

Make Lemonade

Good Evening, Mrs. Aull, Mrs. Seip, Trustees, teachers, families, friends, and most of all- our 2020 graduates. It is an honor to be with you, tonight.

While none of us expected the circumstances that we are currently facing, I truly believe these last few months have represented a significant lesson. . . Sometimes LIFE simply does not go according to our plan. *Sometimes* it is full of unexpected twists and turns. One of my mentors recently posted a thought that I would like to share with you.

“It’s not about the hand you are dealt; it’s the cards *you choose* to play.”

That is the basis of tonight’s speech.

Many of you already know me but for those who are unfamiliar, please allow me to provide a quick disclaimer. I consider myself to be friendly yet fair, nice yet firm, and loving yet challenging. The students at WRUS would tell you that as much as I loved to joke and laugh with them, I also tried my best to hold them accountable and help keep them on track.

So while I hope that our graduates are inspired by my words, I also plan on telling them the truth and providing tips for navigating this interesting experience called life after high school. Tonight, I will be sharing things I wish I had known or appreciated *more* when I graduated from high school.

1. **You Can Always Make Lemonade!**
2. **Make Lemonade With Friends & Loved Ones**
3. **Be Willing To Try Their Recipes**
4. **Make Your Lemonade with Love & Positivity**
5. **Make Lemonade With Ingredients that May Seem Random At First**

You Can Always Make Lemonade!

Many of us have heard the quote, “When life hands you lemons, make lemonade.” That is exactly what I hope you will choose to do as you move forward. . . Make the very best of your circumstances.

As I mentioned earlier. . . this (a virtual graduation ceremony) was not what any of us expected but I can honestly say that for a few reasons. Months ago, I thought this would be the week I boarded a flight from the DFW Airport, landed on the East Coast, spent time with my family, and then sat in the audience at Wye River Upper School as we all watched our seniors cross the stage.

However, Mrs. Aull had something else in mind. I realize *now* that this has kind of been the tone of our relationship. She has found plenty of ways and opportunities for me to stretch myself. **You need people like that in your life.**

Not long ago, I was wondering, “What am I doing?” What goals should I go after, now?” What do I even have to offer?” Who knew that I would soon receive a request from my former boss- asking me, of all people, to share words of wisdom with this year’s graduating class? Me???

When I started working at Wye River in 2011, I had no idea that before I left, I would help coach volleyball or assist with the planning and chaperoning of the first trip to Alabama. . . let alone, deliver this speech- a year after my departure! Thank you, Mrs. Aull, for pushing me, for allowing me to stretch and grow, and most of all, for your faith in me!

Make Lemonade With Friends & Loved Ones

Sometimes we need one another to help us recognize our gifts. There will be times when other people acknowledge positive traits in you that you struggle to recognize within yourself. Be willing to consider their perspectives.

Though it may be intimidating at first, if they give you the chance to exercise your gifts, at the very least→ do it. In my immediate family, my father has been known as the champion in the kitchen. I remember being nervous to prepare a meal for everyone because the bar had been set extremely high. Imagine my relief when I realized that he not only enjoyed the food I prepared but even posted about it on Social Media?! He loved those Asian Lemon Chicken Tenders ;-).

Be Willing To Try Their (Your Loved Ones’) Recipes also known as “Be willing to ask for and receive support!”

People *want* to support you but you have to **give them** the opportunity to do so. As much as we like to pretend, we cannot read each other's minds.

And trust me- I get it. You are walking into young adulthood and graduating from high school but please do me (and yourself) a favor & remember. . . You are NOT an island!

What do I mean by that? I mean, you are not isolated or alone. No one expects you to figure everything out by yourself. (I used to operate that.) You are **not** an island but you are a star *within* a magnificent constellation. The world needs you to shine & share all that you have to offer! At the same time, the glowing lights from the stars around you (your friends, family, teachers, etc.) are there to help guide you.

