

Janine Brown
Woodstream Christian Academy Class of 2017 - Valedictory Speech

"...Woodstream Christian Academy Anandemy" a little girl said once upon a time. She was only about 5 years old and was eager to tell anyone who would listen all about the new school she was excited to attend. After sitting in on a few of Ms. Rachel's classes and after Ms. Bonita had let her help organize school supplies, the little girl knew Woodstream Christian Academy was the place for her. And for the next 13 years of her life it would become her home.

In K5 the little girl would go on to be the first soloist the school had seen, then again it was only open a year. In second grade she would write to the South African embassy on what food they liked there in order for something called a thesis. By fourth grade she had already promised someone she would never leave the school. All I can say is God must've heard the sincerity in the innocent young girl's plea, because 8 years later she stands before you today delivering this speech.



Greetings everyone. My name is Janine Brown, it has been a loooong 13 years, and after 12 thesis presentations, 10 fine arts programs, 3 graduation/matriculation ceremonies just for myself, and more open houses than I can remember, I am truly blessed to have this honor of speaking for the last time as a student at Woodstream Christian Academy -- as the valedictorian for the Class of 2017.

Being one of the few students who have spent their entire lives at Woodstream has been an experience to say the least. There have been numerous changes: from faculty members, to students, to classes, even to the building. I remember when the computer lab was simply a copy space, and now it houses the finance department. I remember when Woodstream didn't have a single playground and today the school can boldly boast of 3. And while there have been many changes made to the school and many of my former classmates from kindergarten left, leaving just Madison and myself, some things have not changed. The elementary school still has the cords we used to double Dutch with in Tutor Ruffin, now Dean Ruffin's 5th grade class. Some of the old water fountains can still be found in the building though I doubt anyone uses them. And the teachers still care deeply for each and every one of their students.

Growing up in one school has not been easy. For one thing, since I have spent the majority of my life in a uniform, I have no idea what I am going to do for clothes next year on a college campus. For another thing it's hard being the one who is always getting left behind in your class. To this day, I still see some of my old friends from elementary school and everyone has had the same look of surprise on their face when I tell them that yes, I still go to Woodstream. At one point I used to hate having to admit that I had only attended one school. I felt like I lacked experiences other kids my age had. I felt like I couldn't change or figure out who I was becoming without a change in environment. But today, I wear the fact I have stayed at one school with a sense of pride and a badge of honor. I can only thank God for letting me come this far without

any major mishaps, and sense of contentment. After all, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength," right?

It is because of God's will that Woodstream has been able to help shape me into a person I only dreamed of becoming when I was 5. It is because of God that I am able to follow in the footsteps of my sisters, my role models, and graduate from Woodstream Christian Academy, their Alma Mater. It is because of God's will that I have been able to compete on a national level in Debate with my partner Dominique, and together we were both able to assist the Fine Arts Department as student choreographers. It is because of God's will that I feel prepared to write the many collegiate papers coming my way next fall, or so I've been told. And finally, it is because of God's will that I truly feel like I have found a place I can be proud to call my home, to have found an el equipo, a squad, to help get me through the tough high school years, and to have found an institution I can honestly tell parents to send their students to. Yeah, Woodstream may lack a few sports teams, it may not currently have a heavily populated student body, and occasionally it can just be frustrating having to attend a Christian school. But Woodstream builds character, it helps students learn to confront their issues and not hide from them. (I mean in a class of only 11 students there really is no hiding.) Woodstream allows students to have a safe environment to ask questions about God and not fear judgment for not having all the answers. But overall, Woodstream builds some pretty impressive leaders, which I am reminded of as I look over at my incredible classmates. Class of 2017, I urge you not to forget all Woodstream has done for you and to remain so fresh and so clean. I urge you to remember the laughs we shared in Spanish class, the freestyle battles we did in art history, the intellectual conversations we had in omnibus, the excitement of working on experiments in science, the joy we felt when we could actually eat in math class, the relief of finishing our last thesis presentation, and the pure and utter satisfaction of never having to cram for another high school exam again. Today, all the SAT's and college applications are behind us. Now we can look forward to paying off college loans, getting married, having families and starting our careers.

To the junior class and those behind them, you guys still have some ways to go. For some the time will go by fast and for others very slow. But it is my hope for everyone that you make good memories to enjoy later down the lane, because when all is said and done, the good memories are the only ones worth recalling.

And to the audience members, take a good look at all the graduates in front of you. Some of you may remember what it was like to be in their positions while some may still dream about one day being in their very spots. Please don't ever forget those feelings. To those of you who have already experienced the wonders of high school, help those who are now coming up behind you and give not just the graduates, but also the students of Woodstream, lots of love and support and forgiveness and understanding and encouragement. They will definitely need it. To those eagerly awaiting to be freshmen, stay positive and know that dreams do come true and that God does answer prayers. Be patient even when it seems like your life isn't going according to your plan because God has a far better plan for you. And don't worry too much about messing up because as Lisa Bevere once said, "If you think you've blown God's plan for your life, rest in this: you my beautiful friend are not that powerful." Just do your best to follow where he leads. It's worth it, truly worth it. Because...Once upon a time there was a little girl who said she only wanted to attend Woodstream Christian Academy... and God actually answered her prayers. And that little girl, along with the Class of 2017, lived happily ever after...or so I'm hoping. The end. Thank you.