

There is a place where the sidewalk ends  
And before the street begins,  
And there the grass grows soft and white,  
And there the sun burns crimson bright,  
And there the moon-bird rests from his flight  
To cool in the peppermint wind.

Let us leave this place where the smoke blows black  
And the dark street winds and bends.  
Past the pits where the asphalt flowers grow  
We shall walk with a walk that is measured and slow,  
And watch where the chalk-white arrows go  
To the place where the sidewalk ends.

Yes we'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,  
And we'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,  
For the children, they mark, and the children, they know  
The place where the sidewalk ends.

Your sidewalk here at Mission Dolores Academy has come to an end, dear Class of 2018.  
You have walked the long and winding pathway towards success, both soaring and stumbling

along the way. You have gathered friendships, collected knowledge to guide your way, and helped to ease the journeys of those who follow in your footsteps by setting a strong example.

As you step off the curb of childhood and venture down the long road of adulthood, I want you to pack your suitcases full of confidence, character, and integrity. I want your journey to be lined with stories of self-discovery, wise choices, and sacrifices for the greater good. I want you to realize your purpose, your passions, and persevere when life gets you down. But most of all, I want you to be kind.

I want you to be kind to others. It is so easy to get caught up in our own islands of “my needs, my wants, my issues”, that we oftentimes forget that there are others in our atmospheres who need our support. My favorite quote of all time is this: “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.” It’s true! Your new sidewalk is going to weave through the narratives of many people’s lives—be kind to them. Pay attention to them. Encourage them. Harness the compassion and empathy you fostered within yourselves here at MDA and spread it furiously to a world so in need of your love. Ignore the temptation to be annoyed; push away the desire to give into irritation or judgement or criticism and critique, and instead seek out opportunities to make someone else’s journey just a little bit easier. Like Kid President says, “Give people high fives for just getting out of bed. Being a person is hard sometimes”.

I want you to be kind to yourselves. This is a task much harder than it sounds as you are now the prey of a society so focused on the pursuit of perfection and the disdain for anything deemed “less-than”. But, if you take nothing else with you from this moment forward, take this: You are MORE than good enough. You are tall enough, strong enough, pretty enough, smart enough, skilled enough, popular enough, liked enough. You look as you should look; talk as you

should talk; dance as you should dance. What you like and don't like is up to you; your taste in music, fashion, sports, hobbies, movie genres, hairstyles—it's all up to you. Don't let the naysayers and haters diminish your flame. Burn bright—light the world on fire with your creativity, ingenuity, humor, and determination.

Just a few months ago, I was asked to give a eulogy for two former students of mine. They were two young men filled with incredible promise, kind-hearted and wise beyond their years. And while I was overcome with grief, I was also overcome by the many ways my perspective on the world was altered because of them. Though their time here on earth was so short, they seized life by the horns and lived so many moments to the fullest. They would throw their heads back in genuine exuberance when they found something funny; they embraced every side of themselves—the shy, the awkward, the hysterical, the quirky, the compassionate, the friendly, the disappointed. They were two humans who were incredibly comfortable in the skin they were given, and they celebrated that. And when they did, so did everyone else.

So, today, I challenge you to, in every circumstance, celebrate who you are. When you walk into the doors of your high schools, colleges, and one day, jobs, own every fragment of your being. Accept any opposition as an opportunity to refine your determination, hone a new skill, prove your worth one step further. And no matter what you face in life, know that you will always have MDA here to cheer you on. This home, this family will be there to continue to support, encourage, and guide you long after the ink on your diploma has dried.

Yes you'll walk with a walk that is measured and slow,

And you'll go where the chalk-white arrows go,

For graduates, you mark, and graduates, you know

The place where your sidewalk ends.

Congratulations, Class of 2018.

Shine on.