Asking for or even just accepting support is not a sign of weakness or incompetence. I believe it reflects your wisdom. You recognize that someone may be able to share their knowledge and skills with you. As you learn from them, apply those things to your life and see what progress you are able to make. [And here's a pro tip or cheat code: your parents may not admit it but they cherish your desire to get their advice and insight- even AFTER you leave their home.]

The day before I flew to Texas, my father offered helpful advice. "Don't be prideful! If someone wants to help you, don't block your blessing!" So I say the same thing to you. If people are freely offering their support and you know that they have pure intentions. . . accept it.

Contrary to many people's assumptions, I moved to Texas with a lot of unknown variables. I attempted to secure a job and permanent living situation before leaving Maryland but it just didn't happen that way. After a month of staying at an Airbnb, I was quickly depleting my savings, still trying to find a job, and I just did not know what I was going to do. One of my friends invited me to not only work for her but also stay with her for 2 months→ **rent-free**! Do you think she had to ask me twice??? I KNEW this was a blessing and truly appreciated her generosity.

Even before that, my wonderful WRUS family showered me with expressions of love and thoughtful gifts. I can honestly say- if they had asked if I needed anything for the move, I probably would have played it off with an "I'm good" or "I'll figure it out." Fortunately, they didn't even give me the chance to reject their heartwarming acts of kindness.

Make Your Lemonade with Love & Positivity

One thing I am intentional about is making sure that people feel seen, heard, and cared for. At WRUS, I worked hard to memorize the names of students, parents, and community members as quickly as possible. When I worked part-time at a grocery store and then a pizza shop, I made sure to remember my customers and their preferences. These may seem like small things but people appreciate feeling and benefitting from your extra effort. My managers at the pizza shop even let me know that our tips were higher whenever I worked at the front counter ;-).

In the words of Toni Morrison, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but *people will never forget how you made them feel.*”

When I reflect on my going-away celebration with my Wye River colleagues, I honestly feel as though they were expressing the **same love** that I tried to show during my eight years there.

We all have been impacted by this global pandemic but I encourage you to consider the world around you. Even now, as many of us are sheltering in place and practicing social distancing, there are plenty of ways to spread love. You might not be able to donate thousands of dollars or large quantities of masks but there is still something you can do that will make a difference. You can reach out to older neighbors, run errands for them, decorate your driveway or sidewalk with encouraging messages, or simply call friends and see how they’re doing. Although a change in our routines can be frustrating, it also gives us the opportunity to re-evaluate our priorities and make time for the things and people that matter most to us.

Make Lemonade With Ingredients that May Seem Random

It is quite possible that whoever first created strawberry lemonade was doubted by their friends and family before the beverage became popular. Now, there are many different flavors→ raspberry, watermelon. . . I’ve even heard that some people enjoy Spinach Lemonade. More power to you. . .

Here is the thing. . . Experiences that don’t appear to make sense and don’t feel good to you can end up *strengthening* you. As my rent-free stay with my friend came to an end, I was going on lots of interviews while maintaining my pizza shop gig. Potential employers kept complimenting me and seemed genuinely interested in me, but for one reason or another, job offers were not coming through. I definitely felt discouraged. After shedding some tears and receiving

encouraging words from friends, I converted the discouragement into determination. While I waited for a full-time job to come to fruition, I worked as hard as possible at my restaurant. I can't tell you how many people thought I was the manager just because I did whatever I could to help things run smoothly.

As you continue living, you will learn that there is always room for improvement. The lemonade recipe that you enjoy at 18 years old may be tweaked by the time you are 30. That is perfectly fine!

Be prepared to hear "No" or "Not yet" more times than you'd care to, but do not let that stop you from working hard! Let it motivate you to work even harder, knowing that every "No" brings you one step closer to the "Yes" that is intended just for you.

You will face difficulties too. A challenging class, an "interesting" coworker, or a frustrating project. . . It is inevitable. However, **you** will determine whether those things make you and your lemonade bitter or better. The choice is yours.

Please know that I am extremely proud of you and I am excited to celebrate this accomplishment with you- even from a distance! Congratulations!