Kristina Arakelyan

Good morning Mr. Cohen, faculty, family and friends, and, of course, class of 2009! Come on, give yourselves a nice round of applause. I know we deserve it.

Midwood is not the type of large, spacious, suburban high school you see on TV. For crying out loud, my first day here, I watched two pigeons waltz it out in the auditorium. Nevertheless, Midwood does have dedicated staff members and teachers, a few of who have left a lasting impression on me. In these walls, I discovered an unforgettable mentor, Mrs. Lustbader, who believed in me when I didn't. She helped me pick up my head and slowly lighten the grip on an unrealistic ideal. Walking into the large front doors, I was determined to immerse myself in the planned medical/science curriculum. Now, walking out, I am considering majoring in philosophy (thanks to Mrs. Lustbader, Mrs. Barabash, and Mr. Resnick) or literature (thanks to the unparalleled Mr. Milkman). Midwood also has an amazing bunch of students. Throughout the four years, I have never felt like an outcast. Some of the students I've met here have unbelievable passion for and commitment toward certain fields and activities (whether it be playing the drums, drawing comics, creating anime, observing a cell for hours in a lab, painting landscapes, performing in the spotlight, or something else). All in all, Midwood was not what I had expected but that did not make it any less of an interesting experience.

I never thought that I would be here giving this speech. I entered the New York City school system as a carefree, ponytailed, ESL second grader who played her PlayStation instead of doing homework. Through blind competition, of which I am not particularly proud, and natural maturation, I slowly became the student I am today. Like all of you, I plowed though some boulders. Thanks to my cousin, who gave me the push I needed, and, of course, my parents, who loved, supported, and tolerated me unconditionally, even at times when I myself would not have, I came out on top without losing myself.

The way I see it, life is a test. Some of us go all out while others try to camouflage themselves as much as possible. Either way, what matters is that while we may regret certain decision and actions in our self-chosen paths, which, make no mistake, we will, we go back to fix what we can and we never put aside our morals; we never compromise our values and, most importantly, our consciences.

I sincerely congratulate you all once again. I wish you the best of luck in whatever future roads you choose to take. Thank you.