

# Dimission

Herlufsholm Skole og Gods  
onsdag d. 27. juni 2018

Dear students, dear IB graduates - dear graduates from Herlufsholm - year of 2018

*"Mankind has foolishly ordained to place all exams in June when the nightingale is singing and the roses are blooming; there is no alternative for the poor young-sters who ought to enjoy themselves in field and meadow but to forget the roses outside and ensconce themselves with their books to carry out more or less needed reviews of the syllabus"* - Emma Gad "Takt og Tone" (Rules of Eti-quette)-1918.

How great it is to look at all of you - in your white caps and with your red eyes. - Red, maybe because of last night's festivities or maybe because of the sadness of knowing that today marks your last day and your last party at the school as diple (students). As we all know, the paradox of graduating is that one is both happy and sad at the same time. Happy to have reached one's goal, but also sad that one's time here has come to an end.

You did it! You have been through quite a lot these past weeks to get to today. I cannot imagine that you have had time to focus on anything other than your last ordeals - you did it! A hearty congratulation on your exam and your time at the school.

While you were reviewing your coursework last week on June 19, 2018, one of our time's great poets, Michael Strunge, would have celebrated his 60th birthday.

Michael Strunge died young - he was only 27 years old when he jumped out of a window from the 5th floor in Webersgade on Østerbro. Maybe he himself chose death - or maybe death chose him. He was ill (manic), and his last words to his girlfriend were, tragically, "*Now I can fly*".

At the time - back in 1986 - when Michael Strunge died on March 9th, I was 15 years old and stood with one foot on the threshold to my student life and my life as a young man. Michael Strunge has always been an integral part of my generation - and of my heart. However, I barely understood that at the time. The words he wrote. But as the years have passed, his words have unfolded in new and meaningful ways and embraced me.

As a boy from Kolding wearing a camo jacket and semi-long curly hair - yes, that was me as a young man - the Copenhagen punk universe at the time seemed far away. The fact that a young man would dye his hair black, wear eyeliner and write poems was slightly beyond what people from Jutland could handle. Michael Strunge was a punk poet. But he wasn't embraced by the punk movement ... it was too middle-class to write poems. Punk music was trendier than poems ... And some people even thought that Michael Strunge's poetry imitated David Bowie - just without the electricity.

I wonder who the great poet of your generation is going to be: Yahya Hassan, Caspar Eric or ... one of you?

We don't know yet, but if no one comes along, Michael Strunge is still young and ready to embrace you. When I look at you happy Graduates, there is a passage in one of Strunge's poems that comes to mind in particular:

Please listen to a passage from his poem "Rebel" from "Skriigerne" (The Scream-ers), 1980. He was 20 years old - I have to warn of provocative words.

THE DAYS HAVE FILLED YOU WITH HOURS  
OF ENRAGING BOREDOM  
THE PARENTS HAVE FILLED YOU  
WITH TAME COMFORT AND GROSS DEMANDS.  
THE TEACHERS HAVE FILLED YOUR BRAIN  
WITH PLATITUDINOUS FACTS.  
THE EMPLOYERS HAVE FILLED YOUR FACE  
WITH REJECTIONS OF YOUR SELF-CONFIDENCE.  
THE NEWSPAPERS HAVE FILLED YOUR SOUL  
WITH FEAR AND FUTURE THREATS  
YOU YOURSELF HAVE JUST TURNED EIGHTEEN  
AND HAVE FILLED YOURSELF WITH ALCOHOL AND NOISE.  
YOU WALK OUT IN THE STREET-NIGHT'S SLEEPY DISTRACTION  
AND WORDLESS SOUNDS.

So what can you students learn from Strunge's life and words? Maybe the courage to unfold your talent - even when it is not fashionable? Or more than that ... since Strunge's poems are about rebellion and crying out, having the courage to show one's vulnerability. They are about pain and loneliness, about beauty and love, about restlessness and doubt, and about searching and dreaming. They are about youth, life and the present. They are about you.

