

## Not the Farewell I Imagined

Hey Tucson Country Day School Class of 2020. Instead of me standing in front of you, delivering this speech, I'm sitting behind my computer and imagining a podium, a sea of faces, and me – trying to hold it together as I address you. (There's no guarantee that I won't shed a tear or two as I write this, but who's to know?)

Little did I know that, when we began our year together eight short months ago that our time together would be cut by nine weeks. That we would have 43 fewer days to annoy one another, inspire one another, and ultimately grow with one another.

There are quite a few of you I only got to teach this year, and I feel especially robbed of that time. The change one undergoes in a year is remarkable, and I wish that I had had more time to watch your minds expand and your writing improve. Many of you came into my class in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and then earned a well-deserved reprieve during 7<sup>th</sup>. Teachers will always approach his/her subject differently, so be thankful that you received a different perspective and learned other ways of doing things during that time. And then, there is that small but mighty group that was stuck with me all three years. The true heroes. Watching you find your footing in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, traverse the emotional upheaval that was 7<sup>th</sup> grade (how many times did we have to take time to watch cat videos to stave off the crying?), and then finally come into your own in 8<sup>th</sup> grade – to take charge, take chances with your writing, and find joy in literature (even if it was looking up dirty words in the dictionary).

And speaking of reading – who knew that the books we read this year would turn into a sort of a non-fiction user's manual? In mid-March, when I was staring at empty aisles in grocery stores, my thoughts wandered to Caleb's and Denzel's "Crazy Shopping Day" lists which contained the all-important items of Hot Wheels cars and BBQ chicken, respectively. I think they were on to something, to be honest. Although, there were times I was really hoping that I could have scored the canned goods and jerky that Tyler Roop and Jack Bowden would have collected. Not too long after that, we read excerpts of Anne Frank's diary and daily I posed the

question, “How would you react to having to spend two years indoors?” Little did I know how relevant that question would become.

In this last quarter, since we started our “distance learning” journey, I feel like I’ve gotten to see you for who you really are and who you will become in the future. I see those of you who are focusing on your family and its needs first. I see those of you who have focused on what brings you joy as a way of making some good out of a no-win situation. And I have seen those of you who are working harder than ever – who will keep pushing no matter what life throws at you. You may have heard the saying that goes, “Character is who we are when no one’s looking.” We can modify that a bit for this quarter: “Character is who you are when no one’s grading you.” Some of you have demonstrated stellar character and for that, I thank you.

And now, two-and-a-half weeks out from what should be your graduation date, we’re still left with the uncertainty of how to celebrate you. But make no mistake – we will celebrate you. We will honor your achievements, your longevity at this school, and your contributions to TCDS. Even if we don’t get to stand on a stage and declare it publicly, your mark has been left on our school and in my heart. 2<sup>nd</sup> period – your honesty is unmatched. You take no BS and had no problem letting me know if something wasn’t working. 4<sup>th</sup> period – I doubt that I will ever have such insightful, deep discussions with another class. The chemistry in that class WORKED. 5<sup>th</sup> period – you were that jolt of energy I needed in my day. You kept me on my toes, for sure. And 6<sup>th</sup> period – my gentle giants. You filled every physical space in that room but kept everything so lively and positive. I can’t imagine a better ending to my day.

While this isn’t the farewell I imagined, it’s the farewell we have. And just like all life lessons, we are free to do with it whatever we wish. We can wallow in self-pity about all the things we missed, or we can ask ourselves what we can learn from this time as we move forward. At the very least, I hope you learned that I’m only just an email away. And that I love you nerds (but not in a creepy way).