

Jason Bergeron and Brigham Boice Co-Student Speaker Speech

(B = Brigham speaking, J = Jason speaking)

B: Let us begin by quoting from the Peterborough Transcript, 1918.

“The “No School” signal was sounded at 12:30 Thursday afternoon, and the schools have not been in session since. Saturday the School Board and Health Officer posted notices - that the schools in town would be closed until further notice. We caution against people gathering in large numbers for any purpose, also traveling on railroad trains. We urge you to keep your children at home, as to allow them to congregate will add to the danger we seek to avoid. Let everyone act in this matter and our town will soon be rid of this serious menace. Peterborough, NH September 30, 1918 Peterborough School Board”

B: These words, written over 100 years ago, became a reality for all of us over the past year. The Peterborough High School closed its doors in October of 1918 due to the oncoming influenza pandemic. The lives of Peterborough students were disrupted in a moment. Not just Peterborough students, but students from Antrim, Bennington, Dublin, Frankestown, Greenfield, Hancock, Sharon and Temple, all of New Hampshire, all across the country had their lives put on hold. Barred from classrooms, sports, and friends — they too struggled through their own quarantine.

J: What do we learn from the struggles of the Lost Generation, a generation following the end of the First World War? We learn that we are not alone. At times we might feel the opposite. We

may feel as if we are the first to face monotony, isolation, anxiety, and great societal change. From past generations, we can see how they too survived through despair, unease, and the challenges we have and are yet to face.

B: In the waning days of the first World War, our towns were struck with a new conflict, not seen in their lifetime. What seemed to start as a simple cold became much more.

J: Humanity has endured pandemics before and each time we have come out stronger.

B: The Black Plague led to the Renaissance, the Influenza Pandemic led to the Roaring Twenties. These critical junctures show that, after times of turmoil, we can come into a greater age of learning and innovation.

J: With that, I hold here a paper from our present.

B: And I hold one of our past.

J: We need both, in order to prepare for the future we hope to create. To ignore either, would be a great disservice to ourselves. We need a greater understanding of both to better our world for all.

B: The past has shown us time and time again what happens when we ignore it. The failure to reconcile after World War I led to the rise of totalitarian powers that started World War II. When we try to abandon history, negative outcomes are guaranteed. Do not neglect your past.

J: Recall the experiences of your past, both good and bad. Whether it be the time you became class treasurer.

B: Or the time you did not become class treasurer.

J: Use those experiences. All the pain of, the joy ..., the envy..., the struggle..., and everything in between. Your memories are the greatest tools for growing as a person. They are what makes you human. Even in our present, we are making memories that will last for a lifetime.

B: Class of 2021, we would like to conclude this oration with an abridged passage from the graduating class of 1918, a message that was given exactly 103 years ago this week at the newly constructed Peterborough Town Hall. They too were stepping into a world filled with dangers and opportunities.

“...you possess the thing for which the rich would give all their wealth, the learned, all their knowledge, the famous all their fame. That thing is youth. The years are before you. You have energy, enthusiasm, time.”

J: “Out of these you must make opportunity. Life and time are yours. Out of these two elements the best are made. - You have been given the coin of the realm of life, and there remains for you the simple decision as to what you will spend it for.”

B: With that message, take what you have,

J: your youthful experiences and hopeful dreams,

B: and go into the future with your histories,

J: for what has come in your youth, is only the beginning of your future.

JB: Thank you.