

Salutatorian Address
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Salutatorian, Class of 2020

My favorite time of the year is May. For me, it has been a time of my fondest adolescent memories. The phenomenon of May at Cheshire Academy appealed to me since my first in 2017. May at Cheshire is accompanied by an odd atmosphere of elation and angst. The temperatures rise, the flowers bloom, people participate in impromptu Spikeball and ultimate Frisbee matches on Slaughter Field, and students bask in the beautiful weather, counting down the hours and minutes until vacation and commencement. May is also the time of final and IB exams—the ultimate evaluation of our performance; however, despite the anxiety, some of my best memories were the long days studying with my peers. At Cheshire, I learned that one forms some of the strongest bonds with those with whom they face challenges whether it be in the library, the fieldhouse, the music and art rooms, or the Black Box Theatre.

This May was **quite** atypical to say the least. The weather was lovely, but no longer was the air imbued with bittersweet sentiments. I had too much free time, and with nothing better to do, I would go on long walks and inquire into my identity. I naturally asked myself the banal questions that permeate every mind that encounters itself: “Who am I?” and “What defines me?” DON’T worry, I will spare you the details. This will not deviate into one of my usual philosophical tangents to which Ms. Cruise, Ms. Max, Mr. Ropke, Ms. Lasoff-Hodge, Mr. LaSpina, Mr. Boyd, Mr. Rogers, and anyone within a 5-foot radius were often unwillingly subjected. Suffice it to say, I found that the answer to these questions on identity lay in the formative experiences at Cheshire Academy.

One can teach oneself mostly everything and almost anything, but it is difficult to teach compassion and global understanding without being immersed in a diverse body of people. Fortunately for us, the Cheshire Academy community is incredibly diverse. It is a microcosm of our world. Not only is it a nexus of different cultures, but it also comprises a *mélange* of people: industrious athletes, fantastic actors and actresses, dexterous musicians and artists, scholarly thinkers, and—the most integral group of them all—compassionate educators. This amalgam is most evident during Convocation. To an outside observer, it resembles the archetypal prep school event. A large, uniform mass of students

marching to and congregating in a chapel, thereby commencing their academic year. To this observer, it may seem that this annual ceremony is austere and rigid, suggesting a stagnant community. However, while this event is steeped in tradition, it is like Cheshire in that it is not defined by tradition. To those who experience it, each one is different, as it reflects a community that is alive—a community that is quickly and constantly evolving. This one- to two-hour ceremony is the strongest testament to Cheshire’s vibrant community, because every year as I walk to St. Bridget’s Church, there is a degree of unfamiliarity, in a positive way. Each year, I have met a new classmate or two on Slaughter, chatted a little during the walk, and learned something interesting about them. As we entered the main hall surrounded by faces old and new, we were met with a symphony of hundreds of conversations, each expressing the excitement for and fears of the upcoming school year. This heterogeneous body then sat together for the first time as one, and even though it may have been someone’s first or fifth Convocation, we were welcomed.

It is not always pleasant to be a member of such a dynamic environment, as it will sometimes prompt you to question yourself and the world around you. Nevertheless, this is imperative to our sense of self and our surroundings. The exposure to people of similar and dissimilar beliefs, cultures, and interests is essential in developing nuanced, worldly, and empathetic thinkers. This synergistic community is what ties all of us together: it is the spirit of Cheshire Academy. Regardless of who you are, what you like, your creed, or your political beliefs, you will be accepted here. You will find a place here. You will learn here. You will find comfort here.

When I first joined this community, I was confident in a negative way. I was myopic, arrogant, and oftentimes WRONG. It was the numerous conversations with people of different backgrounds and interests that demonstrated how much I did not know. This reality initially destroyed me—I tried to conceal myself from it—but I learned to embrace it. Consequentially, I have grown to be like the Socrates of Cheshire Academy. No, I don’t corrupt the youth with grandiose ideals, but I tend to strike up conversations with anyone who is willing to speak, often talking their ears off. Since ninth grade, I have spoken to and befriended a myriad of people ranging from Division I athletes to top-tier musicians to exceptional mathematicians and future social theorists. This has had an astronomical impact on who I am and how I think. Listening to and learning to appreciate other people’s narratives and passions has become the most important aspect in my life. It seems a little counter-intuitive for a guitarist to converse with a physicist about economics, but if my time at Cheshire has taught me

anything, it has shown that there is a lot of crossover, a variety of interesting inputs, hypotheses, and perspectives. I realized that one can learn something from everyone.

I have begun to think of people as wine. You start as a grape in a vineyard. The people with whom you interact are the yeast, soil, climate, additives, aging, and barrel. These determine the product of you. The more diverse these people, the more complex, deep, and aromatic you are. It is we who determine how nuanced and flavorful we become. We are our own projects. Our reality exists primarily in our own actions. Despite this responsibility, we never needed to fret, as the faculty at Cheshire are master winemakers, and they have guided us so that we could realize our potential.

In around an hour, we will officially be alumni from the Cheshire Academy at 10 Main Street, Cheshire, Connecticut. And it is possible that some of us may completely dissociate from this institution and never return. It is possible that to some of us, Cheshire Academy will become just a name buried deep in memory. Some of us may be on campus next week. Some of us may not visit for 20 or 30 years. Some of us will live right down the street, and some of us halfway across the world. You may be attending the same university as your neighbor. You may never see them again.

Regardless of where life takes us, we must remember that Cheshire will always welcome us as it did when we first arrived; we will forever have a place in this beautiful community. While we may have different opinions, cultures, creeds, and make different life choices, we will **always** be one in spirit.

Thank you and congratulations to the Class of 2020.