Good evening,

It feels a little strange standing here, because it seems like just a few months ago, we were starting high school - trying to figure everything out, wondering how the days could feel so long. And now somehow, I'm here, realizing how short the years actually were.

You've probably heard the phrase: "the days are long, but the years are short." I don't think it really makes sense until you've lived the days and look back. They often feel slow and repetitive, but then suddenly you look up, and a whole chapter of your life, the only thing you've ever known, is over.

If I had to compare it, I think life is like writing a book - but with one catch: you can't go back and rewrite any of it. No matter how much you want to edit a sentence or change a moment, you can't. You just keep turning forward.

I heard a quote from a movie a few months ago that stuck with me. It went something like this: you don't get to pick the path you think you should've, would've, or could've been on. Instead, you only get to choose how you walk the path you're on right now - so you might as well make the most of it and cherish each step.

That makes me wonder - if we knew we couldn't rewrite any of it, would we have written it differently? Maybe we would've paid more attention to the small moments. The ordinary days. The conversations we didn't think much of at the time, but will probably end up meaning the most.

Honestly, I think that's what makes today so complicated. I remember not being able to wait for this moment - graduation, finally being here on this stage. But now that I am here, a small part of me already wishes I could go back and live some of it again. Not the homework or cramming for tests, but I wish I would have put myself out there a little more. Spoke to a few

more people, gone to a few more events, even been a little more friendly and outgoing.

But, we can't rewrite the past. We can, however, let our regrets shape who we become moving forward. Today, we're not just finishing a chapter in our lives. We're also carrying parts of it with us into the chapters that follow, hopefully using them as guidance.

If I can leave any advice for the graduating classes of the coming years, it would be this: don't make the same mistakes I have - pause every once in a while. Look up from everything you're rushing toward and actually take in where you are, and where you have been. Because one day, you're going to go from being the person on the school bus…to being the person driving behind it, watching someone else live the years you just had. And in that moment, you'll realize how fast it all really goes.

A lot of songs have metaphorical meaning, but Macklemore in his song "Good Old Days" is quite literal: "Maybe these are the moments. Maybe I've been missing what it's about. Been scared of the future, thinking about the past, while missing out on now."

As we end this chapter of our lives, it's okay to feel a little uncertain, nostalgic, maybe even a little sad. It's also okay, even preferred, to be intrigued and excited about the chapters yet to come. Just remember to take a moment to reflect on your past chapters, and let them help you try and create better ones to follow.

Thank you everyone, and to my fellow 2026 graduates, I wish you all the best on your future endeavors.