

## A New Beginning

Where have we been? Where are we going? The answer to the first question is fairly simple. For our entire school career, we have been eagerly awaiting this very day. We never believed this moment would arrive, yet here we are. The answer to the second question is unknown. For many of us, that is scary. For others, that is exciting. Nevertheless, we know that we are going somewhere and that the world is a changing place. Perhaps, we shouldn't dwell on exactly where we will be when this class reunites in ten years, but instead, we should concentrate on making a difference in the world.

Many of us are treating today as a means to an end, but today is truly a celebration of a new beginning. At this new beginning, each of us must decide for ourselves the impact we want to have on the world and on those around us. What will we do while the world changes? Will we stand idle? Will we change with the world, or will we be the leaders that create the changes we desire to see?

In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, President Jimmy Carter quoted his teacher, Miss Julia Coleman, as saying "we must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles." If we clutch to the principles that we believe and convey them to others through our actions, then we will create change in the world.

For this reason, it truly does not matter where and even if we are going to college so long as we uphold our core values. Some of us are going to college either in state or across the country. Others are preparing to enter the work force. Others still will represent our country in the armed services. As each of us faces an uncertain future, we must remember it is our duty to leave this country, this Earth a better place than when we received it from our ancestors. What will our legacy be? In this new beginning, we have the opportunity to impact the world.

There is a parable known as the "Starfish Story" that speaks of the attitude this graduating class should possess. It goes as follows. A boy walks along a beach on which many thousands of starfish have washed ashore. As he walks slowly and stoops often to toss each starfish gingerly back into the ocean,

he sees an old man. The old man calls out and asks, "Why are you throwing these starfish back into the ocean?" The boy replies, "The sun is up, and the tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they will die." The old man scoffs and states that the boy cannot possibly make a difference since there are many miles of beach and starfish along every mile. Stooping down yet again, the boy tosses another starfish into the ocean. As it lands in the water, he says, "It made a difference for that one."

Think of someone who has had an impact on your life. People such as parents, teachers, and preachers probably come to mind first. These individuals share one thing in common. They pass values on to the next generation. As you go into the world, embody the values these people have shared with you. If our class does this, then we will leave a lasting impact wherever we go. Some of us may have opportunities to create change far and wide, but most of us will affect those closest to us.

As the boy tossing stranded starfish back into the ocean demonstrates, it does not matter how many people we impact as long as we attempt to make a difference for those we come across. Opportunities to create a difference will arise in everyday situations, and we must decide to seize these opportunities.

How can we make a difference? Perhaps, we can simply smile as we pass a stranger in the grocery store. Write a card to a friend for no reason at all. Offer a colleague a simple compliment. We may not know exactly what impact our actions will have, but we can be sure that we will have made an impact on someone's day. Ripples of impact will surely spread as individuals pass on the favor and make a difference for someone else.

This is a new beginning. It does not matter what we have done these past seventeen or eighteen years. What matters is what we choose to do tomorrow. No, I do not mean what fields we will study or what kind of cars we will own. I am speaking of the legacy we leave behind. "At close of day," do not regret having only "frail deeds." Instead, "Rage, rage against the dying of the light" and leave no starfish stranded and dry on the sand.