

My Welcome Speech

By Emily Hewlings

Good morning, I'd like to welcome the Board of Trustees, Mr. Corwin, staff, alumni, Mr. Josh Swiller, graduate students, family, friends and fellow classmates. Welcome to the 114th graduation ceremony at Clarke School for the Deaf. Thank you so much for joining us on this very special day.

My name is Emily Hewlings, and I am fifteen years old. I am originally from Pennsylvania, and I moved to Hatfield, Massachusetts when I was nine years old so that I could attend Clarke School for the Deaf. On my very first day here, I remember feeling so excited and scared. I was so small, and the door leading to Hubbard Hall looked incredibly huge. But I knew that I had found a place where I would feel comfortable, that the school taught students who were all hearing-impaired like me. I was so shy during my first years here that it wasn't long before I was known as the "quiet girl."

Before coming here, I came from a public elementary school in my former home state where I was the only deaf student on the entire campus. The teachers had absolutely no experience teaching someone like me, and tried their best to help me learn. My parents described me as somewhat of a "go-get-it" girl; no matter what, I made sure that I got what I wanted to accomplish my goals. As each year came around, when I moved up to a different grade, the schoolwork became much more frustrating and I was unable to get the information in the classroom most of the time. Because I was born profoundly deaf in both ears, the only technology that I depend on to have access to the world is my cochlear implant with which I was implanted at the age of two. As my third grade year went by, my willingness to learn and the confidence to succeed in that type of setting was starting to slip away. My parents noticed that. They began searching for a new place where I would be able to feel comfortable and work my determination back to where it used to be. We found Clarke School, visited a couple of times, and decided that that was the place where I would spend the next six years. Now, six years later, on graduation day, I can't thank Clarke enough for helping me to build back my confidence that I almost lost when I was nine years old.

Lao-Tzu, a Chinese philosopher, once said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." When I look at this quote, I can see how it relates to life, and the difficulties we've had to overcome. Our life, from the time we are born, is a journey of a thousand miles in which we have to take one step at a time, not knowing for sure where it would lead us. For the 2008 seniors, our first challenge in life was our hearing loss. Thanks to the improvement of technology today, we have the ability to communicate with people all around us. Our journey may seem more than a thousand miles. We, the seniors, are going out into the real world with new challenges to face, and we are going to make sure that we succeed at that.

To the class of 2008: Wow. I can't believe that we're finally here on this day, receiving our diplomas and becoming official alumni of Clarke School. This is so exciting. I want to wish all of you the very best for the next four years of high school; I sincerely hope that we will be able

to run into each other again sometime. Thank you for the great years we spent together as classmates.

To our parents out there in the audience: we want to thank you for leading us in this direction, and being so supportive of us. It isn't easy sometimes, but you managed it. Thank you so much.

This is graduation day, a day where five ecstatic seniors will walk off the stage with diplomas, about sixteen M.E.D.s to walk off the stage as well with a bright future ahead of them in working with the hearing-impaired, and all of the families and friends to rejoice on this very exciting day. Again, thank you for joining us today.

I would like to introduce my classmate, Kelley Flynn.