But please do remember that no one can fly. Even the greatest talent has to land on his or her feet in order to continue. And even though you now are flying away from the school, let that remain metaphorically speaking. Continue out into the bright nights, take care of each other, lose your footing briefly and then fall back onto your feet. Or even better - fall back onto your roots - for you have roots in-deed.

When the bright nights are waning and the red in your eyes is disappearing, new times and new challenges are beckoning. Then you have to make the leap and fly like playful butterflies on the very first day of summer across fields and meadows - and, yes, across new pastures other than Nyhave.

And what will your future circumstances be, and which choices will you have to make - how is it to be young and a graduate in 2018 - it is not the same reality as the one I was in when Michael Strunge wrote his poems - many of the jobs or elements of life that will be yours do not even exist today, and changes come quicker than ever before. That puts pressure on you.

The author Camilla Skovgaard speaks in a new book about young people like you that students in the 8th grade already feel pressured by the expectation that they are supposed to know what they want to do with their future life.

She says that,

*"There is youth and then there's the future - and it is so imperative that we distinguish between the two and let youth be youth and future be future. Unfortunately we forget that youth is an important time which has value in and of itself and which is not just about performing but also about figuring out who you are and how to make choices."*

Making choices is also the theme for Tine Thygesen, CEO and a member of the Government's entrepreneurship panel who provocatively asks in the online magazine Finans (mid May issue),

*"What have you done that you weren't forced to do? What have you created? Who have you helped, and what have you learned on your own?"*

So, dear Class of 2018 - how did you spend your youth here, what did you choose, and what did you create?

You originally made the choice to become Herlovians with sea shells on your shirts - not as a decoration but as a symbol of the deeper, more fundamental values of showing accountability, engagement and academic rigor. You have had to repeat these choices day after day, week after week, year after year in countless words and likewise actions in order to live up to not just Herluf Trolle and Birgitte Gøye's wish for a school that furthered your academic abilities but also in order to create the foundation for your own identity.

If we could turn over today's diploma, and if we could read on the back side about all that you have created, participated in or moved, one would be quite impressed. This diploma would - with respect to content and quality - in all regards match your diploma showing your exam results. You are sitting here today with skills that are innumerable, varied and great - and you have not just obtained these skills in the classroom.

Through these choices and your time at the school you have also created a community that is unequalled anywhere. Whether you have been here for a short time or a long time, whether you were boarders or day students, you are now inextricably bound together in a community the magic of which will beat Hogwarts' any time.

And you are needed, your skills and community feeling are needed more than ever. We live in a time where integrity and honesty at times are pushed aside by spin and fake news. Where the most influential opinion makers are pop stars and where Herluf Trolle and Birgitte Gøye's ideal is under threat. The ideal that the foundation for a leading role in society is created through knowledge, skills and the right values.

We also live in a world where individualism continues to be ranked higher than the community, and where our basic need to belong has drowned in the fear of opening yourself up to the unknown. Our time seems to have partially forgotten how valuable relations between us as human beings are for all of us and our shared history - and that is a sad sad thought.

But that is not what you want. A month ago the school had its 16th anniversary gathering where 300 old Herlovians showed up. I spoke with students from 2008 and 2013 who combined made up 100 of the returning alumni - old Herlovians. I asked, *"Why are there so many of you?"*. And each time the answer was, *"We were such a good year that stuck together - we and our time at the school mean so much to us."*

And you - year of 2018 - are also a good year. Through your solidarity with each other and the school that you now leave for a while, you can help to put the focus on integrity, honesty, knowledge, skills, commitment and accountability wherever you go. As individuals, as members of the class of 2018 and as global citizens - you can do it and I know that you will do it - like the students before you - as a testament to your inheritance as sons and daughters of Herluf Trolle and Birgitte Gøye.

You have been in charge of many things and have created the life and playfulness necessary at our joint school - among the things that can be measured, I can mention that you became the year with the highest SRP average in the school's history, and I can also divulge now that the GPA of your year is as high as 8. You can be proud of yourselves - the way we are.

The numbers are impressive, but to me the defining moment for you as a class came when you dared to leap across the Hell's Gap in 2.g with the performance, "Ronja, the Robber's Daughter".

