

Charlotte Damico Commencement Speech 2010

Standing in front of you all today feels so surreal. It's weird because as we proceed day by day, nothing seems to change. But pretty soon, everything's different. At times the Baldwin path seemed never ending, probably due to my senioritis kicking in, in October of my freshman year, but as I stand here today, I am in disbelief. It is hard to believe that my 13 years here at Baldwin have come to an end, and today, I leave as a Baldwin alum. I would like to thank you all for joining us this afternoon and celebrating the commencement of the senior class. Ironically, back in 1966, my mother also delivered her high school commencement address on June 10th, making this moment, and honor, even more special to me. My mother stood before her senior class and spoke about the Vietnam War, and today I am here to talk to you about my Class of Green, my Army of One.

It is hard to summarize the beauty of the class of 2010. In my opinion, we can be compared to the camouflage pattern on our shorts we wore on ring day sophomore year. We are not all the same shape, size, or color, but ultimately, we blend together. Each one of us makes up a piece of a marvelous puzzle, with athletes and artists,

academics and divas. We strut our stuff through the glorious blue passageway, and down the hallways with strange carpets in which I am still trying to decipher the secret codes. Throughout the years, we lost some troops, and we gained some troops, resulting in this infamous, magnificent, platoon. I heard a rumor that our very own Christina Middleton joined our class due to the aesthetics of our buildings and their similarity to Hogwarts. Little did she know how well that thought process would fit in here at the Baldwin School. We might not be the school of witchcraft and wizardry, where we learn to concoct a polyjuice potion, but rather the Baldwin School for Thinking Girls, where we have mastered the art of composing 5 page analytical papers the night before they are due.

One thing I can say about this class is that we are all fighters. We're tough. Like cadets, we fought through hard times. We fought against each other, whether it was over team Edward, or team Jacob, or even physically, resulting in a pin protruding out of our very own Jenna Price's nose. We tastefully debated our political views, resulting in Leila Collin's senior stat to read, "Usually seen verbally abusing republicans while wearing flip flops." Though we are never armed with a loaded gun of peanut butter cups, we are surely armed

with ammo consisting of strength and individuality. Baldwin has given us the strength to stand up for what we believe in. It has prepared us to depart to our various other bases across the country come fall; some fighting on the fields, some fighting on the courts, some fighting for lead roles on the stage, as well as all of us fighting in the classroom. I remember one day when I was in Shelley's office arguing with a number of people over a sports team. Still hung up on the argument an hour later, I continued to voice my opinion and attempted prove my points to Coach White and she turned to me in the gym and said, "You're going to be someone Charlotte Damico." I'm not sure she knew right then and there how much those words meant to me; but it goes to show how Baldwin, with its education, and its unbelievable array of faculty members has built us into these passionate, opinionated, strong women. Strong women who not only share their voices during chemistry class while performing "Lean On Me" in the middle of the lecture, but strong women who are not afraid share their voices with the world.

It is imperative to give an immense amount of thanks to the faculty. If it weren't for you, we would not have been able to push ourselves out of our comfort zones. From the brilliance of your

lessons to the warmth of your compassion, we learned some of life's biggest lessons. We learned how to face challenges with Shelley's physical and emotional guidance, and we learned how to smile and salsa with Sra. Silva as she performs the cha-cha-slide through the hallways. We are also deeply grateful for Ms. Gephart's words of wisdom, be it on where to find Ms. Allan for her tootsie pops, whether or not we actually need to consume those extra calories of the tootsie pop. We learned, and negotiated with the best. And we owe a significant amount of our success to you all today. The amount of growth we have experienced because of you all is remarkable. Now I'm not talking about physical growth because I know Jess Cook is a little challenged in that area, but in the way that we have grown to carry ourselves as real women is phenomenal to me. For instance, back in second grade I was cast in the crucial one line role of...the bucket maker; but three years later I was singing a solo as the lion in the Wizard of Oz. I don't know if it was on purpose, or simply a coincidence, but our class performance of the Wizard of Oz was kind of perfect in my mind. The idea of us coming together and producing a play about the *Emerald City* seemed so fitting for our class of green. My mother uses the phrase, "be the lion" to me almost on a

regular basis, as it is a metaphor for facing your fears, and finding the courage to simply be yourself. Baldwin gave me the confidence to be who I am today, and for that I am forever grateful.

