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Reflections at The Sharon Academy

Seniors Talk About Challenges, Support at Graduation

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Sharon — After finishing middle school, Clara Young assumed high school would easily be the best four years of her life.

Things didn't go according to plan. Just two years into her time at The Sharon Academy, the thought of graduating felt like an impossible goal. Completing every day soon became its own accomplishment, and she didn't expect to see the start of junior year.

"Depression is crippling," Young told TSA's graduating class on Sunday. "Your brain convinces you what you have to offer is worthless."

But when Young wanted to shut down, her support system at school and home wouldn't allow it, she said. Teachers, friends and family all surrounded Young and helped her find help.

She's still learning to manage depression, but came back to school stronger, even participating in TSA's production of *Spamalot* this year. Although Young still has more work to complete before earning her diploma, she was also proud to be at graduation, wearing a green cap and gown alongside her classmates.

"Probably the most important thing I learned is to value myself," Young said. "At any other school, I probably would have slipped through the cracks."

Young wasn't alone in thanking the TSA community on Sunday for help in times of needs. Twenty-nine graduates each took turns, speaking before a room of about 150 people and reflecting on their time in Sharon.

They told stories of how teachers fostered a love of learning, how students provided friendship and support, and even how recovering from season-ending injuries made them stronger people. Keeping with tradition, most graduates limited their speaking time to two minutes, but others took

a bit longer to belt out meaningful Frank Sinatra or movie songs.

"Public speaking is one of my worst fears," admitted Amelia Travers. "But I am here today speaking in front of you."

Travers also had a difficult start to high school. But when teachers began discussing a five-year plan toward graduation, she buckled down and decided to take a renewed interest in academics.

"Everyone sitting in front of and behind me have helped me get to the place I am now," Travers said, tearing up.

That includes her mother. With graduation approaching, Travers recently opened up a time capsule sent to a future self years ago. In it, she found letters from her mother's diary when she was pregnant.

"All I ask is for you to be the best you can be," Travers' mother wrote. "Please, no matter what the problem is, come to me. I will never turn you away or look down on you."

Robin Chadwell said the school helped her cope with the death of her father, Rod Chadwell, in 2013. At the time, she didn't see openness as a positive trait, and often suppressed feelings.

"All I wanted was to be able to sit with another human and cry about my fears," she said.

Chadwell decided to change this year, allowing her friends and teachers see the real her. This past year, she didn't block out her best friends, she won accolades directing a one-act play, and her soccer coach embraced her when she had the courage to say a sunset reminds her of her father.

"I lived free and in peace with myself for the first time," she said.

William Hudnut said he appreciates his classmates taking the time to say TSA supports and helps, but that's not what the school means to him. Instead of supporting students, TSA gives them space, he said.

"It gives you a place where you don't have to fit in and be someone for other people."

The Sharon Academy Class of 2016:

Fletcher Ambrose, Colorado State University; Bruce Atwood, Middlebury College; Carter Blanchard, Norwich University; John "Max" Boudreau-Perkins, Dalhousie University; Isabella Byrne, Smith College; Robin Chadwell, work in New York City; Katherine Elder, Lasell College; Lucia Gagliardone, Bowdoin College; Christopher Gish, University of Vermont; Marilyn Groppe, Rochester Institute of Technology; Asher Heaney, Maine Maritime Academy; Clara Henderson, Smith College; William Otis Hudnut, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; Maie Kimball, UVM; Jay Knoerlein, Ithaca College; Daniel Lazar, work in New York City; Emily Masteller, gap year; Laurel Mendelsohn, Keene State College; Lydia Roe, Swarthmore College; Patrick Sharpe, Montclair State University; Luna Skeet-Browning, travel; Mahar Sperling Gallatin, New York University; Gretta Stack, UVM; Jordan Stevens, Americorps; Quinn Thomashow, Hampshire College; Sebastian Torres, Universidad de Chile; Amelia Travers, Green Mountain College; Arne Wolz, Wentworth Institute of Technology; Clara Beth Young, work/travel.

