

## **Commencement, June 4, 2023**

### **Remarks by School President Cherish Buxton '23 and School Vice President Viola Quiles '23**

#### **Viola Quiles '23: Commencement Introduction**

I want to call you to this moment.

What are we at this moment, this very second, this minute —

This present moment, that used to be the unimaginable future?

We used to dream about this time.

We have traveled hours and days and months and years to get to this grass, this tent, that bird song, this history — and now we are here, silent and together, and here.

Everyone is here for this graduation, this second, this celebration.

I want to call you to this moment.

We are, or are about to become, beneficiaries of our history and of our community. And, for 125 years, this school has been waiting, moving toward this moment, our Commencement. This history has gotten me to where I am now: standing before you; standing tall, head high; standing alongside 43 other students who put in their all to get to this moment; standing in front of their families, my family, who gave us the opportunity to walk across this Commencement stage.

Thank you.

I would now like to welcome Cherish Buxton, this year's School President, to share her words with you.

## **Cherish Buxton: Commencement Speech**

I think my mom can predict the future. On my first day of high school four years ago, I sat anxiously in the crowd listening to the School President, Ayla Wallace '20. My mom turned to me and said, "That's going to be you someday." I shook my head no. When I applied to Harvard in the fall of my senior year, my mother held my hand and said, "You're going to get in, I know it." I shook my head no. In the days nearing Commencement, my mother told me she would cry during my speech. I said, "Oh, no."

I am honored to be standing here today, giving my final speech as School President of Miss Hall's. I am grateful to be attending Harvard in the fall. I am looking at my mom now in the front row and can already tell this is going to be an emotional speech.

Despite my mother's unexplainable psychic abilities, one thing I learned about the future is that it is unpredictable. No one knows what obstacles life may throw our way and what may follow those hardships, but the one thing we can do is persevere.

I mentioned the idea of perseverance in my Convocation speech at the beginning of this school year. No word better describes the Class of 2023 and how we have navigated our high school journey. As 9th graders learning to adjust to a new environment, our freshman year was cut short by a pandemic none of us could have been prepared for — a pandemic that required adaptation and, most of all, patience. No one knew when things would be normal again, when we would see our friends and be able to hold our loved ones once more.

Many of us spent our second year of high school completely online, and, in the blink of an eye, we were suddenly juniors, on-campus, and unable to comprehend the little time left in our high school careers. Nevertheless, this setback didn't stop us, and it didn't stop the Miss Hall's community from thriving. Grace Notes still sang, theater still performed, Student Council still voted, artists still created, and students still learned. It was then I realized that, like our alma mater says, "No matter how far distant we may be," we are all connected. Miss Hall's isn't just a place we go to school, but it's also a place that stays in our hearts. We couldn't predict COVID, but it didn't stop us. Class of 2023, we made it.

I have a whiteboard on my desk, and at the start of the school year I wrote a question to myself that I want to share with you all now: "Is not knowing a bad thing?" I'm sure many of us would take comfort in knowing exactly how our lives will play out at some point — whether that's knowing what will happen tomorrow, in a year, or even 10 years from now. There is always some question we don't have the answer to but would really like answered. Sometimes, looking to the future is a comfort when things get difficult. It

goes back to the word perseverance and finding the strength to get through something hard. However, it's okay to not know. The future doesn't have to be so scary when what you can make of the present is right in front of you.

As a senior, it was easy to get caught up in the idea of my future and what it might look like. When I noticed most of my days were consumed by thoughts of what the next few years would entail, I took a step back and realized that's not how things should be. I redirected my focus to karaoke nights with my friends, getting to know my teachers better, trying new things, crying with my classmates, and everything else that made this year memorable. I can answer that question on my whiteboard now and say that, no, not knowing is not a bad thing, because, even now, I don't know what the future holds. But, I do know that once I leave this campus today, I leave with memories and love and laughter I can never forget, because of how I lived in my present moment.

Today, I look at 43 people who I have had the privilege of calling my classmates. I have learned so much from each and every one of you, and I am proud to be a part of the Class of 2023. You are looking at 44 individuals with passions, talents, and a true commitment to bettering this world, who leave with the skills they have learned at Miss Hall's, and who will use them to embark on a new journey.

Thank you to the entire Miss Hall's community for helping me become the woman I am today. And, to my mom, thank you for believing in me and seeing my future when I wasn't able to. Congratulations to the Class of 2023 and thank you all for listening.