

June 21, 2023

Speech at the graduation ceremony on June 21, 2023

(the spoken word applies)

Dear parents, hørere, stander and - first and foremost - dear graduates,

A warm congratulation to all our IB and Danish graduates, their families and all their teachers and dorm teachers as well. My speech will be on our website in English from tomorrow - please allow me this afternoon to go on in Danish due to our school's roots, our founders, and our tradition.

Dear class of 2023,

It is with great joy and a certain amount of sadness that I stand here today to graduate you. You have been a very special year. When Herlufsholm's story is told in the future, you will go down in the school's history as the students who have experienced the greatest changes - in the shortest time.

When the school was founded on May 23, 1565, Herluf Trolle and Birgitte Gøye wrote that the school was for the children of noble and honest men. That Herlufsholm was both for children of the nobility, but also for children who had the desire and ability for learning and education. At the time, this was very forward-thinking. And you have beautifully honored the school's two founders, both in terms of your academic results and your efforts on behalf of the special Herlovian community that we all value so highly.

In a turbulent time for the school, you as seniors have shown maturity, cheerfulness and understanding of your important role here at the school - you have handled all with tact and grace - and on behalf of the school, I would like to say a big thank you for that.

For the responsibility you have taken on. Your academic efforts. And the feeling of security you have helped create has quietly spread to the rest of the school's students and has contributed to the good year we have had.

With these words, I would like to welcome you to this ceremony in Herlufsholm Church. Today we are here to congratulate and, at the same time, say goodbye to you; a group of young people who have come to mean a lot to me - and to the other employees at the school. You have given us many joys during the time you have been students at Herlufsholm - and, well, maybe also a few gray hairs.

Dear parents,

Before we go back to the students' year at Herlufsholm, I would like to say a big thank you to all of you parents - both parents of day students and boarding students - for choosing Herlufsholm and entrusting your children to us. We are both happy and proud of that. I know how difficult it can be to miss and to do

without - to try to follow your soon-to-be adult child in their everyday life as best you can - this is true whether they live at home or here at the school. Being the recipient of your child's joys and frustrations, an endless stream of talk about teachers, peers, rules that were or weren't followed - and this year probably also a lot of talk about traditions that were changed or reinterpreted.

Therefore, I would also like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to you for persevering through the difficult situation the school has been in. Thank you for believing in the school - in the processes of change - in the future of Herlufsholm. I know that it has been a choice you have had to defend - thank you for persevering. When we look out over this group of fantastic young people, I think we can all be happy with the choice you made.

Dear students,

You will be remembered as the diplo who, in just a few months, helped move Herlufsholm several years into the future. It has been a stormy year - and I'm sorry that it affected your last year at the school.

But when it comes down to it, maybe it was a good thing it was you. Because you had the strength to stand united - and to get through it.

I am genuinely impressed by the resilience, sense of proportion and courage you have shown. As students at the school, you have been vilified in the press and on social media for bullying and incidents that none of you participated in - or in any way supported. You have had to defend the school, your peers and yourself to the outside world. It has been unfair what you have had to put up with.

But in the midst of the storm, you showed a maturity and reflection far beyond what could be expected of someone your age. You had the hard conversations. And you took care of each other.

In a difficult time, you have openly and thoughtfully discussed the value of education, camaraderie and community.

You have stood by the values that have been the foundation of Herlufsholm for centuries: Academics, commitment and responsibility.

And you have left your positive mark on the school and on our special community in ways that will be remembered and that will have a profound impact on generations to come. You took responsibility for the school, for the younger students and for each other. It is thanks to you that Herlufsholm today is the high school in Denmark with the highest level of wellbeing.

It's something you and your parents can be proud of.

Wellbeing and academics

You can also be proud of your academic efforts. Especially in your final year, you have worked intensively and seriously in everything from ancient history to biochemistry. During the weeks you wrote your SRP, there was an atmosphere of almost reverent contemplation at the school.

High academic excellence has always been a hallmark of Herlufsholm. We believe in the value of going the extra mile and setting the bar high, and our students always rank high on national exam average rankings.

This year is no different, thanks to your hard work and great results. Together, you have achieved an exam average of 8.2.

This is the highest average in the school's history, excluding the strange Covid-19 year when students only sat two exams. Quite simply, it's impressive. Congratulations!

Commitment

You are also the first class to have completed the Herlufsholm distinction award, and here too you have shown great energy. The program is individual and reflects the personal development goals the students set for themselves during their stay at Herlufsholm.

You rose to the challenge and your projects were very different, but they were all very ambitious. From music, comics, botany and cookbooks to glider certification and volunteering. One of you learned a new language, another knitted the school crest into a sweater with a complicated pattern, while several trained for grueling physical activities. What you all had in common is that you showed the discipline and perseverance needed to set a goal - and achieve it.

