

Baccalaureate Speech - *Laura McIlwain Cruse '91*

Headmaster Seivold, thank you for inviting me to speak to you all today. It has been a great privilege to be a part of this community here to celebrate the Berkeley class of 2023.

When I was a graduating senior, I committed as early decision to Emory. Having a passion for sports when at Berkeley, I wanted to find ways to continue those interests and discussions with Coach Pisano and Coach Roberts that spring convinced me to take the risk to try walking on for the soccer team. In essence, they communicated to me —‘Laura, you’ve got this’. While I did make the team, the significance of those conversations was that I realized that I had the confidence to take the risk, regardless of the outcome.

I have reflected on my own Berkeley experience and how similar it has been to your own, 32 years later. I know that my time spent at Berkeley—both as a student and as a parent, has shaped how I strive to be my best for my family, my friends, my patients and myself.

There have been a few upgrades! The campus is a ‘bit’ larger than in the late 1980s. The Cafe offers more daily choices than the Math Club lunches and the Servo machines. The facilities are second to none, lovingly planned out over the years for our benefit.

The level of attention to detail and the creation of a sense of community from the faculty, staff, volunteers and students are still the reasons why Berkeley is a special place.

I am proud to call many of my high school friends still among my closest confidants. They grew up with me and will always have my back. We supported one another

when we made less-than-stellar decisions and gave each other a chance to try again. We can go months or years between seeing one another and yet, it is as if not a day has passed. This is a group you can always count on. Take a look around at each other. Tell each other “You’ve got this”. (Go ahead, I’ll wait!)

My Berkeley parent friends are in the same vein. You all have been irreplaceable as we have shared the joys and trials of watching all of our kids traverse these years in school. We have forged friendships that will outlast our time of regularly coming to campus, and I look forward to continuing to grow our friendships in years to come.

The happiest people invest in relationships and make connections. Take time to foster these and be mindful of being present, in real-time, with and for those around you. Sometimes you may need to intentionally unplug! When the desire to connect with friends near and far is there but the time to commit to a meetup is hard, intentionally schedule an 8-minute phone call with a friend. Most people can spare 8 minutes and are glad that they did. Purposefully surround yourself with people that inspire you and lift you up—people that are ‘bucket fillers’, and be a bucket filler yourself. Look for opportunities to share laughter with each other. As a doctor, I can tell you with confidence that laughter is ‘often’ the best medicine! It is hard not to feel a sense of contentment after a good laugh with a friend. I thought this may be a good time to tell a joke, but I would probably embarrass my budding comedian and it would even be worse than our household Dad-jokes!

Moving on is exciting, but scary—many of you have been here for a long time, and the world around you is beckoning. It is ok to step outside your comfort zone and try something new. You will learn something from it even if you learn it is not for you! Thomas Edison once noted, “I did not fail. I found 2000 ways not to make a lightbulb. I only needed one to make it work!” I have said for years (ever since Med school actually) that if I can do two months of surgery rotations, I can do anything! That

helps me to view opportunities that are new or different with a better attitude. Having a healthy perspective can aid in resilience when times seem extra tough.

As you head out to college, wherever that takes you, you will be asked about your future plans. It is OK not to be sure of them! Give yourself some space to reflect and remember that your journey will probably be more impactful than your destination, sometimes taking a path that you have not planned.

This graduating class has a lot of passions. I have seen much of it firsthand but have also heard accolades from your parents or through the school shout-outs. I have watched the band kids pour themselves into their music, try out for ensembles, learn solos and perform for adjudicators and support the actors by playing in the pit for musicals, and I have been the beneficiary of many personal concerts at home due to all of the practices required! I have seen the hours of early morning and weekend training to get the cross-country personal records. There are so many similar stories with our 16 sports teams, national-level debaters, actors, artists and academic-related endeavors. You have taken advantage of the opportunities here at Berkeley to be multifaceted in your academic and extracurricular activities and perform them all at a high level. The willingness to put yourself out there and give it your all is a great life skill. This class knows how to get the job done. You just have to do the work.

An Emory friend of mine, April Rinne, wrote *Flux*, an actionable book about embracing change, that originated from a Ted Talk about navigating an uncertain future. One chapter in her book stands out to me. She describes building a portfolio career —she gives some great examples, as she has traveled the world, first, in our college days as a bike tour guide, and now as a consultant, lawyer and author. One of her signature skills is the old-fashioned handstand, which she has captured in each of the many countries she has traveled. Your work will take up most of your time beyond college, but don't let it be the only quality or activity that defines you. Think about your personal skills, experiences and talents that can be mixed and matched. Think

creatively! All of this needs to be in your portfolio representing who you are. Nowadays, you have the ability to imagine your career based on what really creates joy and purpose. As parents, we would advise you to factor in paying the rent as well! I see now that there can be more flexibility in these career journeys, and am working to widen my own scope of skills and interests. You never know what doors this might open in the future!

As we hear at the end of every Honors night, keep reading! Pick up a new hobby, language, or instrument, just because! You are never too old. These add to your portfolio! I have been learning to play the ukulele from my youngest for the last few years. Currently, we are working on Over the Hills and Far Away by Led Zeppelin (my kids have really good taste in music!) Don't ask me to sing while playing the ukulele, but it fills my bucket every time I pick one up! Music has been a fantastic connection for me both with my kids and with our school community.

Be cautious when you hear your inner critic, and show yourself the same grace that you would give to a friend. You are not alone when things get hard (and sometimes they will be hard). Everyone starts each day with a 'green stick', a clean slate no matter what happened yesterday. Remember this behavior "helper" from first grade?! We don't have to dwell in the past. Always remember that you are loved. Again, look around you.

Success and happiness are defined by each of you. You get what you give. Use your skills and resources for the betterment of your community and the world around you. Make time to embrace and explore your faith. Get involved, and stand up for what you believe.

Lastly, class of 2023, I would like to leave you with the advice I offer every patient—just like when you are on an airplane, put your oxygen mask on first before you start helping anyone else. Prioritize a healthy foundation to be your best: a

healthy diet, water, exercise, sleep and address mental health concerns. BE the positive difference in the world. Be proud of yourselves and all that you have accomplished so far. Keep your classmates and our Berkeley staff in the loop with your journey in addition to your achievements. Remember that this is your Berkeley community forever. This is not really goodbye.

Take the risk. You've got this.