

# Shaker Heights High School Commencement 2020 Program Transcript

**DR. DAVID GLASNER**

*Superintendent, Shaker Heights Schools*

Welcome to the Shaker Heights High School Class of 2020 Virtual Commencement.

I am Dr. David Glasner, Superintendent of Shaker Schools.

We are glad you have joined us for this important celebration.

The Commencement ceremony you are about to watch has been pre-recorded. Given recent events, as we celebrate our graduates tonight, our hearts also go out to those who are hurting, here and throughout our country.

Racial unrest is gripping our communities and tens of thousands of families, including families in our community, are mourning the loss of friends and loved ones because of racism, violence and illness. We want to take a moment to honor and commemorate those who we have lost this year, including most recently: Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd.

So as we celebrate, we also mourn. Still, we remain hopeful.

Whatever challenges we face in the days ahead, we are confident that the members of this graduating class will contribute mightily to efforts that will help us create a more just and equitable country.

Our graduates will make our community, our nation and our world a better place.

Congratulations to the Class of 2020 and thank you all for watching.

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## **“POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE”**

*Edward Elgar, arr. Donna Jelen*

*Performed by the Shaker Heights High School Chamber Orchestra*

*Directed by Ms. Donna Jelen*

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**MS. HEATHER WEINGART**  
*Board of Education President*

Hello, I am Heather Weingart, President of the Shaker Heights City Schools Board of Education.

Welcome to this incredibly unique celebration honoring the Shaker Heights Graduating Class of 2020.

I know this is far from what we had all planned. It's as if you had climbed the mountain and just as the peak was in sight, fog rolled in. I think it's important to remember, though, that the peak was still there. The path just didn't look the same. Maybe our takeaway is that we should always set the goal knowing full well the plan to achieve that goal may change along the way.

We are so proud of this class for setting their goals and achieving their dreams. We are thrilled to celebrate your accomplishments and thank you for the joy and memories.

We know this moment in time is different than any other, ever, and we know you will take it and run with it as you race into your brightest future.

Congratulations Class of 2020!

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**MR. ERIC JULI**  
*SHHS Principal*

Students, parents, teachers, staff, district administrators, board members and honored guests-welcome to our graduation. I am Eric Juli, principal of Shaker Heights High School. Tonight we honor the graduating class of 2020. While this is my first Shaker Heights High School graduation, I think it's fair to say that our school has never had a graduation quite like this one, or a graduating class that has experienced their senior year in any similar fashion. We are of course here to honor and recognize the class of 2020. But before we turn our attention to our graduates, let's take a moment to ask our graduates to thank their first and most important teachers; you, their families', their loved ones, their care-givers. Take a moment at home to thank the people who pushed you and supported you on the way to your graduation tonight.

We have others to thank as well. If we were together, I would ask teachers and high school staff to stand up to be recognized. Please take a moment to think about teachers who helped you get to this graduation. Say their names out loud in recognition of the help they provided. Without our teachers' and staff efforts this year and every year, our graduates would not be receiving diplomas today. Thank you to our staff for your incredible efforts. I want to offer a special

thank you to Sara Chengelis and Kristen Miller. Without your efforts and attention to detail; this graduation ceremony could not have happened tonight. Thank you.

Now to our graduates. The class of 2020 would always have been special to me. You are my first graduates as principal of Shaker Heights High School. That you have faced this pandemic with grace, and dignity in the face of losing so many wonderful opportunities in your senior year just makes you even more special to me. Usually, I find graduation speeches fairly easy to write. I know what I want to say and I can get it onto paper fairly quickly. Not this time. I sat staring at my computer screen writing and deleting trying to find just the right words to address how each of you is feeling attending your own graduation virtually, and from home. And I finally realized that I don't have the right words, because I can't possibly understand how each of you is feeling. I know what you have missed intellectually. I know what you have given up because I've spent my entire life in school. But I don't know how you feel individually. I realized that while I can't possibly know how you feel, I do know how I feel. So instead of trying to respond to you, I humbly and respectfully offer you my perspective on this, your 2020 graduation.

