

Valedictory of Class 2014: Sergiy Vasylyev 114

Congratulations Class of 2014! We made it! Thank you, friends, families, and teachers for helping all of us climb our way to this epic finale. Out of all of the possible versions of Sergiy that may exist in parallel universes, I am grateful to be speaking to you as this version in this spectacular auditorium. Without a doubt, high school has been an unforgettable experience. When we go back in time to the very first day of high school, we realize how much we have all matured physically, socially, and intellectually. Yes, we complained here and there, but here we are, getting ready to embark upon a new chapter in our lives.

When I say that standing before you today is a blessing, I mean it in every sense of the word. Every time I turn on my television, I am reminded of just how fortunate I am to live here in the U.S, where I have opportunities that are out of reach for most young men and women in the world. If not for the bravery of my parents fifteen years ago to bring me here from my hometown of Kharkiv, Ukraine, I would probably be guarding a post and gripping a weapon with white-knuckled hands, with only a bitter wish, a doomed and damned hope for the position I have today.

Coming to the United States from a country like Ukraine is most comparable to winning the lottery: getting plane tickets and citizenship was virtually impossible, but we somehow managed to do both and settle in the United States.

But it was not until my trip back to Ukraine two summers ago that I really came to understand the blessing of living here in America, where most families have a car or two, my relatives in Ukraine had none. Running water is so poor in Ukraine that, for weeks on end, my family would have to cope with freezing water or with none at all for everything from cooking to bathing. In Ukraine, hopelessness hangs in the air like a dense fog, driving out the oxygen and what little aspirations remain in the hearts of people, whose dreams deteriorate in a country that does not recognize the significance of raising bright minds.

Here at Christian Brothers, we have had the luxury of attending school without having to worry about a crumbling government or a war outside our windows. We are all blessed with an inordinate number of opportunities for a good life here, and we should each appreciate the freedom we have in choosing our road as we stride into the future. Unlike for many teens around the globe, our high school years have given us a solid foundation to stand on, and more importantly, to build on. Our education is nothing less than a miracle.

Yet even for us, the road is rough. There are no traffic lights telling us when to turn and no signs telling us where to go. But must we fear the future? No. Instead, we must embrace it with every ounce of our being and take control of what we choose. Like the cosmos, our futures bring great mystery, but we must relish this mystery in every step we take. In order to grow, we should not be afraid

to be skeptical and ask questions, to wonder and marvel at the incredible world in which we live. As said by Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson, the famous astrophysicist, “No one is dumb who is curious. Those who don’t ask questions remain clueless.”

We cannot see what world lies beyond, but do not be anxious. There are no crocodiles or snakes waiting to consume you on the other side. But once we make the next big step in our journeys, our lives will never be the same and our world will continue to change. So let’s have fun this summer. Let us be with our families, go somewhere new, and spend time with our friends. But let us not forget that we truly have the opportunity of a lifetime to change the world as we move toward our destinies. Thank you and good luck to you all.

Matthew Reade '14  
Salutatorian

Thank you.

Before I begin, I wish to express my gratitude to all of the people who have helped to make this day possible for me and for my classmates.

Without the extraordinary friends, family, faculty, and mentors who have guided us through this formative period in our lives, the bright future ahead of us today would have been out of reach. So to all of these people and the God who smiles upon this ceremony tonight, a big thank you from the class of 2014.

Almost five years ago, my short and scrawny eighth grade self walked onto the campus of Christian Brothers High School for the first time in his life and fell in love with what would become his home for the next four years. I remember sitting in Mr. English's B Set with my shadow buddy Jimmy Barnes and observing with wonder the quiet admiration that shined from the faces of the many students in the room. In those students, I saw a hunger for knowledge, and from that moment on, I knew that Christian Brothers was the place that I wanted to be. And today, more than ever, I know that my feelings were justified. As I reflect upon the past four years, what stands out to me the most is the incredible array of talent that this class has had to offer. We have media artists like Emma Bradford and Lucas Dudley producing films that are the highlight of our KBFT

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broadcasts. We have actors, singers, and dancers like Allison Lian, who is so talented that she manages to be an expert in all three areas and still finds time to be my girlfriend. Then there's Sergey our valedictorian, who spent his summer junior year earning *twenty*, yes, twenty gold medals at a national dance competition in Orlando. You are all so talented. We must not forget, however, that while talent brings opportunity, it also brings questioning.

We all want something out of life that we just can't quite explain, and for my first three years at CB, I did not realize what that something was. I sated my desire for knowledge in my schoolwork and for companionship with my group of friends, but there was still something missing, something that, when found, would fill the empty spaces in my life. Little did I know that what I needed all along had hung upon the wall of my room for the longest time, dusty, untouched, and unsaid, an old Maryanne Williamson quote about our inner selves: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure."

Looking back upon my four years at Christian Brothers, I do not regret the things I did here but the things that I failed to do, the opportunities that I passed up in order to appease my fears of rejection, embarrassment, or failure. The experiences that I cherish the most from my

past four years were those opportunities that I tended to with care until they could bloom, spilling their brilliant array of colors upon the canvas of my life. For me, one of these opportunities was learning jazz music for the first time. I remember joining jazz band sophomore year and being scared to death of the music because I had never played any of it before. I could have walked out the door, washed my hands of the whole experience, and saved myself weeks of embarrassment as I learned the ropes of this new genre, and in all honesty, I thought about doing just that. But if I had, the life-changing experiences that came from my decision to join band would never have materialized. I never would have gotten to know the incredible musicians in our class—Cody Upton, Josh Stone, and Dylan Santana, to name only a few. I never would have felt the euphoria of improvising a line, and I don't know that I ever would have loved and pursued my music to the degree I have over the past four years.

So maybe what we hunger for the most in life is life itself. Life is an opportunity to grow, change, and transform into the people we want to become, and it is *our* choice to take or leave each opportunity our lives bring. We have poured our hearts and souls into our Kairos experience. We have dedicated ourselves to others with thousands of hours of community service. In the incredible things we have accomplished as a class, we have

demonstrated that we are able and willing to grasp these chance occasions whenever they present themselves.

So to the class of 2014, never forget that every single one of you is powerful beyond measure. Never forget that the happiness you seek can be found by simply stretching out your hand into the ether of opportunity. Never forget that where you travel in life is up to you, and never fear the leaps of faith that happiness will require. You are the painter of your own canvas; do not allow room for regrets.

Before I close, I want to thank you for what you have brought to my life and to the lives of those around you during the past four years. For the many laughs we have enjoyed here, for the love that we have found here, and for the lifelong friends we have made here, thank you, and I will always remember what we have built together and felt together as this special class of 2014.