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By Tim Camerato Valley News Sta Writer

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Sharon — As she took to the stage at The Sharon Academy on Sunday afternoon, graduating senior Daisy Hutt recalled the last time she was before such a large crowd of family and friends.

It was her eighth-grade graduation, which also the rst milestone she celebrated without her mother, Patience Hutt, who had died a month before. To Daisy, high school seemed as though it were a “distant and impossible dream,” she told those gathered in TSA’s gymnasium.

“Everything had, and was, falling apart, but somehow I made it here, and I found myself surrounded by some of the most beautiful, genuine and loving people that I have ever met,” Hutt said.

When school started a few months later, her classmates and teachers were quick to step up to the plate, reminding Hutt daily how strong she was and how much room she had to grow. It’s because of them, Hutt said, that she’s gained confidence during her four years of high school and sees herself as someone who can accomplish what she sets her mind to.

“Thank you for being amazing friends and being loving and accepting me no matter what,” Hutt told the class of 2017, holding back tears. “It means so much more than you could ever know that I can say, even though she can’t be here, my mom would be proud of who I have become.”

Following a long-held school tradition, all 34 TSA graduates spoke at Sunday's graduation ceremony. Some used the time to talk about trips abroad that shaped their education, or discuss how their athletic victories and defeats built character or crack a joke or two about the event itself.

"We're gathered here to space out, listened to your loved ones speak and then space out again," said Harvey Kelley to laughs from the audience.

But many also reflected on how their time in high school made them better people, aware of their faults and willing to work past them.

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Emma Petersson was among them. She took five years to graduate and endured a difficult recovery from a sports injury.

"It only took five years, four pelvic fractures, three torn muscles, two concussions and a partridge in a pear tree," she said.

However, Petersson didn't just struggle with her injury but with her attitude on academics. For much of high school, she tried to be an island, isolated and learning independently.

"I viewed asking for help as a sign of weakness, or stupidity or failure," she said. "But now I can say with the utmost of confidence that I have been weak frequently, stupid often and I have failed at many things in my 19 years of life."

Among those failures is skiing, crocheting and asking for help. Petersson said she believed wrongly that education was her sole responsibility, but the TSA community taught her she's really part of a whole.

"My success in graduating today is not my success. It is a success for my community, my continent," she said. "Asking for help is not a failure, not asking for help is."

Alex Binzen said he's also grown as a result of those at TSA. Before coming to school, he considered himself selfish and anxious.

So, he learned to disconnect and enjoy the present.

"Which is why I decided myself to be happy in this moment because what else could be more important than that?" Binzen said.

Students and teachers "showed me how to be engaged, how to be present, how to be happy,"

Bizen said.

For Jocelyn Johnson, TSA taught her to advocate for herself. She didn't naturally seek out help and was sometimes forced to do things that would benefit her.

Johnson said she didn't see vulnerability as a positive trait before her senior year.

"This year people have seen a side of me that I never thought was accomplishable," she said. "This year, I finally lived really in complete peace with myself for the very first time."

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Sharon Academy Class of 2017

Cordell Benjamin, Vermont Technical College; Alex Binzen, Ithaca College; Paige Bissaillon, Smith College; Eli Carini, American University; Dylan Carson-Turner, gap year; Taite Clark, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; William James Connelli, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Samuel Coté, gap year; Lily Crowley, Marist College; Grace Dorman, Ithaca College; Tray Fisk, Emerson College; Eleanor Frost, Colgate University; Emily Gross, Community College of Vermont; Anyata May Hamilton, Bard College; Kaelan Burch Heston, Simmons College; Daisy Hutt, University of Vermont; Jocelyn Jada Johnson, Nichols College; Maya Blessing Johnstone, Ithaca College; Harvey Wood Kelley, Emerson College; Benjamin Lazar, University of San Francisco; Abigail Levy, gap year; Mallory Rose Lloyd, Plymouth State University; Jacob Mayer, Vermont Technical College; Richard Morrill, Clarkson University; Lydia Morris, Marlboro College; Thatcher Morrison, Paul Smith's College; Zea Palthey,

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Rollins College; Emma Petersson, University of Maine Farmington; Willem Sage Pfeil, work; Paula Kira-Mara Rubart, Integrierte Gesamtschule Flötenteich; Zev Ruben, University of Utah; Meghan Jeanne Shirley, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Michael Usher, Salem State University; Emily Weatherill, Marlboro College

