

## Lifestyle

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## Pomp and Circumstances

By Patti Verbanas



It's been 21 years since I graduated and stood before my classmates at Immaculata High School in Somerville giving the valedictorian address. Eighteen is often the first major crossroads we approach in our lives. And the decisions we make at this tender and volatile age send far-reaching ripples out into the depths of our future decades.

This year, my niece, Rion, graduates from high school and embarks on her next phase. It's an exciting, tumultuous time, and it makes me recall the few bits of wisdom I had back then — ideas I shared with my classmates. The occasion of Rion's graduation gave me the opportunity to realize how very many of these tenets have served me well. I decided to

share them with her in her graduation card, which she could decide to keep or throw away as bunk. That's the liberty we had at 18 — and still do today.

The glorious thing is that regardless of our stages in life, in some ways we are always 18, always at some sort of crossroads. We should continuously be discovering "what we want to be when we grow up" — whether that calling be in terms of careers, family, or leisure-time pursuits. We should always surround ourselves with good people and laugh regularly. And making decisions for the right reasons will never leave you cold.

In this season of graduations, I wanted to share with you my letter to Rion. Maybe there's something here you can glean for the graduate in your life or perhaps you, like me, will find these ideas still salient.

Dear Rion,

Congratulations on completing high school. Now, it's on to the great adventure of being the author of your life.

When I was 18, there were certain ideas that I used as a roadmap to what lay beyond. Like a traveler who stops to collect the interesting rocks and leaves, I likewise have gathered more ideas along the way. This year, I turn 40 and have the wisdom to know that these tenets have guided me well. I want to share a few of them with you as you prepare to jump off the swing and into your adult life:

No matter what field you study, never assume you know what you want to be when you "grow up." Your vocation and passions are ever evolving and assuming anything blocks serendipitous encounters.

When I was in college and people would ask me what kind of job I wanted to have when I graduated, I'd always respond: "I don't know. But I do know that the best job will come to me." And it always has. All I knew was I wanted to spend my days at places where I would laugh a lot — because I loved my work and enjoyed my coworkers. I sought employment that fed me spiritually and challenged my talents. I've had five jobs since college and I've loved each one. While at in school, take note of those activities that make your heart race with the anticipation of starting them or that give you that sense of hard-won satisfaction when your day is done. (Hint: You may not find these activities in the classroom.) You'll never be disappointed.

Going through life without regrets is one of the best gifts you can give to yourself. Before making a decision, first gather the most knowledge you can about your situation and make your move with the best, most pure intentions. You might second-guess that later as you gain knowledge and experience, of course, but you cannot have any regrets because you will be secure in knowing that you had made the best, most informed decision you could at that time.

Live in the moment. Respect the past, plan for the future, but live in the now. That is your only true reality, and when you engage your senses and focus on the moment, you will experience the miracles — even in the mundane.

You are talented, valuable, and strong. Believe that, live that, and others will, too.

I can continue with more, of course, but you need the space to figure some out on your own. I leave you with this: The world is a vast and glorious playground. All it asks is that you go out and explore. And for that, you will be endlessly rewarded.

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