

Emma's Speech @ BHS Graduation

There is one thing we all have in common. Yes, we are all about to graduate from Berkley as the class of 2007. After spring break, we couldn't do anymore homework. And, we all could tell you that the last four years have gone by quicker than we anticipated. But there's one more thing we all have in common: (BACKPACK)... We have all been carrying heavy backpacks. Anna Quindlen, an author, has a metaphor about backpacks that relates to our high school experience. Our backpacks are very heavy. We have lugged them around from classroom to classroom, from our cars to the hallways, from Berkley to OTEC, from CASA to our homes. (DOWN) Whenever my parents have moved my backpack they usually say, "Emma, what are you carrying in here? This is ridiculous." Even doctors have studied students and their heavy backpacks. They have issued many warnings that these backpacks will eventually cause back problems and may even cause "curvature of the spine."

Our backpacks have become part of our identity. If you look inside you might get a sense of who we are and what we do.

You might have five packs of gum and lots of empty wrappers.

You might have your IPOD;

the gyms clothes for team sports.

a half completed homework assignment;

or maybe just loose papers and no folders.

Or maybe a nicely well written paper that you some how forgot to turn in.

You might have a small library in your backpack with notices for their overdue fines.

Or even a note from a friend saying, "I'm sorry" or "Thanks."

I think that our backpacks are also filled with some things that we can't see or touch, but they are there. It is usually heavier than all of the gum wrappers, pencils, textbooks, and homework assignments combine. I think that our heavy backpacks are full of other people's expectations for us. These expectations are weighing us down. The expectations aren't our own: they're our teachers, our parents, our community, our friends, the media. And when the backpacks—those expectations—get too heavy, we lose sight of who we are. We get what Anna Quindlen calls, "curvature of the spirit."

How do we keep our backpacks from getting too heavy, too full of things that weigh us down and keep us from moving forward towards our own goals? How do we keep the expectations from controlling what we want to do and who we want to become? Part of high school was learning about who you are. We came in as inexperienced ninth graders and today we leave with knowledge: of our community, our world, but I think most importantly, knowledge about ourselves.

I learned that it's okay to take a break from studying and go watch a movie or go out to eat.

I learned that some people I never thought I had anything in common with are now some of my closest friends.

I learned that it wasn't necessary to stress out about every little issue, because in the scheme of life: everything is just one part of a long journey;

bumps are not the end of the road.

So yes, I learned a lot about myself in high school; lessons that I will carry onto my college campus. But I am also learning that I must lighten my backpack a bit by removing some expectations from others that don't fit in my pack.

Anna Quindlen said, "Begin with the most terrifying of all things: a clean slate. Then look, every day, at the choices you are making, and when you ask yourself why you are making them, find this answer: for me..."

Because they are who and what I am, and mean to be."

In high school we balanced learning about who we are with the expectations from others around us. We tried carrying them around. Some fit, but others did not. I hope that as our independence grows in the next years of our lives on the college campus, in the military service, at a job, or where ever else life might find us, I hope that you begin to create and respect your own expectations. You try out **some** and toss out **others**. You begin to set the **maximum weight** for your backpack.

There is one thing that I hope you do not toss out from your backpack. Those are the memories from Berkley. I think that each of us have excellent **moments** that **we will** forever hold onto. They might be **buried at the bottom** but I hope you can always pull them out.

Freshmen year I was sitting on this stage playing **Pomp** and Circumstance. I was thinking that the next four years of my life would go by slowly. I wondered why everyone was so emotional on graduation day. Was Berkley really that special?

The friendships I have made,
the knowledge I have gained,

and the memories I have created will always be part of who I am.

We might not know it now, but in September when we do not return to the familiar building between Sunnyknoll and Catalpa many of us will realize how much the staff and students of Berkley meant. Yes Berkley really was that special.

For four years, each of us has successfully carried our backpacks and tonight we will carry them with us across the stage. People will always be setting expectations for us. It is up to each of us to define what we want in our backpacks: what are our own goals and dreams.

So maybe in the fall you can clean out your backpack a bit: you know, take out the gum wrappers and that homework assignment from junior year. But keep a few of the memories from Berkley and begin a fresh start. Pack what is important to you, to your dreams and ambitions, and most importantly pack what fits you.

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June 2007