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Graduation Speech

When I look back on my four years at Villa Park High School, immediately two words come to mind: survivors and family. I know what you’re probably thinking, “those two words have nothing to do with each other,” and you would be half right. When I said survivor, many of you probably guessed I was leading into the topic of the current situation we are all facing: a global pandemic, school closures, a pause on our “normal” lives. But no. I am talking about what the class of 2020 survived long before covid-19 became a household name. For my fellow seniors, these obstacles are memories we will not soon forget. We survived football and soccer season without a field, basketball and volleyball season without a court, multiple track seasons without a track, countless assemblies without a gym, an academic year filled with construction, fences, relocations, and so much noise. If we thought getting to class in 5 minutes was difficult before, shutting down half the pathways didn’t make it any easier. We survived the closing of part of the student parking lot, the rainy season flooding our walkways and creating small lakes outside of the classrooms, and my least favorite, we survived the mid-October heat wave with classes in the t-buildings. However, through everything these past four years threw our way, we not only survived, but we THRIVED. Football season became the road show, outdoor assemblies became a chance to get away from a stuffy and crowded gym, construction zones became walking with someone new to class and taking different paths. Many would call them obstacles, but Villa Park called them opportunities, and that is what makes this Spartan family different from anything I have ever been a part of.

This leads me into my next word- family. From the outside, Villa Park High School is just a building on Taft Avenue, but to us Spartans, it is our home away from home. For many of us, we found ourselves on campus more than in our actual houses. Whether it was those in ASB or Link Crew staying after school to paint posters and organize assemblies, the athletes at practice for countless hours, traveling around the city to compete, the kids in the band and choir programs staying for extra rehearsals before performing at the big concert or the Friday night game. Whoever you are and whatever your passion, there was a place for all of us. It was home for our big Spartan family. A family of mentors, motivators and educators, staff, faculty, parents, and coaches, teammates and classmates, best friends, close friends, new friends, mutual friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, old friends, and everyone in between. So, now as we walk away from this place we have called home for the past four years, and embark on a new journey filled with challenges, struggles, and obstacles, I know that the future is beyond bright for this class; because we are the class that overcame.

I wish I would have known how much this incredible school would come to mean to me. I wish I would have known how my teammates would become my sisters and my classmates would become my closest friends. I wish I hadn’t taken this time for granted, because as we have all just witnessed, four years of high school is not guaranteed. However, as high school comes to it’s official end, I can confidently look back and say I gained everything I wanted out of these four years. I made phenomenal memories, I achieved all of my goals, and I had an experience unlike any I ever imagined. Given the chance, I wouldn’t change a thing. Every experience, every friendship, every failure and every success made me the person I am today.

So we didn’t get a prom, our graduation is taking place through a screen, and the spring sports didn’t have their chance to shine. But this Spartan family never missed a beat. We stood tall, we stood together, and we overcame. Twenty years from now when we look back on high school, we won’t think of the homework and projects, we won’t remember the tests or the lessons. But what we will always remember is how we overcame every obstacle that came our way, and we did it together. Class of 2020, we can do anything. And we will. Thank you.