Let me tell you a not so secret, secret. Eighteen year olds aren't usually known for thinking about other people. Not you. Your generosity of spirit and willingness to sacrifice for others is beyond reproach. What you have done for the people in our community is beyond generous. It is not an exaggeration to say that each and every one of you have saved lives by giving up your last months of senior year. The possibility of earning state championships would have been amazing; Rent would have been fantastic, attending and participating in spring sports with stories untold, being named prom king and queen, having a hopefully funny and not overly disruptive senior prank; you gave up all this and more. And there are people alive in Northeast Ohio today because of your sacrifices. I think that all of you should adjust your resumes with a line at the top. 2020: I saved lives by giving up so much that was important to me in my senior year. Sacrifice, a willingness to think of others, giving up something important for the good of others... These are all skills that will serve you well in college, in the workforce, in the military, in every step you take after graduation. I think you should own what you have accomplished in this pandemic. You have saved lives through your sacrifice. Make sure everyone knows it. I sure do.

I don't want to use all my time to dwell on what hasn't happened. Instead I want to look forward together. We often talk about graduation as if it's an ending. Certainly, you are ending your time at Shaker Heights High School, and you are ending your time in high school. You are saying goodbye to teachers, and to friends. But the reality is that while you are ending your K-12 education, you are beginning the next chapter of your life. Tonight you are filled with only potential. Let's not talk about the ending. Instead, let's talk about starting the next chapter.

We face many new beginnings as adults. I had a new beginning this past July when I began my new role as Shaker Heights High School principal. I had a new beginning when I moved to Cleveland nine years ago. I had a new beginning when I graduated from high school and when I graduated from college. I had a new beginning when I got married. But the new beginning I want to share tonight, seemed very much like an ending when it happened and not a beginning at all.

Thirteen years ago, I was a brand new father, living in Massachusetts. I wasn't yet a principal, and I didn't know how to be a parent yet, and sadly, my father was dying. I sat in his hospital room watching him face death, and as each day passed, he moved closer to the end of his life. My father was my greatest teacher, and he taught me two lessons that I continue to try to learn and improve upon today. I am still working hard to learn these lessons. And so, in this beginning of your next chapter, I pass these lessons on to you.

First, don't live a life filled with regrets and anger. You've argued with people. You've disagreed, you've failed at things you've tried, and you haven't tried things that you could have attempted. And these last few months haven't gone the way any of us wanted. Don't focus on what hasn't happened for you these last months or throughout high school. Don't focus on what you didn't get to do. Focus on what you have accomplished. I think lots of people, when faced with their own mortality want to change something about their lives. Or they want to travel or do something new, finally. My father, when faced with his own mortality, wanted to live the exact life he already had. He changed absolutely nothing. He kept teaching and living his exact life each and every day for as long as possible. He had not a single regret. I cannot say the same. I do have regrets. But as you head out into the world, aspire to create the life you envision, so way off in the distance, many years from now, when you are faced with your own mortality you won't want to change a single thing. As important, don't harbor resentments for what happened in the past. It will negatively affect your future. It's so difficult to move through life without regrets. But every new beginning is a fresh start. You have the opportunity to reinvent yourself in your next phase in life, no matter what you've chosen to do next. You get to leave behind the actions of your youth, and start to become the individuals you have the potential to be. Take advantage of this opportunity, and don't focus on what went wrong for you in the past. Focus instead on what you want to make right in your future.

The second lesson my father taught me that I want to pass on to you is this: Wake up each day, know who you are and what you have to accomplish that day, and go do it. It's easy to say and so difficult to accomplish. Knowing what you have to do each day could be as simple as cleaning your room, paying your phone bill, or mowing the lawn. But to really know who you are, you have to find your vision. What do you want to do? But in this case, the word do means accomplish. What do you want to accomplish in your life? What do you want to accomplish professionally? What do you want to accomplish financially? What do you want to accomplish in your relationships with friends, and families and finding someone you love? When you take time to answer these questions, the answers can, and should guide your actions each and every day.