The story is by Astrid Lindgren, and I opened the performance using her words that "you cannot beat anything into children, but you can get a lot out of them by applauding them" - we applauded you a lot back then - and rightly so - the way that we also do here today.

In the story of Ronja, her birth splits the Mattis castle into two parts with a chasm - called "Hell's Gap" - in between them. This chasm splits the possible future unity between the Mattis and the Borka gangs. Throughout her childhood she lives with the separation, symbolized by the fact that Ronja's father and mother tell her that she has to stay away from Hell's Gap. As her father, Mattis, says, *"If you fall into Hell's Gap, you're done doing anything!"*

On the opposite side we have Birk of the Borka clan, and in a defining moment in the play where it seems that both families have lost a child to this division, Ronja realizes what she has to do. It is unselfish, and it is courageous bordering on being reckless - but it is the only way if she wants to save the unity with Birk that she desires. She starts running, takes a leap and Ronja goes flying across the deep Hell's Gap and she lands on her feet. But the leap has caused something that changes everything.

That is how it has been for you Graduates of 2018 - everybody who saw you perform the play knew that the night before the dress rehearsal on Friday and the main performance on Saturday you had received the unexpected and shocking news of the tragic death of your classmate and year-mate Mads Nørgård Larsen.

A Hell's Gap had opened up for all of us, and no words could change that. And you Class of 2018 - at much too young an age - had been faced with the tragedy of losing a friend - a feeling that is still vivid today.

I remember your faces when you rehearsed until the end - it was not the play that shaped your expressions - it was the grief. I also remember how tears were welling up when you had to enact how Skalde-Per dies and is carried off the stage - but most of all I remember how you stood together and lit a light in the dark for all of us - out of respect and love for your friend, his family and your unity.

I know that many of you have stepped up to help and support the family - both before and after Mads died, and even though such a wound never heals, you showed what you represent and who you are. I like to say that we do not always choose our circumstances, but what you can choose is how you act under these circumstances - and you did the right thing. Mads does not graduate today, but he is here in the room, through you as his class of 2018.

When we lose someone we love, it happens that some fall, but others keep standing - it is all about having roots and being able to stand firm - easy to say, difficult to do when adversity brings you to your knees.

But no one is standing as firmly on their roots than you Herlovians. When I look at all of you, one can be awestruck by the thought that you are the year of graduates following 453 years of school operation. It makes you special, and it makes Herlufsholm special - the fact that you could celebrate our founder Herluf Trolle's 500-year anniversary together, and the fact that we were bestowed by him and his strong wife Birgitte Gøye not just a piece of land, but a foundation on which to build. A foundation which even today stands firm - which is our roots.

The wings of history create an airstream among you that will be able to lift you for the rest of your life with all its leaps - yes, actually almost to a state that resembles flying - so, dear graduating class of 2018, please take each other's hands and know that what you are really holding is each other's hearts - take each other's hands and leap across all the chasms that may open up - you will land on your feet.

You may stumble when you land - especially if life gives you a blow and you have to rectify the damage - but that

is also learning. You can also use your feet and let them come to a standstill if you don't agree with the direction - and you have done that as well. You have also cried out and rebelled - well, actually let your "spring calling" sound loud and clear across the Skovkloster lands - just a little part of the many memories that constitute your time at Herlufsholm.

Now your high school years here come to a close, lived in the soft shadows of the crow-stepped gables of the old, red building, and you take the leap ahead. Thank you for each minute, each word, each action that came from you. Thank you to faithful dorm teachers, teachers, parents and to everybody who out of love pushed when necessary. It is an expression of a generosity which you can now continue - well knowing that we human beings show through generous acts that we are of noble background.

I am now back where I started - with Michael Strunge's posthumous words that will stand forever ... he whispers gently into your ears in 1985 with "My Poem".

*The night bows in growth  
and the days wash your face.  
You step through sleep  
and open a door to the sun.  
There, not in your own light,  
you carry the body  
pulsing with blood.  
This is where you are human now  
and you go in search of your time .*

Go in search of your time, Class of 2018 - with these word I hereby de-clare you to be graduated - congratulations.

