Jillian Heckman - Salutatorian

When I look up at the night sky and see the many stars in the universe, sometimes I feel the weight of my own significance in this big world. Other times, I get lost in wonderment, looking at the stars as if each one was placed in the sky just for me – forming patterns, making stories, building connections. Other times I feel a great sense of belonging, that I am in fact part of something bigger than myself, and that I have a responsibility to take care of this world in which I live. In many ways, my high school experience has been much like my stargazing experience.

I am sure many of you felt the same way I did when we first began high school four years ago - that this place was so big. Where did I fit in? How was I going to be of any significance? Who were all these people? Well, I soon came to know that these people were some of the best people I would ever get to know. Perhaps, of all the things we learned in high school, the most important lessons were learned in our relationships with others. It is the warmth of friendship, that we will remember most. For these friendships gave a purpose. A purpose that required selfless acts of love - including being honest, faithful, and trustworthy. We learned to celebrate in times of triumph and comfort in times of sorrow. And overtime, we realized that these friendships were what gave meaning and purpose to our lives.

Leaving next year fills us with many worries, but one of the greatest is that we may lose our long-lasting bonds with our fellow classmates and once again feel that sense of loneliness in this world. And yes, life is going to pull us in all different directions, but I would like us once again to reflect on the stars. We sometimes go days without seeing stars – daylight, cloudy nights, yet though invisible to us they are still up there millions of miles away. Then every once in a while, the stars appear in the night sky each shining brightly reminding us they are still there. Our friendships and memories will work much like this. Even though, we may be far apart a little glimmer of friendships past will keep us connected.

Not only did we have a chance to explore outward and form new relationships in high school, we also had a chance to turn inwards. Just as looking upon the stars gives us pause to wonder about our own significance it can also reveal to us our very uniqueness and special place in the world. This calls for a time of self-reflection and a chance to immerse oneself in areas of your own interest, not just for show but because it is truly important to you. Some of you may have found your passion on the athletic fields in or academics. Others found themselves in the art room, or music room, or in the agriculture department. Some may have had to face challenges, illnesses, or injuries that dimmed their light, yet those who had a true passion were able to surpass this hurdle. Others of us may still be searching for what will make us happy. Don’t stop or settle if you haven’t reached it yet. And once your find it, take time to rediscover your passions throughout your life. We all have a significant role to play in this world, and although it may be a challenge, it is our goal to find it.

Sometimes that challenge requires a little guidance. All good stargazers know, it is sometimes very helpful to have a guide. Someone to point out the stars that may have gone unnoticed or explain the meaning behind these magnificent lights shining in the night. In high school, it is also helpful to have a guide, a mentor, to help us find our way. Maybe for you it was a special teacher, a coach, an administrator, or a counselor. We have been blessed to have had the opportunity to have worked with the staff and faculty at Penn Manor who care so much about their students. It has been such an honor to have been taught by teachers who place such value on academics. They have encouraged us to reach a little further than we thought possible. The teachers here have developed our potential, our shining potential that will allow us to achieve great success in the future. Our parents are also our mentors. As we begin our next steps in life, we must remember to look to our parents for guidance, love, and support. They are the ones who have been there since the beginning - from our first word, first step, and first day of kindergarten. We must thank them for raising us to be well-educated young adults, and must include them in our lives to come as we grow in our new community.

Just like the stars, we, too, can feel connected to a larger universe. We have been privileged to be a part of a larger community here at Penn Manor. As comets, we cheered at sporting events, volunteered in the community, and have taken care of each other. This sense of belonging encourages us to contribute and take care of the world around us. We can make this world a better place.

Many of us have been told that if you make a wish on a shooting star, then it will come true. Well I am here to tell you that as silly as it may be, to keep wishing on those shooting stars. We all have dreams. We all have passions. It is one thing to live our lives creating dreams, and another thing to chase them. I hope you all keep “wishing upon a star,” doing whatever possible to make those dreams come true. Those plans may not work out perfectly; the course may change along the way, but following passions no matter how big or small is what separates the achievers from the believers. To be a star, you must shine your own light, follow your own path, and don’t worry about the darkness, for it is in the dark when stars shine brightest.

I would like to an end with a short story.

Once upon a time a star was born. Her proud parents thought she was the most special star they ever saw. With love and care, they raised her to shine among the dark sky. And shine she did.

Soon it was time to go to school to learn about the world around her. Her teachers taught her about the moon and the stars and opened up a universe of possibilities for her.

She made new friends – young stars, old stars, yellow, white and red stars. They taught her many things, too. She learned when they worked together they were brighter than a single star. They could build constellations with intricate designs and tell fascinating stories while they danced in the night sky.

Before long it was time for this star to graduate and decide what her next phase of life would be. What would she become? How would she journey out into the world? Where should she go?

In the end, it really was not a hard decision at all. She knew what she must do. She would become a comet - a spectacular comet with a tail of fire - trailblazing a new course! Now all would be able to see this magnificent, marvelous ball of fire streaking across the sky and leaving her mark on the world. In her heart she knew she could not have made it without the love her parents shined upon her, the knowledge her teachers had opened to her, and the beautiful friendships and lessons learned as part of a constellation of other unique and talented stars.

And so now friends, class of 2013, it is your time to light up the sky so all cannot help, but look up and see you in a blaze of glory streaking across the sky and leaving your mark on the world. For we know, just as that little star had learned, that every day has been and every day forever will be… “A great day to be a Comet!”

Thank you and Congratulations to the Class of 2013!