

**Welcome Speech – Graduation 2008**  
**By Allison Shafir**

On behalf of the class of 2008, I'd like to welcome you all to our graduation ceremony. I also want to thank all of our parents, friends, and family for their love and support, as well as York's faculty members for their guidance and patience; we truly owe you all that we are.

I'd like you to indulge me for a moment: call me Ishmael... because as we delved into the dark romantics in Mr. Sturm's eleventh grade English class, I began to feel like Ishmael, the wandering sailor, from Melville's *Moby Dick*. York Prep was the ship, *The Pequod*; my classmates were my crewmates; and the combined forces from the adult world manifested themselves in Captain Ahab. In the novel, Captain Ahab unites his crewmates with a single purpose, to kill Moby Dick, the great white whale.

Our great white whale? The future, *college*, the dream and goal that consumed us with passion. Captain Ahab—our parents, our teachers, society in general-- ignited this fire within us, and put us on a voyage, a boat we could not get off of. In the midst of ocean that separates childhood from adulthood, we were led and guided by Captain Ahab and forced to have faith in him and in one another. We lashed ourselves to the masts of our boat, York Prep, and found support in others and rode out the storms. We held our breath and braced ourselves as waves lifted our boat up into the air and threatened to come crashing down. But we survived, we persevered by banding together, and I truly believe those storms contributed to the overall strength and uniqueness of our grade. And ultimately, this journey was more than just attaining a goal, it was a quest for self discovery.

Let me tell you another story about self-discovery. It's a story about a girl who was floundering in a highly competitive school where she received very little support and had low self-esteem. The faculty at this school told the girl's parents that they weren't quite sure that she was the type of student that they were looking for. The girl made the decision to transfer to a different school in the ninth grade, where over the next four years she was nurtured and taught to believe in herself. To make a long story short, in December of this year, against all odds, the girl was accepted early decision to a top university. By now, it's clear the girl in the story is me, and the school that fostered her is York Prep. Here, in Mr. Neuhaus' ninth grade class, I received my first A. Here, in the hallways of York Prep, I had my first crush. Here, with York's small but determined track team I ran my first race. Here, I learned to speak like an adult, and express myself in writing and in art. Here, I realized my potential, and

made the enormous transformation from an unsure little girl to a driven, passionate individual.

I would be deceiving myself if I believed that I slew my whale alone, that I accomplished all of these things on my own. Without the support of this school and these crewmates, I couldn't have made the journey I made, and none of you could of made the equally exciting and impressive transformations that you made.

These changes in my peers and myself have been underway for some time, but I hadn't fully acknowledged or contemplated them until the very end of senior year. Perhaps it was too poignant, too difficult for me to choke down; in truth, it still hasn't fully sunk in. As I approached York the morning of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2008, the last day of classes, I saw the characters that make up our senior class: an army of kids in bright colors, wearing large hats, crowns, costumes, bandanas, sunglasses. As we rainbow children clustered under a large flag with "Seniors '08" written in place of York's usual official school flag, I saw my classmates in an entirely new light. I felt a deep connection to my fellow peers, the merry pranksters, in the burst of energy that erupted that morning. Throughout the day we danced like children of the jungle, read and told stories, ate ice cream, and chanted and raced through the school. We converted our anxiety about changing, about growing older, into a protest, and a strong desire to hold on to our childhood and our spontaneity.

Rather than act "mature," as college students are expected to act, we regressed back to childhood. May 2<sup>nd</sup> was a celebration, a tribute to who we once were as kids, and the people we will become as we cross the bridge from childhood to young adulthood. We needed to go back in time to remind ourselves of who we once were, in order to move on to be ready for the next step and bring that childlike delight with us as we go. As magical and adventurous as the regression was, it could only be temporary because life and time move forward.

Through it all, York has steered us through tumultuous seas, guiding us through the trials and tribulations of our high school years. There will be many great white whales in our life; York has brought us to this one, *Graduation*, the culmination of a dream, the slaying of this particular whale. As we say good-bye, we look back on these last four years with a smile, and we look forward with confidence we have gained here to embrace the changes and challenges of our life ahead. There are new experiences to be had, new visions and people to greet, a new journey is about to begin, and we finally are ready to set sail. It truly has been a privilege to attend York Prep. Again, thank you.

*[Editor's note: Allison Shafir was admitted Early Decision to Brown University.]*