

Dimission

Herlufsholm Skole og Gods
Wednesday, June 26th 2019

Dear students, dear IB graduates - dear graduates from Herlufsholm - Class of 2019.

“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 youngsters who ought to frolic 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 Etiquette) 1918.

The words belong to Emma Gad in “Takt og Tone” (Rules of Etiquette), and even though 101 years have passed since she wrote them, I am sure that you, dear students, will agree with her that the past month and a half has felt long, and that there has not been much frolicking in field and meadow. But now you are sitting here, happy, getting into a festive mood in the good company of each other and your closest family, and wearing caps that symbolize your high school diploma. Caps which will not leave your heads for the next many weeks as they gradually start looking more and more lived-in and worn out by parties and celebrations, the way you also will start looking yourselves. A huge congratulation with the caps and the diploma you will receive in a moment and take with you when you - like playful butterflies - will fly away from Herlufsholm.

Regarding the diploma, Emma Gad continues with a message to you, the parents:

“If the examinees suffer all kinds of mental anguish, then the mother (and the father) certainly suffer along with them, when she (they) sit at home waiting for the exam results.”

Here, I will minimize this anguish right away. You became the clan with the highest SRP average in the school’s history, and I can also divulge now that the GPA of your class is one of the best that a class from Herlufsholm has ever achieved. A GPA of an impressive 32.4 for our IB graduates and 8.0 for our STX. In other words, you can take away a diploma that is evidence of a time with great academic gain and be proud of yourselves - the way we are.

But where did the time go, dear graduates? Especially this past year when Herlufsholm has enjoyed having you as the 215th government and our guardian angels in white?

I don’t quite know - when you started this school year, Denmark said goodbye to the poet and composer Benny Andersen whose life ended at the age of 88.

In many ways his words express my experience of the passage of time with you.

Time

*We have twelve clocks in the house
yet time does not suffice
One walks into the kitchen
to get chocolate milk for one's skinny son
but when you return
he's become too old for chocolate milk
demands beer, girls and revolution
We must use the time while we have it*

*One's daughter comes home from school
Goes out to play hopscotch
returns a little later
and asks if you could babysit the little one
while she and her husband go to the theatre
and while they are at the theatre
the little one is promoted with some difficulty
to 3.g.*

- excerpt from the poem "The Time" from "Here on the Reservation", 1971, by Benny Andersen.

That is how it feels to me. A moment ago you were standing here as new Herlovians at the school, and today we celebrate the end of your time as diple. Do you remember your first sight of the school when you arrived, excited, nervous and full of anticipation? Do you remember your first friendship? The first dance, your first victory and some of the defeats you had pick yourself up from, and the people who helped you? Do you remember your first kiss and the first time you felt that you belonged to a community? Did you feel part of the history - your own and the school's? I hope you did, for it was your time, each and every one of you.

I know that you will be missed - by me, by the many people who belong at the school, students as well as staff, and right now I cannot help feeling that you will be difficult to do without. We came to the high school together - at what seems a long time ago - I as new headmaster and you as freshmen in 1.g. But as you now pack books from cabinets and other things in moving boxes, I unpacked my last moving box just last week. You are now leaving, off on new adventures - I unpack for the next school year. That is how time is - in many ways a strange phenomenon.

Your time in 2.g is very clear in my mind. Here, you showed your mettle at the Comedy Ball where you worked together and were creative and persistent. It was in connection with the play "The Ruling Class" - a play that requires courage to put on. Courage that the Royal Theatre only has had once way back in 1971. You wanted to communicate the story about a wealthy paranoid schizophrenic man who thought he was Jesus. On top of that, the audience had to be made to realize that he had gotten some of these mental challenges by attending a boarding school.

Your collaboration on a difficult play was impressive, and you did an exemplary job!

But most of all I want to dwell on your last weeks in 3.g. Here everything is in play and at stake, and as the oldest class you have had great opportunities to influence the rest of the school's diple in a positive manner, through your examples to be followed. It has been a pleasure to witness how you have lived up to that responsibility in a way I would like to mention specifically - from Fugleskydning and throughout the year until Pø fight, it has been clear that you as the oldest class have wanted to be important culture

bearers for all diple. You have done your part to ensure that Herlufsholm is a school where the community is for everybody, and where you as seniors have not wanted to promote yourselves at the expense of others. In this manner you have managed to lift yourself and the class to new heights, and for this and our time with you, the school and I would like to thank you greatly.

Also a thank you to you parents for trusting Herlufsholm. High school is a period in young people's lives where we as parents see our influence gradually reduced and replaced by a community of friends. Thank you for having the courage and trust to let us be part of your child's journey through this exciting time, the many-splendored years of youth.

I will encourage you students to use your last days here to the fullest - seize the day - use them to swing by the dorm teachers, hørere, other staff or diple to acknowledge and thank them. I have talked with many Herlovian alumni who can mention one or more persons who have had a decisive, positive influence on their time at the school - do not forget your significant persons. That may be the most meaningful thing we humans can be - something for each other - so do remember that before your time at the school as diple finally comes to an end.

A new time lies ahead of you, a time with changes that can be scary and exciting at the same time. What are you going to do now, which advice and paths are you going to follow? There are plenty of opinions about that.

I will give you three pieces of advice to use on the road, and my first is;
“Be skeptical and don't trust everything you read - and do not be afraid.”

The ability to see the big picture and be able to evaluate data has never been as challenging as it is today. You have to be able to sort through a greater deal of information than ever seen before. In this jungle of news and stories, it can be difficult to know what to believe - what is true and what is false. It threatens our faith in our foundation as people and our mutual trust in each other. It threatens democracy itself.

