

One thousand, four hundred, and twenty-four days spent as high school students at Quakertown Community High School.

One thousand, four hundred, and twenty-four days walking through the poster - covered halls, laughing and eating lunch with friends in the cafeteria and commons, dressing in all blue to support the football team on Thanksgiving, dancing at homecoming in the gym under white curtains and Christmas lights, worrying about long-term homework assignments, and - even though starting the summer with great intentions - procrastinating on summer assignments and cramming two **months** of work in *three days*.

While I wish **all** *one thousand, four hundred, and twenty-four days* were the best days of our lives, the reality is some days were not the best - and to be honest - some were rough. Days where we woke up late for school, fought with friends, failed a test, argued with family, received upsetting news, or . . . just had a bad day.

When I initially started to write this speech, I planned on speaking about how "**one**" person grows after an extremely tough day. How **one** person, *individually*, takes a setback and turns it into a learning moment and conquers it **alone**. However, after some reflection, I remembered the *people* around me. So I returned to my speech and revised it. Rather than focus on the resilience of a **single** individual, I wanted to acknowledge and celebrate how **we**, as a *community*, supported each other through those "bad days."

In my sophomore year, I failed a pre-calculus test - polynomial long division - so you can understand why. It wasn't just **my** personal studying *alone* that helped me grow and learn. It was my classmate who sat next to me and shared the correct answers to help me revise; my friends who made me laugh at lunch to distract me (because I could already imagine how furious my

parents would be); and my teacher who offered remediation time during Pride to review the concepts I missed.

As Xan Oku states, "May the flowers remind us why the rain is necessary."

We all wish every day was sunny - no clouds and no rain - because no one wants a "bad day." But I genuinely believe as people, we can not *grow* and *learn* without life struggles. A flower can not bloom without the rain, but it also can not thrive without the sun and the soil - the *community* supporting it.

From the first day of kindergarten, *standing* in **front** of our elementary school with a tiny backpack and laminated name tag carefully indicating our bus number and teacher's name anxiously waiting to enter the doors, to our last day . . . **here** . . . in a cap and gown *sitting* at our graduation ceremony with our high school **behind** us eager to start our futures, the people surrounding us, in the seats, on the stage, and in the stands, have been our sun and soil through *every* little rainshower and *every* utter downpour.

I know I would not be the person I am today without my classmates, teammates, and friends before me. Since kindergarten, 180 days for thirteen years, these, *now*, graduates in this stadium have been *my* community. Now, it is time for us to separate and pursue *our* dreams; the dreams we planned *together*. I ask my fellow graduates to remember that when we encounter those rougher patches, stormy skies, and turbulent times, those who surround us, our *community*, will support us and guide us forward. Congratulations, Class of 2022!