Once I knew I wanted to become a principal, I figured out what steps I needed to take each year to make it a reality. Knowing the steps to take each year, guided me towards knowing what I had to do each month. And knowing what needed to happen each month, meant I could figure out what to do each and every day. What kind of person do you want to be? And how do you become that person? Know who you are, and what you want to accomplish each and every day. Doing that is the only way that I know to breathe life into your dreams. Ask any adult you know,

and every one of us will tell you that a life with dreams fulfilled is way better than a life with dreams that never became a reality. Know who you are and what you have to do that day, and then go do it. It's easy to say, and harder to do. Start doing it when you wake up tomorrow.

So what happens next? After our virtual graduation is over, I hope you have a small party., I hope it's socially distant, within state-guidelines, not too crazy, and I hope it brings you joy. I want you to take some well-deserved time to celebrate. You have certainly earned it. But tomorrow, or the day after that, when the party's over; what happens then? For some of you, it's preparing for college. Others of you are headed out into the workforce or the military. My last message to you tonight is simply this. Work hard. Take nothing for granted. And commit to reaching all your dreams by starting with effort. Once you figure out what you want to do, and how you want to do it in all the parts of your life, then you need to work hard. When you think you are working hard. Work harder. And then find a way to work even harder. You've proven you can take on big challenges and carry them to the finish line. And that's what life is about. We don't win at everything we try, but when we complete everything we attempt, we live successful lives to be proud of. Decide what is worth fighting for in your life. What dream is over there on the horizon, or over that mountain top. Decide what the next fight is, and go get it. Be tough, be brave and be strong-find your dreams first, and then make them real day by day and step by step.

Tonight is a beginning. You are ending your time at Shaker Heights High School, and closing the book on this chapter in your life. And you are beginning a new chapter of whatever is ahead. We'll always be here at Shaker Heights High School to answer your questions and give you guidance. But I know if you make effort and hard work your guide, you will be successful.

It has been my pleasure to be your principal this year. I wish I had more time to spend with each and every one of you. I am proud of all that you have accomplished already, and I wish you only the best as you take these next steps in your lives.

One of my favorite parts of the day beyond picking music between classes that you loved to complain about, is the daily words of wisdom. The words of wisdom were the first time you heard from me on the first day of school, so I thought it would be a nice way to hear from me for the last time at your graduation. So, here we go.

Good evening Shaker Heights High School. This is Mr. Juli with a few words of wisdom.

There's a proverb that says: When there is no vision, the people will perish.

That's an interesting thing to think about. What's your vision for tomorrow? What dreams are you dreaming? Now listen to this advice:

Whatever you can do or dream, you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Anybody out there with a vision? Start dreaming it today!

With something to think about, this is Mr. Juli. It's been my honor to be your principal. Make it a great life, or not. The choice, as always, is yours.

Thank you.

And now, three of your fellow graduates would like to share a few words to commemorate this evening.

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**GABRIEL GRISWOLD**

*Class of 2020*

Hello my name is Gabriel Griswold. When I first started, high school I was nervous. I, just like everyone else graduating today, had no idea what to expect. I can't help but look back and reflect on everything that we have been through. We saw change. We were met with hardship, and we overcame obstacles. In those times filled with challenges, and in those times filled with triumphs, there was always one thing that kept us all together: family. Not just our families at home, not just those friends who always stick together. A bigger family. A Shaker family.

In my time at Shaker, I've had the opportunity to travel the world, speak new languages, explore new ideas, grow as an artist and as a learner. I took part in the world's longest standing German/American exchange program, acted in school musicals, directed the marching band, and became a facilitator with SGORR. These opportunities did not come about through the will of one person or even a small group of people. These opportunities exist at Shaker because of the entire family of teachers that help us learn, administrators who guide us, parents, guardians and grandparents who work tirelessly to organize, students working diligently and of course, now us, alumni. We might be done with our time in school, but our time with this community, this family, is far from over. When I lived in a different country for 6 months, who was there for me? The Shaker family who had done the exchange before. When the band charges the field at halftime, the Shaker family cheers us on like no other. When students excel in their learning, the Shaker family pushes them to the next level. When we need that extra bit of help, the Shaker family helps keep us on the path to success.

To those teachers, parents, administrators and alumni who have helped us thus far: Thank you. To those students graduating today-- we did it, it all paid off. Let's all remember that even though it may seem like we are all on our own today, we're not. We are all part of this community and this family. The Shaker family. Thank you.