Many of you have just exercised your democratic right and duty by voting for the first time in the elections in May and June. You had to think critically and make decisions based on the news stream that you are confronted with on a daily basis. How does one do that, whom and what do you believe? It is a challenge you have to be able to handle. In addition, we live in a time when the democratic education process has been undermined by misinformation, and our most important problems are no longer national but extend past country borders and political systems. It is yet another challenge, but right now there seems to be a movement - especially by you young people - towards a greater degree of putting action behind rhetoric when crucial problems regarding our joint future must be solved. It takes critical awareness and ability to act, and suddenly unexpected heroes pop up, such as the 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg who fights on behalf of your generation with a commitment and willpower that few adult decision makers have been able to muster so far.

So at a time when a new concept is trying to take hold of you young people - climate fear - Greta's example inspires us to act and refrain from becoming scared or indifferent to the challenges - and instead seek to be a part of the solutions. Not just on the individual or national level - but also on a global one. To me, it is a strong example of how you young graduates can let go of the “me thought” and combine your efforts to create a better world, locally as well as internationally - and that creates hope for all of us.

To be young should not mean to be afraid, but instead be signified by the insouciance that sometimes is the absolute right method to solve serious problems. Here, critical thinking can contribute to being able to act and to take the right action when it is important - without becoming fearful.

My second piece of advice to you is;
“Better go wrong, than not go at all.”

The words may seem a little cynical, but they are said with love, and they are, in my opinion, very timely. Our time and the social media that are used to promote our actions and self-image have in combination with a performance culture and the rat race for high grades created a young adult life where more young people fail to thrive and exhibit symptoms of stress. Many young people put far too great an emphasis on any action they may take. They imagine that these actions will have a potential negative effect on the rest of their lives. Many people think the good result is worth more than the good process that has led to a less splendid result. We praise the perfect, the good result at the first attempt, more than people who - undeterred - pick themselves up from mistake after mistake and still make it to the goal. We have created a focus on grades and results which not necessarily is healthy. Throughout your high school years, we have told you that your results and achievements will influence what you can study. But the grade point average may not be high enough for your dream education - and then what do you do? Try to remember this: Happiness does not lie in what you become, but in who you become. And in order to find yourself and who you are, you have to test yourself, make mistakes and get to know yourself through actions that are not always perfect. When we ask you young people to scrutinize each choice so carefully for its consequences, it is no surprise that many young people lose courage.

Don't lose courage - believe in yourself and take off, make mistakes and pick yourself up, get back on your feet - made stronger not weaker. It is not about becoming something, but about being yourself - that is where one part of happiness lies.

My third piece of advice to you is;
“Cherish the fellowship and be generous.”

To cherish the fellowship and be generous are to me the essence of being a student from Herlufsholm - you show your nobility through acts of generosity - and it therefore makes me very happy to know that you will have each other and the fellowship in the years to come. It is your inheritance from the school, and you have created it yourselves through acts towards each other and by cherishing the friendships you have gained. They will last for the rest of your lives. It may be difficult to relate to concepts such as “for the rest of your lives” on a day like today, but let me give you a strong example of what it means.

A few days before you started school in 3.g, the Herlovian alumni Finn Kirstein died at the age of 78. He was surrounded by his family in Germany, where he had lived for almost 30 years. At the school's anniversary this year in May, he would have celebrated 60 years as a Herlovian alumnus. A year before he died, the school received a package whose content he wanted a dipel to have. You may wonder what was in the package? What was it that he had so laboriously and carefully wrapped and mailed off?

The content was Finn Kirstein's school blazer which he had worn 60 years ago when he graduated from high school at Herlufsholm. The act of returning the blazer both moved me and commanded my greatest respect. The fact that he - 60 years after he had left Herlufsholm - still had kept the three shells on the Gøye shield near by and in his heart, says a lot about the importance of the school to him and about himself. A witness of the love for the school throughout a long life, and the strong connections to the people with whom he had shared his time at the school. All this symbolized in the blazer sent to a new generation - a wonderful gesture.

Today you are the ones to leave with a blazer in your wardrobe; and its shield is - as you know - not just a decoration. I hope that you will carry the shield in your hearts and with dignity the way others have done before you - in witness of your fellowship.

In a little while you will receive your diploma - and the excellent results in it. Results that you can be proud of and which you bring with you when you walk behind the altar to our founders Herluf Trolle and Birgitte Gøye. But know this - 454 years ago they wanted to create a school for the children of nobles and other honest men - their vision was to make Herlufsholm support their academic and personal development so that you Herlovians always would be defined by your decency and ability to do right - therefore, meet our founders in the crypt and send them the thought that their visions came true and are now yours, and that you will fulfill your promises to them, now and in the future.

That promise is a part of the unwritten diploma that you take with you, and it is as important as the written diploma that you are going to receive. It can open a series of doors, but you have to go through them yourself - I wish for you that you may walk through all doors courageously, knowing that you are never alone but always have someone from the fellowship by your side. I wish that your time at the school may lead to new exciting times, where you are living a vibrant life in the moment, the way Piet Hein expresses it:

Living in the Moment

*To live in the moment's a well-worn routine
that most of the world has perfected;
for some, it's the moment that's already been,
for others, the one that's expected.*

*Yet no sort of magic can kindle anew
a past that is over forever,
nor summon the future before it is due:
our moment is now - or it's never.*

*So brief is the moment in which we may live,
and future or past it isn't.
Whoever would know of what life has to give
must gratefully welcome the present.*

by Piet Hein a.k.a Kumbel (1905-1996), Denmark

Dear Class of 2019, the moment is now and it is yours!

With these words I hereby declare you to be graduated - congratulations.