

## **Valedictorian Shreeya Panigrahi entitled her address “Keeping the Faith”**

2002. Do you remember 2002? That, my fellow classmates, is a year that many of us hold close to our hearts. Why, you may ask? That year, we turned 5, graduated from preschool, and began kindergarten—in Sayville Schools for the vast majority of us. That time period is one that many of us long for—a time when everything seemed great and the world was at our feet. But what was life actually like in 2002? For one, many of us were playing with Hot Wheels or Bratz dolls; our favorite television shows were *Arthur* and *Blue's Clues*, and movies that we all love such as *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and *Lilo & Stitch* came out. I guess the world was pretty awesome in 2002.

Now, let's jump 6 years to 2008. What happened in 2008? That was the year of our fifth-grade graduation, the same year that we would enter middle school—a period full of braces, Silly Bandz, drama, and the sheer awkwardness of middle school dances that most of us would like to forget. That same year, Michael Phelps had a record-setting Olympic performance in Beijing; both *The Dark Knight* and *Breaking Bad* debuted, and Flo-Rida and T-Pain's "Low" was the most popular song. A lot of remarkable things happened that year.

However, as great as the past was, we need to remember that it was just as flawed as today's world; we just didn't know it. We need to have more appreciation for the present, because, ultimately, the present is the only time we truly have. Again, many of us—when thinking about the complexities of today's world—will look back nostalgically and long for those days when we had little responsibility and could pretty much do as we pleased. Everyone does that, whether it's our grandparents and parents who desire to see the simplicity of their time return, or our older siblings and cousins who believe that we've had it too easy thanks to technology. We all would rather be in this past. This past that, whether we like it or not, was full of things that we'd like to forget. These may be America's preparation for war in 2002 or the beginning of the Great Recession in 2008, or on a less serious note, the use of dial-up Internet and flip-phones between those years. As Billy Joel once said, "The good old days weren't always good."

Now, when I ask you about 2015, what do you think about? Some of you may first think about the fact that this year, we're graduating and taking the next step, whatever that step may be. Others may think about the tense political climate in which we live among many other cold realities, such as the current drought in California. However, 2015 isn't quite finished, and many good things have already occurred. Both *Parks & Recreation* and David Letterman ended their respective runs on television with a bang; we now have various women and people of color being considered as serious presidential candidates by both major political parties, and we still have much more to look forward to, like the upcoming sequel to one of our favorite school novels, *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Evidently, today's society is just as complex and full of everything as it was 10, 20, 30 years ago. So the next time you hear someone bemoan the state of society and explain how everything was so wonderful during their time, I suggest saying something along the lines of..."Today's world is good and bad, just as it's always been; just as it always will be." It's really as simple as that.

However, the buck does not stop there. We have already acknowledged the constant, complex state of society. Now here's the fun part. Let's continue to view the past and enjoy what we can, whether it be by watching *The Breakfast Club*, listening to The Beatles, or by watching clips of the Dream Team on YouTube. Moreover, let us ensure that we learn from the mistakes made in the past, so that we can create a better present and future. The most important thing is that we are not blind and do not get hung up on a time that no longer exists.

Instead, we need to focus on the present because that is all we have, and we cannot waste this time and everything that it has to offer us. For example, instead of always waiting for the weekends or for the next deadline to pass, we need to simply appreciate each day for what is, even on the days where we have a million things due yesterday that need to be completed. Because at the end of the day, we will never get that time back. This will be especially relevant as we approach the next four years of our lives and find our time split up by other people. This is most often the case when it comes to midterms and finals weeks. While we cannot change college calendars and the responsibilities that will always face us, let us enjoy the present by controlling our own time and preventing ourselves from being consumed by these markers.

Additionally, we should do more to appreciate all of the resources that we have now because many others could have only dreamed of having what we do. Plus, something better generally does come along. The most prominent example that comes to mind is the Internet. That I could take my phone out right now, ask any question, and get an answer within milliseconds is incredible. Yes, technology is not perfect, but it's pretty spectacular. Let's not dismiss this amazing time of innovation that we're in by consistently longing for the past.

Earlier in this speech, I referenced Billy Joel, who once said that "the good old days weren't always good." However, I neglected to mention the other half of that lyric from his song, "Keeping the Faith," where he sings: "And tomorrow ain't as bad as it seems." So, let's continue to enjoy the present and view the future with the same positivity in which we often view the past. Thank you, and congratulations, Class of 2015!