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**MADISON OWENS**

Class of 2020

Hello class of 2020. Although the slogan that is meant to encapsulate our year is “2020 vision”, I am more than positive that none of us saw this coming. In the copious amount of time that quarantine has afforded me, I have had the opportunity to reflect on this past school year, as well as all of my years at Shaker. During this time, I could not help but to think about how consumed I was with the thought of the future during my years in high school.

I constantly sacrificed quality time with my friends and family so that I could work on homework and study for tests, and as I look back, I sacrificed all of these things rather than living in the moment-- all for a future with no guarantee. Had I known that I would not have the chance to properly say goodbye to all of my friends at the high school, to the staff that were so kind to me, to the teachers that fostered my love for education, I would have spent my time a lot differently. I would have focused more on making memories than improving my GPA.

I hope that as a class, as we go forward living our individual lives, that we may always reflect on our graduating year, 2020, and allow it to serve as a reminder to relish in the moment. To never take anything for granted, especially time with our loved ones. All we have is the present, and it is an amazing gift.

Hellen Keller once said that “The best and most beautiful things cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart”. We are the best class because, although we are not able to graduate together physically, we are the first and only class to end our journey together in our hearts, and that is the most beautiful thing.

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**CECILIA ZAGARA**

Class of 2020

Hi, my name is Cecilia Zagara, and I’m honored to be giving this speech today. During my high school career, I have been part of the rowing team, basketball team, Model United Nations and student council. This summer, I will be heading off to attend The United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.

Like many others who have older siblings, I have sat through my fair share of Shaker graduations. After struggling to stay awake during my third ceremony, I sat there and wondered, “Do I really want to sit through this a fourth time?” Oops, I might have jinxed us.

But today, I can honestly say, “yes, I do want a graduation.” Today, the graduates are our friends who keep our secrets safe, our teammates who score the winning point, and our classmates who help us with homework. I wish we could all be together to celebrate this moment.

Looking back on our high school career, we have survived a raging fire, scary bomb threats, awkward first dates, endless advisories, and the 6:30 phone call.

At 6:30 am, we would love nothing more than the phone to ring cancelling school for a heat day or a snow day. And at 6:30 pm, we would dread the incoming call because it meant we were caught cutting class.

In our class, some of us will achieve our dreams next year, some in four, and some in ten. We could not have done it without truly excellent teachers, dedicated coaches, and a principal who genuinely cares. For this, I thank you, Shaker.

It goes without saying that we are all thankful to our parents, grandparents, guardians, and siblings who have supported us in all our extracurriculars.

My Grandpa once said, “Dream big, because the subconscious remembers every dream.” Successful people start with an idea and a dream. Who would have thought an app where pictures disappear after they are opened could be turned into a three and a half billion dollar company? In 2011, only three guys thought it was possible and they named it Snapchat. We could not have made it through high school without it. Now, we must believe in our dreams to create something for the future. What’s your million-dollar dream?

When I campaigned for president last year, I promised to give you guys an unforgettable prom. And now, I feel confident in saying that what happened to our prom this year, is unforgettable. We have lost some of the best parts of our senior year unless you consider the stresses of college applications to be fun.

Since kindergarten, we have worked hard to gain the right to walk across the stage and receive our diploma. Nothing, not even COVID can diminish our achievements. No longer do we look back on what we missed, but rather we look forward to the future. Whether we are going to college, getting a job, taking a gap year, or joining the military, we will be successful and achieve our dreams. After all, we do have 20/20 vision. Congratulations, we did it!!!

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**MR. MICHAEL MCELROY**  
*SHHS Class of 1985*

Hello Class of 2020. My name is Michael McElroy and I am from the class of 1985. And it is actually because of one of my fellow classmates who is a parent there celebrating today with you that I am here.

I know that this has been an incredibly difficult time as all these end moments of your senior year experience have had to be canceled because of this crisis that our world is in at this present time.

And I wanted to bring you something. Share something with you.

There's an organization called Broadway on Call that sends video messages and songs to doctors and nurses around the world who are musical theater lovers. One of the songs that we sent out is something I'd like to share with you.

