

## My Welcome Speech

By Kelley Flynn

I would like to welcome the Board of Trustees, Mr. Corwin, staff, alumni, graduate students, families, friends and fellow classmates. Thank you so much for joining us on our special day!

My name is Kelley Stone Flynn. I am 14 years old and will be turning 15 this summer. I have attended Clarke School for eight years. I am originally from Rotterdam, New York. My parents discovered I was hard of hearing when I was one; the doctor told them I would never be able to hear and speak. My parents were very upset, but my Aunt Colleen gave us a balloon that said, "Expect a Miracle." I used sign language and I had very little speech; I wore hearing aids. My parents found hope when I was two, and that was Clarke School for the Deaf, a place where deaf students learn to speak and listen.

I finally came when I was seven years old. My family made a big sacrifice and dropped everything they had to move to Massachusetts for me to go to Clarke. I instantly stopped signing and worked very hard on my speech.

Later on that year, I found more hope, and that was cochlear implants. I asked my parents if I could get one. They were a bit shaky about the idea at first, but at the same time, interested. They asked my teachers at Clarke about it, and they said I was a great candidate.

After I got my cochlear implant, my listening skills and my speech both improved. It took me a while to get used to it and do well with it, but I got there. I got a lot out of the cochlear implant and Clarke School. I got to participate in a lot of activities here and I grew up here. I have a lot more opportunities on the horizon now, and more confidence.

I want to thank Clarke School for helping me get to where I am now, and I want to thank my parents for leaving everything they had to bring me here. My father said to me, "I wish I could call the doctors back in New York and tell them they were wrong about you," then he said, "No, actually, *you* can call them!" I sure would love to! Turns out my aunt was right--a miracle did happen.

Congratulations to the graduate students. It was great to get to know all of you, good luck! Be the best you can be.

TO THE CLASS OF 2008: I am fortunate to have been put in this class. Everyone has very unique personalities and you're all great! We shared many hilarious moments and we all got along very well. We made it! Good luck at your next schools!

Thank you for coming to our graduation!