Ms. Ameisen assigned us essays to read by a therapist named, Lillian Rubin in our ICS elective. Lillian Rubin wisely states, "Its what we do with the knowledge, how we manage to live with the scars life inevitably leaves, that counts." Through our disgustingly disheveled lounge, to Adrienne Frank's backpack overflowing with possibly four years worth of paperwork, it is evident that we are not all perfect. We make mistakes, and by making these mistakes we learn more about life and ourselves than we could ever imagine. Like when Christina Maloomian forgot her pants during our second grade play, or when Ali Callegari decided to steal off of Justine Lamb-Budge's lunch number back in lower school. Repeatedly. We are all, in our own beautiful, individual ways, flawed. Yet this is what makes us so special. Ms Schmalzreid informed our own Sarah June that she may want to "change the way she sneezed" if she wanted to get anywhere in life. But I'm sure that *Harvard* will fully embrace your sneeze as we did. Regardless of our flaws, we sweat bears, we bled blue. We stood together, dragged our elbows and knees through the mud, and

reached the finish line. And let me tell you, you guys clean up good. It is my honor to stand here before you today, and the image of the camouflage sea of white dresses will forever be engraved in my mind.

To be honest, when I was younger and going through those oh, so glorious years of middle school, I didn't think this place was for me. I stand here today a changed woman. I never felt like I belonged here, but I soon realized that I am the epitome of this place. It took me four solid months of Welsh Valley Middle School to realize that I am nothing but a caffeine addicted, procrastinating, competitive, Baldwin Girl. Now, I know not all of you may know that I transferred and came back, proving the fact that I am simply not entirely familiar with every single one of you in this class. Not all of you know everything about me, and I don't know everything about each and every one you, but I'm not sure that this matters when it comes to expressing the fact that I *appreciate* all of you to the moon and back. J.K. Rowling stated in the speech she delivered at Harvard Graduation, "you are touching other peoples lives simply by existing." And that is what you all have done. It is easy to say that we have an incredible bond, each person connected with different people, ultimately connecting every single one of us. It took leaving this

marvelous place to learn that what I had at Baldwin, I couldn't get anywhere else. As hard as I tried, I wouldn't find cherry trees lining the driveway of the main entrance. I wouldn't find the warmth of Mr. Preetam's air high-five, or a classmate like Christina Lisk who apparently "taught Ksenia everything she knows." What would I have done without witnessing Noelle Niu being saran wrapped to the podium during assembly, or participating in the notorious Lip Gloss video with Sam Swartz's epic dance moves? I can't imagine a day without Caroline Durlacher who gives me a vocabulary lesson with each conversation without even knowing. It's the wave from Herb as I drive through the front gates, or Ms. Loke's beautiful voice as she sings "Don't Stop Believing" with me by the color-coordinated test board. It's hard to believe the color green will not be seen on that test board next year. Needless to say, I'll miss the little things. The small characteristics, instances, and traditions that make this place nothing less than unbelievable.

I never imagined this day would actually occur. Graduating to me has simply seemed like a bizarre concept, a day that on some days, we yearned for. Today, here, at this moment, not so much. Kayla Cohen wrote, and I agree, that with the exception of a few

history classes, our Baldwin experience went by way too fast. Its weird because right now, the end of something great is coming, but I want to hold on a little longer, just for one more second, so it can hurt a little more. Carol Sobieski once said, "How lucky I am to have something that makes it so hard to say goodbye." The class of 2010 stands before you, and as the clock strikes 1700 hours, we will depart. We will depart out of Baldwin's gated grounds and follow our separate yellow brick roads to our new bases...but they will never compare to our Emerald City. As I conclude my speech I would like to thank you all for being here this afternoon, family, friends, faculty, and peers, for listening and supporting our troops, my wonderful class of green, my army of one. As I leave you all, I just wanted to let you know that you will always be a part of me, from the gates to the cherry trees. I wish the best for each and every one of you, and that you all will continue to strive for greatness. Stay awesome; stay classy. Don't be afraid to take chances in the days to come. The road is long, but in the end, the journey is the destination. At ease, cadets. I salute you.