I know also that you had to cancel your spring production of RENT, which is near and dear to my heart as I was fortunate enough to do on Broadway for many years.

So I got a few friends together, and I wanted to send you this message. Because I want you to remember that even though times are difficult and challenging and your senior years didn't end the way you wanted them to, when you look back on this time -- as I look back often at my time at Shaker -- even though I was a part of many shows and choir events, the thing that I most remember and that I'm still connected to are my friends. The people that I took those classes with and went on those trips with and sang next to.

So in this time that we have to stay disconnected, know that in the future you will remember and be connected to those people. And that we measure our lives not through events or the things we do or don't do but through the people who we love and who love us.

So I want to leave you with this message and wish you all the best. Take care.

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**“SEASONS OF LOVE” FROM RENT**

*Jonathan Larson*

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**DR. DAVID GLASNER**

*Superintendent, Shaker Heights Schools*

Good evening – and congratulations! I am Dr. David Glasner, Superintendent of Shaker Heights Schools. It is my great honor and pleasure to address the Shaker Heights High School graduating class of 2020!

Before I address our graduates, I want to take a moment to thank our families, staff, school board and community members who have supported our students in these challenging times.

Our graduates would not be receiving their diplomas without your support, your inspiration and your devotion.

Thank you!

The Class of 2020 holds a special place in my heart because we have known each other for quite a while.

I met many of you as your Middle School principal, when I first came to Shaker Heights and you were in 7th grade.

Last year, we reconnected when I was your interim principal at the High School.

It is an honor and a privilege to see how you all have grown, learned and matured and to celebrate this momentous occasion with you.

I know we are all sad and disappointed that we could not celebrate your graduation in person. Nevertheless, the current pandemic does not diminish your accomplishments, or the excitement that we all have for you.

Over a century ago, as many of you know, a deadly flu pandemic swept across the globe.

One survivor, Katherine Anne Porter, wrote about her experience.

"Don't you love being alive?" Porter wrote. "Don't you love weather and the colors at different times of the day, and all the sounds and noises like children screaming in the next lot, and automobile horns and little bands playing in the street and the smell of food cooking?"

Living through the pandemic made Porter appreciate the world around her. I imagine that when we look back at our experiences this year, we too will have a greater appreciation for the daily joys of being alive.

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to read and discuss Ibram Kendi's book *How to be an Anti-Racist* with other members of the Shaker schools community. Kendi was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer when he was only in his mid 30s and before he had fully finished his book.

In the face of personal crisis, Kendi recommitted himself to the struggle for social justice.

In an article that he wrote last year after his successful recovery from cancer treatment, Kendi impressed upon all of us the need to use the time we have on this earth to actively work toward advancing equality for all.

“If I could live on, why not be an antiracist?” he wrote. “Why not live to be fully human and see all others as fully human, and fight to ensure our policies see and treat all humans fully and equitably?”

Like Kendi, I challenge all of you to do the same. Take this moment that we live in, along with the tools and experiences that you have earned here in Shaker, and commit yourselves to taking action that will improve this world.

For this class of graduates, your lives so far have been bookended by extraordinary circumstances. You will enter your adult lives in a time of global crisis, and you were born at a time when the world was reeling from the September 11 attacks.

This past fall, we all had the opportunity to revisit the historical impact of this event at the September 11 Commemoration Ceremony held at Shaker Heights High School which was hosted by your fellow graduate, Caleigh Leiken, and Shaker Heights alumna and Senior Director of Education Programs at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, Megan Jones.

It was inspiring that one of our students took the lead on organizing such a special event.

It was also incredible to welcome back a Shaker graduate who works every day to make the world a better place.

Megan Jones is not alone.

In fact, Shaker alumni do amazing things all over this country and around the world specifically because of their Shaker education and experience.

Shaker graduates write best-selling novels that become hit television series, star in or produce Broadway shows, develop into elite athletes, serve as local, national and international leaders in politics, the military, arts and the media and, like our keynote commencement speaker, take on senior positions in multinational companies with the goal of advancing diversity, equity and inclusion.

