it is what makes *you* uniquely *you*.

We are fortunate that Newton South is a space that encourages our individuality. It isn't just a safe zone for assassins, it is a safe zone for young men and women to grow and develop and learn. South encourages us to get involved, find our passion, and express ourselves.

Clearly our principal promotes this philosophy. One time, Mr. Stembridge was a zombie. One of my favorite memories at South was when Mr. Stembridge made a cameo appearance in the student written, student directed show *This Is A Musical About Zombies*. I had just come off stage from a scene that I was in and I saw my principal standing offstage. He was wearing tattered clothes, sporting stage make up like a champ, and he was drenched in fake blood that reeked of laundry detergent. He looked like a right-off-the-screen, about-to-tear-your-brains-out zombie. Then he slowly turned to me, his eyes almost invisible with the combination of the black makeup and the shadows across his face and he smiled the biggest, brightest smile, gave me a thumbs-up and said "You were really great." I chuckled and thanked him and told him to break a leg. Seconds later, he ran onstage with his arms flailing yelling "Gharraarhahh!"

What other school has a zombie for a principal?

South is a pretty special place filled with pretty special people. Everyone walks to the beat of his or her own drum, with their heads held high and I wouldn't want it any other way. Each one of you has found yourselves. Or perhaps you are still working on it. Hey, that's what we have the rest of our lives to do. We take the head start that we got at South and we fine-tune it to become the best us that we can be. Not just on the special days, but every single day. Whoever we are, and however we choose to express our individuality, it will be amazing because it is who we are. Don't ever let anyone tell you otherwise.

Individually, we are each wonderfully unique. Together, we are the Class of 2015.

A huge congratulations to the class of 2015 on all we have accomplished and all that we are setting out to do! So even though you might not be sitting next to a future winner of the Nobel Prize, I know for a fact that you are sitting next to a remarkable, individual, human being.