In this context, I would also like to take this opportunity to send a big thank you to the teachers and other staff at the high school. You have managed - over stormy months - to focus on exciting teaching and interesting school days. You were there for the students when they needed support when the subject matter was difficult, and you were ready with new challenges when it was too easy. It's not a given that an organization under so much pressure can come together to do its best every day. I, along with many others, am grateful for the loyalty you have shown this school year - and the many long working days you have put in to support Herlufsholm.

But Herlufsholm School is much more than high academic standards and skills development. It is also teenage life, fun and community, both during school hours and during the rest of the day. You have participated in and contributed to it all - from extracurricular activities to cozy cafés and wild parties. Many of you have formed friendships that will hopefully stay with you for the rest of your lives.

Therefore, you can take credit not only for the school's highest average and Denmark's best wellbeing - but I think - though I can't know, as my history at the school is short - that you have also been the most festive class ever.

You've lived the wild and fun life of youth. You have caused a lot of gray hairs on our heads, but it has all been worth it. Because the courage and zest for life you have brought have left its mark on the school. You have helped to establish new traditions that I expect will continue for centuries to come.

Last but not least, I think that future grades will thank you for the fact that you actually managed to negotiate longer parties in the coming school years. I know that the younger students are happy about that.

Responsibility

And thus to the last fundamental value at Herlufsholm: Responsibility. You have shown great responsibility towards the school and your younger peers. Your senior year turned out differently than you had expected, and it all happened at short notice. Several of you had taken the prefect course, which was abolished last May. Other traditions were changed, renewed or abandoned altogether.

Discussions have been loud and emotions have been high. You could have chosen the path of anger as the class that stood in the eye of the hurricane. You could have gone into opposition or started a rebellion over the unfair treatment and publicity you've experienced. You didn't. You chose the dialogue - to contribute to the development of the culture at the school - and you have, with great maturity, found your own path and thus contributed to bringing the proud old school forward so that future generations can also receive their education here. In short, you have shown the essence of being educated young people who respectfully listen to others - even if you disagree.

Today, we would like to thank the president and vice president of the high school's student council, Holger Skeel and Kristian Lange. You have been great sparring partners for the school management over the past months, where you have convincingly represented the students' interests in the many major decisions that have been made. A very special thank you to you, Holger, for attending more than 20 board meetings - some quite long - and for always keeping the big long-term goal in mind: to keep Herlufsholm as a school.

Good advice

Now you're heading out into the world, and of course you'll need some good advice along the way. In 2022, philosopher Morten Albæk wrote the book "False Truths". In it, he examines the sayings and norms that contribute to many people ending up regretting the life they have lived. Based on his own experiences, he takes a stand against the sayings that become ways of life, and which can existentially tie people down in a life they may not want to live. The book is about recognizing who you are and who you want to be.

The false truths Morten Albæk addresses are:

"You are what you are" - inherent in that statement is the premise that we as humans are fundamentally incapable of change. You know that's not true. In your years at Herlufsholm, you have seen friends change - even fundamentally. And that's just in the few years you've spent with them - imagine how much can happen over a lifetime.

"You can be anything you want to be" - you leave here with many options. Far more than most people. But few can be anything they want to be - and while the message is positive, it can be a huge stressor. Take the time you need to settle into adulthood and think carefully about how you want to live your life.

"You have to love yourself before you can love others" - this is not only a false truth, but simply nonsense. Happiness is only found when we share something with others. You have come to this realization because you have lived in a close community with other young people here at Herlufsholm. Remember that as you move on.

"Success makes you happy" - Maybe, but happiness is transient, while the feeling of living a meaningful life is permanent. Being happy is something you have to give yourself permission to be present in, appreciating and recognizing the moments when life unfolds extraordinarily for us. I hope you find happiness and that you will take the time to enjoy those moments - but most of all, I hope for you that you will create the life that is meaningful to you.

"Time is money" - Yes, certainly from a business perspective. But remember that time is a scarce resource to begin with - because despite what you may think right now, life is not infinite, but far too short. So remember never to waste your life. Spend your time doing what you enjoy.

The book tackles 5 other false truths, but it would be going too far to go through them today. My message is simply that you should seek the path that makes sense to you. All too often, we end up living the life that others and society expect of us, rather than the life we want to live. Just because something is normal doesn't make it right. And just because something is different doesn't automatically make it wrong.

I hope that your years at Herlufsholm have provided you with the strength, integrity, knowledge and self-awareness that will enable you to find the path that is meaningful to you. And I hope and believe that you will carry Herlufsholm and our values with you throughout your lives. Because even though the school uniform has been stored away, you will continue to be part of a community across generations and continents, built on shared values, experiences and a common history at the school.

Your time as a dile is coming to an end. But Herlovians - that you will always be. Thank you for your time here - thank you.

With these words, dear seniors, I pronounce you graduates. Congratulations.