After today, all of you will be joining the ranks of our alumni. I am confident that your voices and your actions will also help strengthen our community, our country and our world.

I'd like to close by sharing a few words of advice.

First, find something you love and keep studying it.

Second, make sure you choose a career that will keep you excited, even when you have to wake up early on a Monday morning.

And most important, in the words of our former First Lady, Michelle Obama, remember this:

“The secret to success is education.”

I know that in this room, Ms. Obama's advice is no secret. It is something you have all embraced, and will continue to embrace.

I am confident that this graduation is only the first of what will be many celebrations of your accomplishments to come.

At this time it is my great privilege to introduce our special guest speaker, Britta Wilson.

Ms. Wilson is Vice President of Inclusion Strategies at Pixar Animation Studios in California.

She is also a 1979 Shaker Heights High School graduate and a member of the Shaker Schools Alumni Hall of Fame.

Ms. Wilson, thank you for joining us and congratulations to the Class of 2020!

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**MS. BRITTA WILSON**

*Class of 1979*

*Vice President, Inclusion & Outreach, Pixar Animation Studios*

Helloooo Graduates, Parents, Grandparents, Brothers, Sisters, Aunts, Uncles, Cousins, Friends, Teachers, Staff, District Leaders, Board members, Neighbors and Pets.

Thank you for this opportunity to share in this wonderful accomplishment with you My apologies for not being in the same graduation regalia.

No disrespect. It's been a few years and I no longer have my Shaker cap and gown (PICTURE #1: White/cap & Gown), so I hope that this tam from my doctoral graduation will suffice.

I know that this whole virtual thing isn't the ideal nor the way you expected that you'd celebrate your graduation from high school.

But since we're here, let's try to make the best of it! So, let's go.

Some graduation speeches will tell you to pursue your dreams – I'm not going to tell you that. Others will tell you to take risks – I'm not going to tell you that either.

Quite a few will tell you to find your path – Nope, not going there.

Here's what I am going to tell you.

A Story:

Picture this, your family just moved to Shaker. You're scared about starting a new school. Will you make friends?

Enter Britta Wilson, President, Chair and Ambassador to the unofficial and unsponsored Welcoming committee.

Yup, I was that kid who welcomed every new student, made sure that they had someplace to sit for lunch and invited them to hang out with us where ever we were going.

You know, that kid.

In fact, even 'til this day, my friends call me the Diplomat because I'm always trying to make sure people feel connected & that they belong.

It's funny – despite being the Ambassador of the Welcoming Committee, when I graduated from Shaker a few years ago ..alright, it was a few decades ago, what I envisioned for myself was a career in law leading to an eventual appointment to the US Supreme Court, as the first African American female Chief Justice.

From the vast wisdom I had amassed from 17 years of living, I thought that one of the most impactful paths to shape our nation and its people, was most assuredly and unequivocally from the hallowed halls of the Supreme Court.

SMH - What did I know?

You see, I've come to realize that life has a funny way of giving you the seeds of a tree that you don't know what kind of fruit that tree will bear, you just have to nurture the seeds the best you can and see what grows.

After Shaker, I headed off to college with the single vision of the Supreme Court.

My family had relocated out of the area and frankly, outside of a couple of my pals from my graduating class, I had lost touch with the Shaker community.

So imagine my surprise a few years ago, when I received notice that I had been nominated for the Shaker Hall of Fame.

I completed the requested paperwork and later learned that I would, in fact, be inducted into it.

Admittedly, I didn't know that such a thing existed nor did I know initially who nominated me.

Over the years, I had simply honored my goals, tended to my seeds, by keeping focused on them - even if and when I felt unseen or devalued or when the rest of the world seemed out of focus.

Because of this, I think I have found myself in places and spaces I never would have imagined from my limited single vision view at 17 years old.

Imagine this, fresh out of UCLA, when I didn't get into the fancy schmancy law school of my choice, my counselor referred me to a friend of hers who was looking for someone to help out in his publishing company.

Her friend was Richard Wurman, architect, innovation guru and founder of this little gathering called Technology, Entertainment and Design.

Yep, fresh out of college, I helped plan what would be the first TED conference which evolved into the world renown TED talks.

