

Hello class of 2016!!! I'd also like to welcome all the family, friends, teachers, staff, and guests who have joined us to celebrate!

It is my great honour to speak on behalf of the class of 2016. I know I never imagined in grade nine that I would one day stand on this stage as your valedictorian. Before I came to OTSS I had been home schooled and I did not know one single person in this school. Sometimes it would make me nervous seeing other students playing around with each other because they knew each other so well. In my Learning Strats class I worked on a project with another student that I didn't know well. He was holding the paper and I was holding the scissors. I was supposed to cut the paper but I missed and cut his hand! There was a good amount of blood and, from that, we started what became a blood brother friendship. I have since made many more friendships like this at OTSS (but without the actual bloodshed). Well - apart from wrestling and hockey tournaments and most of that was from my nose. Sorry about that first cut Mike!

Whenever anyone asks me what I think of my high school experience I always say it has been a ride. We have all been through deep lows and great highs. It has certainly always been exciting! I remember the first day I held a

torch in welding class. All the grade nines stood in a circle holding torches. Mr White taught us how to fire it up and instantly I knew that this would be a passion in my life. OTSS and Mr. White's mentorship have allowed me opportunities like attending Skills Canada - something that will forever impact my life. OTSS has given many of us these opportunities. A chance to showcase the skills that we are taught at this school.

This school offers so many opportunities outside of the classroom too. From camping trips, rock climbing, link crew, sports teams, dog training, making glass art, and field trips in the city and out of it. These opportunities have given us the chance to learn new skills that will empower us and provide a solid foundation for work when we leave here.

Coming into high school I had been given many labels in my life and told I had many limitations. Dyslexic, speech impairment, verbal learning disability, major depressive disorder, OCD. Before I came to Ottawa Tech I felt defeated in school. My best never seemed to be good enough and I never saw the results I thought I should. In the end I left public school to be taught at home where I could succeed but then I came to OTSS, and it wasn't even for me.

I came to OTSS for my cousin, Christine's, graduation. I knew, that day, that I needed to be at this school. It was going to be a huge step for me but I knew it was what I wanted. Just walking through the halls of the school - there was something very different about this place. I felt that this school wanted the students to succeed. As I passed by the shops and saw what was offered here, as I sat in the graduation and watched students with many different challenges succeeding, it inspired me and gave me hope. It allowed me to believe that I too could reach this level of success at OTSS some day.

I'm so happy to say that OTSS has never disappointed me! I have seen the hope present at this school change many lives. I have seen the great staff and community inspire all students from day one to rise above and keep fighting the labels - to questions the restrictions once placed on them. The staff never give up on us. The teachers work together with us to reach success. The school community is constantly motivating us and cheering us on.

Our student community is unique and powerful. In our community labels disappear. In our community we support and believe in each other without hesitation, walls,

or judgement. We all come to OTSS with a learning disability, with an IEP, and with a different way of learning. Here we are encouraged to see past that. We see each other, we see the potential in each other because we all struggle. We have all had to work so much harder, face more possibility of failure, and rise above so many times in our lives. Because of this, our friendships are deeper and the bonds between us as students is unmatched outside of these walls. We all understand what it is like to be different, and we KNOW that different is good.

So - now this chapter in our lives is finished. We are moving on and we have a choice. We can continue to live as OTSS has taught us - to rise above what people say should limit us in our lives - or we can go back to how we felt before we learned everything that OTSS has had to teach us. We can choose to let life defeat us but I challenge each graduating student to not let this happen. I believe in all of us. I believe each of us has great potential. I believe that we can change the way the world views those that are different and that being different makes us stronger, more compassionate, more brave, and above all unique! I believe that we all have a purpose in life outside of this school. Find that purpose, chase it, never give up on yourself - I know the reward will be great.

I would like to thank every staff member in this school. My hope is that you each already know the great impact that you have made on my life and the lives of each student in this school - particularly the graduating class of 2016.

I would like to thank all the parents, guardians, and friends who have always supported us through these high school years.

I would last like to thank all the students who have made my high school experience amazing. I will never forget the memories made with all of you.

Finally to the graduating class of 2016 - Remember this: life is beautiful, you have a purpose in life, the possibilities are endless, and never ever give up!

Thank you all and congratulations class of 2016!!!!!!!