

Principal's Commencement Address

By Denise Severin

Friday, October 21, 2011

Good Evening:

On behalf of the staff and students of Peterborough Collegiate and Vocational School, I would like to welcome you – parents, grandparents, friends, staff and most especially, graduates to this evening's celebration.

As those of us who have spent some time immersed in the life of this school could tell you, PCVS is a place of enduring traditions. Tonight's commencement is a continuation of one of those time-honoured rites of passage as this class is the 184th to graduate from PCVS. Having spent the last four, or five years with you, I know that you, as graduates can and will hold your own among the most illustrious to have ever walked our halls – the scientists, the performers, the politicians, the activists, the rich, the humble, the famous and even the infamous.

Graduates – welcome home! Gosh, you're lookin' good! I hope as you came in the front doors tonight that it felt as if you were coming back to see a good and cherished friend. I hope you were reminded of the times that we have shared in this room. Right here, just a year ago we wept during the Remembrance Day service and then we whistled, cat-called and applauded like crazy fools during talent shows and Christmas house skits.

Tonight however, stands alone among all those other gatherings. It marks the pinnacle of your years as a Raider. This evening we have come together to honour YOU – to honour what you have worked towards since first arriving for your grade nine orientation – when you learned what LINK leaders were, you sang that cheesy rendition of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" (my apologies Ms Rankin). You were excited, nervous, young and SHORT. Then many of you went on two years later to become those very same LINK leaders, the difference being that this time, you led that same cheesy rendition of Old Macdonald (again, my apologies Ms. Rankin) for other nervous and excited grade nines. And ... you were the leaders and the role models.

Graduates, tonight as you walk across the stage to receive your diploma, many of us in the audience, parents and teachers, will be remembering the younger version of you and we will marvel at how quickly the years have gone by.

As with any milestone, any momentous accomplishment, your graduation is the result of a great deal of hard work and I would encourage you, tonight, to think also about those who have helped to make this a reality. The late nights of dances, coffee houses, championship games or studying, were only possible because someone was waiting to give you a ride home, and to offer a kind word, at the end of a long day. As any parent in the audience tonight will tell you, high school can at times, be something of a wild ride ... for all of us. There is excitement, pride, anticipation, sleepless nights and no small amount of worry. So I would encourage you, to thank those who have supported you – your parents, guardians, grandparents, brothers and sisters.

We are fortunate, you and I, to have a wonderfully creative, innovative and committed team of teachers at PCVS. They have a deep and unwavering love of what they do. They get as excited about camping trips, social justice issues, art shows and dunk tanks as you do. They are proud to share tales of something you have done – sometimes with a tear in their eye, more often, with a hearty giggle – and I have to tell you – that tonight in these front rows on both my right and my left are people who are

proud of you and who are excited to see what comes next in your adventures. Please keep in touch with us – we want to share in your journey.

As you take the risks that will lead you to great learning and astonishing experiences, please be safe. Take care of your heart, your mind and body.

Take care of each other. Take good care of the friendships of your high school years. Relationships that are based on shared experiences in school have a special quality and the people sitting around you are in all likelihood, the ones who will attend your wedding, celebrate births and share in your sorrows in the years to come.

As you well know, each week at PCVS we honour students by naming Raiders of the Week. Recipients might have been leaders in organizing school-wide activities like the collection of school supplies for our sister school in Zimbabwe, or they may have demonstrated great sportsmanship on the athletic field or court, but just as often, it is someone who has shown a gentle kindness to someone else. Someone who stops to listen, opens doors, or maybe someone who picks up garbage that has landed in the park or hall that was not theirs. Regardless of the reason, by naming a Raider of the Week, we are acknowledging students whose behaviour embodies what we know of, as the PCVS Way. Although you won't find posters around the school listing what the PCVS Way is, we know that it means to live a life of respect for others, of empathy for the less fortunate, of civic responsibility and of personal integrity. The PCVS Way is too misty ... ethereal to succinctly define, but we see evidence of it in you, our students, our graduates each and every day.

Regardless of what the future holds for you, and for us, this is the legacy of PCVS. It is your job to carry it on, and to spread our common commitment to living in acceptance, in love, and in inclusion. This is what you will take with you into the future. We together, and you as graduates, will go on to build safe places for all ... gay, straight, wealthy, poor. I have every confidence that you will work to make the world a kinder, gentler place, a place with social justice at its heart. This is the PCVS Way and is our legacy, one which is timeless, limitless and will last ... then, now and forever.

You came into the school tonight as PCVS Raiders, and you will leave for the first time as alumnae. You have the talents and the skills to make real differences in the world and I wish you every success.

Congratulations Class of 2011 – we are so VERY proud of you!