I've had the opportunity to celebrate the centennial celebration for Paramount Pictures with Hollywood's elite & founding fathers.

I've traveled the world with Expedia and helped dozens of clients lead inclusively.

While it wasn't the Supreme Court, these were opportunities that I didn't imagine for myself

... and I now work here at Pixar- which is (snicker) pretty much as far as you can get from the Supreme Court.

We're a small little animation studio in Emeryville, CA. In case you've not heard of our films, I'll name some.

If any of them rings a bell, go ahead and cheer or clap. If you do it loud enough, I just might be able to hear you.

Toy Story, Finding Nemo or Dory...

Wait, you may be more familiar with The Incredibles, Cars, Inside Out, Coco...

I may be a little biased, but I think our little studio here has told some of the most heart-filled, compelling and thought-provoking stories around.

Often when I travel for work (back when we could travel for work), and folks see the Pixar logo on my screensaver, they will invariably tell me how this film caused them to think differently about something, or how it opened their lens.

If you think about our films, that's exactly what they do. In fact, many of them do so by considering "what if's"

What if – toys had feelings

What if – a rodent was French chef

What if – the monster world was actually powered by the energy from kids screams

What if – with a quest we could spend one more day with someone we love and lost

"What if's" start with a question that can lead to an impactful story.

"What if" questions invite our imagination to consider a story or an imagined reality we want to explore.

In fact, my job at Pixar is basically predicated on that. My role exists to pursue and achieve "what if's" for our stories and staff.

"What if" we were a more inclusive studio?

"What if" we attracted, retained and engaged the next generation of diverse storytellers who told stories from their lens and experiences?

That's my job!

When you challenge yourself to "what if", you suspend logic and land in the imagination; you remove the guardrails and guarantee adventure

One of the things that my team challenges others to do, is to open their aperture and see things from a wider lens or broader perspective in order to consider things that may not have been in our view.

Or, to abandon what we all tend to operate from – our single vision.

In our work in Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, this means including the voices and perspectives of those unseen, unheard or unvoiced.

In photography, a higher aperture setting is better for when you want everything in your shot to be in focus.

We want the focus of our stories to be inclusive of everyone. We don't want to leave anyone out of the shot, or in our case, story.

That's what "What If" and an opened aperture will do.

You know at the beginning of this, I acknowledged that this is likely not how you envisioned your senior year.

But I'm going to challenge you to open your aperture on this virtual senior year experience and see it from a broader perspective.

What else can you bring into focus?

I'm also going to challenge you to pen your "What if?"

You've got time now; your schoolwork is done - you've completed & apparently passed all of your finals. You're graduating now!

Take the time, before you go off to whatever is next on your journey.

Jot it down and save it. Periodically, look back at it and see how you've fared.

I didn't do a "what if" exercise when I graduated from Shaker, but deep inside, I must have pondered, "what if" I can play a part in changing the world.

While I thought that the path was through the Supreme Court, my opportunity to change the world is actually via the work we do right here.

It's right here in the stories that we tell.

Stories are powerful.

They shape our views. They create connections. They inspire. They open apertures. They transform.

As a result of the seeds that were planted from my childhood experiences right there in Shaker, I knew that equity, inclusion and compassion would be central to my story.

No, I didn't know if, how or where those seeds would bear fruit. It's only been in looking back over my story, did I discover how integral Shaker was.

So, what's the Cliff Notes version (wait, do they even still have those?)

What's the summary of what I've said over the last approximately eight minutes and 24 seconds:

#1: Being willing to cultivate the seeds that you're given because they may open up the door to spaces and places you couldn't have imagined for yourself (TED y'all – really?)

#2: Asking yourself "what if" is a great path towards the discovery of a great story

#3: Look at situations, esp. maybe those that aren't ideal with your aperture open

Before I end to your thunderous applause all across northeast OH, I'd like to thank to Phyllis Burks, who nominated me for the Shaker Hall of Fame (PICTURE #3: HOF Group Pic).

It is that award which reconnected me to Shaker and facilitated me standing here before you today. Sadly, we lost Phyllis a few weeks ago to a long hard-fought battle with cancer.

