

In my career as an Ephrata student, the most important thing that I have learned is to work up to my potential, discover my purpose in life, and to pursue that purpose with the greatest passion that I can. We have all heard the phrase, “anything is possible if you want it badly enough,” and how blessed we are to live in a country where this is possible. I have witnessed firsthand the power of opportunity when my parents left Russia so that my siblings and I could have hope for a better future. If they had not come to this country, I would never have had the opportunity to dream of reaching the goals I have been able to set for myself, and it is easy to forget that none of this would have been possible without the patience, support, and dedication of our parents, teachers, and fellow students, all of whom we will never forget.

Throughout our past four years at Ephrata, we have all been impacted by our teachers. I can say that I have never been in a car accident because Mr. Robinson gave out safety ed homework like it was going out of style. I can say that I have developed a love for American history and a stellar work ethic because Mrs. Mellinger and Mrs Hauser would come to school with bags under their eyes because they were up all night grading our papers. I can say that Mr. Harding taught me practical stuff like being able to explode a dog’s heart in the off chance that one ever decides to attack me... head-on. And I can say that I have become a student who strives for excellence because my sister and my teachers always told me I was smart, even when I couldn’t read well in first grade, when I failed a geometry test in Mrs. Westley’s class, or when I got my first B in political Econ. You owe it to yourself and future generations not to give up when the going gets tough, and if you settle for less than what you are capable of, you will regret it for the rest of your life. The years have not been able to erase from me the memories of dedication and support, and they never will. Never underestimate the power your influence may have on others.

I have learned that potential is one of the most valuable things that each one of us has. It has been said that the wealthiest place in the world is a graveyard, because in a graveyard lies all

of the world's untapped potential. Buried deep in the ground are books that have never been written, cures that have never been found, and songs that have never been sung. Class of 2009, don't rob society of your talents, and don't live life without giving to the world all that you are capable of giving. The saddest thing in life is not death, but life lived without purpose. Señor Mahlandt taught me that if you enter a career and you lack the passion, you will most assuredly lack the life and vitality you need to do your job well.

Today, we can stand here grateful to all the teachers who missed out on sleep, sanity, and their children growing up because they put us first. I learned that you don't get a quality education from padded auditorium seats, a better lunch menu, or air conditioning- it comes from the dedication of teachers who not only care about you Mon- Friday, but 24/7. Today, on our last day as Ephrata Seniors, I can say without reservation that I wouldn't trade our mismatched tiles, the perpetual reeking odor from Mr. Delpiano's backroom, or Mrs. Eby's Africa stories for the world. None of us would be the same people we are today without the love, support, and dedication of our school, our families, and fellow students; and although we all will take different paths, and this may be the very last day that we see each other, we can rest assured that we are never alone because we will take a little piece of each of each other with us wherever we go. Notebooks are 10 cents at Walmart. Binders are \$5.95 at Staples. Mrs. Fritz dreeing Señor Mahlandt as Paula Abdul to fight childhood cancer—priceless. And now I challenge you class of 2009, let loose your potential and give to the world all that you have to give.