

I don't know about you guys, but I'm terrified right now. In fact, I've been afraid this entire week. This past week I was talking with my mom about what I should say for this speech. I mentioned multiple times that I was afraid I'd give a mediocre speech and that I was afraid that it would be a letdown. Then my mom, who knows me so well and is so brilliant, said to write about what I know. And, trust me, I know fear.

I'm what you might call a "Type A Personality." I struggle with anxiety because I put so much pressure on myself and I'm a perfectionist in every sense of the word. I like to think that I can control everything. Fear is what I experience when I realize that I can't control everything, which is often.

During times like graduation, when life is changing quickly, it can be a time filled with fear. Can you blame us? We're leaving our family and our best friends. For many of us, we're leaving the familiarity and the comfort of the only place we've ever known. In order to move forward, we must learn two things: why fear can be a good thing and how to handle fear when it's holding us back.

Fear can be healthy. It can warn you that you're headed for disaster or that you need to stop and think for a second. Healthy fear gives us respect for authority. It can be an excited fear that encourages you to push your boundaries and step outside your comfort zone.

However, more often than not, our fear is not the healthy kind. Unhealthy fear comes from lies that we tell ourselves, lies about how we're not strong enough, not smart enough, or not important enough. Unhealthy fear is the kind that paralyzes you. It stops you in your tracks and leaves you feeling isolated and desperate. We've all felt it. So the question that remains is, how can we, the Class of 2019, overcome it?

As fate would have it, I'm overcoming it right now. I started school as the girl who would rather sob and cling to her mother's legs than go and talk to other kindergarteners. Middle school Isabel was the new girl in town and was terrified of both not having and making new friends. Fast forward to senior year. I'm still shy, but I've made some of my best friends here in Gladstone and I'm addressing a gym full of people. I've recognized that overcoming fear is a process. It involves acknowledging your fear but not letting it dictate your actions. As Franklin D. Roosevelt put it, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear." As we step out into the unknown, here are some things I hope you remember.

Remember that you are not alone. Don't believe the lie that you're the only one that is afraid. Everyone has fears, therefore we all need each other in order to be brave.

Remember that being afraid doesn't actually change anything. Fear inducing situations are inescapable, but the paralyzing worry and anxiety are not. Personally, in those moments, I pray. It calms my fears and brings my focus off of myself. Although it may not change my situation, praying changes the way I view the situation.

So, Class of 2019, all of us must now face the unknown. It is my hope that in our individual pursuits, we will remember to be thankful for the safety net of our friends and family here at home. Remember that when your heart starts racing and your palms are sweating, that just means your next adventure is about to begin.