But, I promise you that she wrote a lovely story of strength, tenacity, faith and love.

What is the "what if" that will be the catalyst for your story?

To each of you, the 2020 graduates of the BIG S-H-H-S (Shaker Heights High School) from the depths of my heart and from the center of the Pixar Animation Studios campus,  
CONGRATULATIONS!

And to your parents, Parents, Grandparents, Brothers, Sisters, Aunts, Uncles, Cousins, Friends, Teachers, Staff, District Leaders, Board members, Neighbors and Pets – Thank you. You did good! I know that it takes a village!

Be inspired. Be well. Be safe. Be blessed.

And I will leave you with this quote (which also happens to be the title) of our last release:  
"Onward"

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**DR. DAVID GLASNER**  
*Superintendent, Shaker Heights Schools*

Thank you Ms. Wilson for your inspiring message to our graduates.

Now, as superintendent, it is my honor to lead the certification of graduates.

Mr. Juli, do you certify that this year's graduates have met the requirements of the state of Ohio, the Shaker Heights Board of Education, and the Shaker Heights City School District?

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**MR. ERIC JULI**  
*SHHS Principal*

Dr. Glasner, it is my absolute pleasure to certify that these graduates have met the requirements of the State of Ohio, Shaker Heights Board of Education and the Shaker Heights City School District.

Now, let's present our Shaker Heights Class of 2020 Graduates!

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**LIST OF GRADUATES**  
*Submitted videos and photos*

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**"SHAKER HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL ALMA MATER"**  
*Performed by senior members of the A Cappella Choir*  
*Directed by Mr. Mario Clopton-Zymler*

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**MR. ERIC JULI**  
*SHHS Principal*

Class of 2020, we have come to the end of our graduation program. I want you to know that you have made our entire community so proud. It's time to turn your tassels. Please stand up. Shaker Heights High School graduates of the Class of 2020, please turn your tassels from right to left.

Congratulations! You've done it!

From your homes, please join us in congratulating the Class of 2020.

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## SHHS FACULTY AND STAFF CONGRATULATE THE CLASS OF 2020

**Ms. Myriam Neil:** Class of 2020, to a special class, special circumstances. It's been a joy accompanying you through high school. Go and make the world a better place.

**Ms. Jamison Kolaczko:** Congrats y'all! I'm so proud of you! Remember, make good choices, do good things.

**Mr. Don Readance:** Hey Shaker Heights High School Class of 2020. You guys did it! It was a rough ending but you all crossed that finish line and that's all that matters. Wish you all the best. You guys have bright futures ahead. Good luck to all of you!

**Ms. Khadeja Sherrill:** Hi Class of 2020! Bye Class of 2020!

**Mr. Raymond Durban:** Of all the classes I have ever taught, the very special Shaker Class of 2020 is .... the most recent. Know that I love you. May graduating in a pandemic inspire and create in you the determination and resilience to follow your heart and achieve your dreams.

**Ms. Paula Damm:** <<Gives the thumbs up>>

**Mr. Keaf Holliday:** Congratulations to the Class of 2020! You made it!

**Mr. James Schmidt:** Congratulations, Class of 2020! You're resilient and I know you'll come out of this stronger for it.

**Ms. Robin Sweigert:** Congratulations on your graduation and best wishes for your next adventure. If you need anything, just email me. I'll be there for you.

**Ms. Mae Morrical:** Hey, Shaker Raiders Class of 2020. This is Mrs. Morrical in the main office wishing you the best of luck. Come back and see us!

**Ms. Kimberly Owens:** Shaker Heights Class of 2020, may you be remembered not by the circumstances of today but by what you accomplish tomorrow. Congratulations!

**Ms. Tiara Sargeant:** Congratulations to the Class of 2020 for graduating! Good luck on your adventures!

**Mr. Greg Zannelli:** Congratulations, Shaker graduates of 2020 from Mr. Z! And remember, the force will be with you, always.

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**“LA REJOISSANCE”**

*George Frideric Handel, arr. Matthew Naughtin*

*Performed by the Shaker Heights High School Chamber Orchestra*

*Directed by Ms. Donna Jelen*