

Beloved guests, distinguished speakers, faculty, staff, administrators, and the class of 2023: good morning. I am so, so honoured to be able to be here amidst you all today, and to have the opportunity to speak on what has been four truly remarkable years.

When we opened that welcome package to Haverford all those years ago, one fact was starkly pointed out to us. Welcome to Haverford! Here the trees outnumber you 6:1 – pick your 6! Name them, even. The next four years of your life will be on this gorgeous 216-acre spread of land that single-handedly bolsters Zyrtec and Claritin sales in the spring.

I'm no botanist (in fact, I'm unfortunately infamous for my penchant for killing even succulents), but there's something exceptionally fitting about an arboretum being the place where we've spent the past four years of our lives. There is so much growth happening, constantly. So many rhizomatic roots, pushing through the loam. So many shoots, eagerly grasping for the sun. Everytime I get overwhelmed by that growth, however, I just remember that pace and appearance are not everything. I think of the ever-greens, like the wonky one on Founders, slowly inching their way through the sun, rain, and cold. I think of the deciduous trees, like the cherry blossoms that intermittently line the nature trail, going through waves of hibernation before bursting into a frothy pink profusion.

Just like the trees that surround us, I am reminded that growth is not a linear, direct path. Growth requires change, requires the ability to remain steadfast, rooted, through hardship. Growth requires love, and care, and the kindness of the people around you. I think of all the ways we've grown here at Haverford, but also, all the ways in which we've helped Haverford to grow, too. It's hard to reflect on the past four years without thinking of all the arborescent tenderness we have fostered and gathered, propelling us through times of turmoil, of loss, of adversity.

It is undeniable that our class year in particular has been one marked by indelible change. I think of us as a class characterised by in-betweenness, the gaping two-year gap of Covid a bridge through which we've all forged through, prevailing and continuing—together—in our hopes of making this school a better place. We were the last class to experience Haverford pre-Covid, and we were also the first class to navigate what this new post-Covid world looks like for the classes after us. We were here for the protest against the sale of La Casa, and we were also here for the establishment of the LCC. We were the penultimate class of Barclay freshman, and the ultimate class of North Dorm upperclassmen. We've had both a plenary held through google form, and a very special plenary held in-person where they bribed—sorry, *incentivised*—us with boba. We experienced four drastically different models of customs, and ceaselessly advocated for a better programme for the classes that succeed us. We were the class that did all that and so much more, amidst the constant flux of rapid change.

At the end of every tour I've given of this school, I've always said that whenever I'm at Haverford, I want to be a better person. I want to be kinder, more considerate, more thoughtful. I want to be more passionate, more driven, more curious. And it's all because of

the people I'm surrounded by. We are not just a class of scientists, of writers, of artists and theorists. We are a class of dreamers and thinkers, of disruptors and unrelenting advocates. Haverford people don't do things because they're supposed to, or because they've been told to; they do it because they genuinely care, because that's who they are at their core. When you are at your lowest, in the cold bite of January frost, there is always someone to tend to you. When you are at your highest, richly green in the summer sun, those same people are still there, surrounding you, celebrating you, loving you.

All of us wouldn't be here were it not for the people that have taken care of us along the way: the parents, guardians, and mentors that raised us from saplings, the faculty, staff, and friends who've pruned and nourished us. Today, all of this success and celebration is just as much yours as it is ours. We are the people we are today because of all the love we've been given by our communities. We are the people today because our parents let us come to this school – some just down the road, others of us 14,026km (or 8725 miles) and a full day's plane-ride away. We are the people we are today because staff like Sam at the DC and Norma at the Coop nourish us, slipping us red packets for Chinese New Years, or just asking “baby, have you eaten yet today?” each time we pass. We are the people we are today because staff like Lisa in the Admissions Office and Mikey P and Tim on the Grounds Team always ask us about our days, beaming smiles on their faces everytime they see us. We are the people we are today because our professors believed in us, never once saying that we weren't capable of doing something, or that it was impossible to dream.

Doubt, I'm sure, has appeared in smatters throughout all our time at college. I personally never thought this school was going to be the place for me. When I first received that welcome package, all those years ago, I couldn't help but wonder what I was supposed to do at this small liberal arts school in Pennsylvania. Who was I supposed to be? The thing is – you don't have to have it all figured out. Each of us are so uniquely different, our trajectories from tentative bud to unfurling bloom distinctly our own. What's most important is that through the past four years, we've learned to become more of *ourselves* – fuller versions, the best parts of the people that we looked up to when we were younger, the people we'd always liked to be.

The learning doesn't end as soon as we walk off this campus. The care of this community doesn't expire as soon as we exit past college lane, pattering off into every crevice of this country, across multiple countries in this world. Just like the weeping willows that line the Duck Pond, I think of the way they pirouette in a gust of a wind, their drooping tendrils whispering a farewell to the cold. Within each of those waves, I don't see a goodbye, though – I see a thank you, I love you, and I can't wait to meet you again. Congratulations to the class of 2023 – what a privilege and joy it has been to grow alongside you. I can't wait to see all the growth we continue to be part of.