Wide-eyed and anxious, I take a deep breath, adjust my hair, ensure nothing is stuck in my teeth, then, I step in through the glass doors. The comforting smell of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies fills the air around me. Four years ago, before Orientation and Convocation, our Brandeis beginning, many of us started our college experience with an interview in the Brandeis Shapiro Admissions Center.

After four educational, challenging, defining, and stimulating years on the Brandeis University campus, many of us within the last year, months or even more recently in the past weeks or days found ourselves once again in the daunting interview process. We stand in the doorway with vast amounts of possibilities lying ahead. With the advice from mentors, friends, parents, professors and career advisors, we are searching for suitable paths into our next chapter. Now, standing with our future just around the corner, we face the hard part: taking the initial step, confidently out of our comfort zones, through the doorway.

Good morning, President Liebowitz, members of the board of trustees, honorary degree recipients, beloved faculty, staff, alumni, family and friends. And last but certainly not least, I am thrilled to address my peers and fellow graduates of the Class of 2017.

We are all approaching the time to embark on a new journey where inevitably, “the strange will become familiar and the familiar strange”. Each one of us has places on campus that resonate with us because memories were made, friendships blossomed, we failed, we triumphed, we rallied and we learned countless lessons in these places. It is odd to think that these unique, meaningful places could ever be unfamiliar to us. Yet, thinking back, I never thought my childhood home could feel different, but as these past four years progressed, with every visit back to my house, in Montreal, Canada, I felt more removed. The house’s four walls and décor within remained relatively the same, but my home had shifted to the Brandeis Campus. First, to Reitman (North Quad is better than
Massell), then to Rosie, Ziv and finally to a blue house on Dartmouth Street. This shift and change in mindset which makes you look back on a place in a different light is about to happen once again.

Some may argue that Brandeis will forever be our home. Although I agree that we will always have a place here, I recognize that our home, as we know it, will not remain the same. Upper Usdan will probably change again. Further, I am eager to see this university grow and develop with the active and intelligent minds that will roam the campus following our departure. But, change is hard and the unknown is frightening. However, we, graduates, here today are not the only ones facing uncertainty in what will come next. Today, all of America is facing uncertain times, and now, more than ever, we need to be courageous, and overcome our anxiety in order to advocate for our core values.

“Truth, even unto its innermost parts” is the Brandeis University motto. It has a nice ring, but, recently, it dawned on me that I am unsure why this is my school’s motto. In discussing legal strategies to deal with the current political climate, one of my favorite professors, Daniel Breen, informed me that Justice Louis D. Brandeis once caught the 27th President of the United States of America, William Howard Taft, in a lie, and the idea that somebody in power could lie even about something minute was unsettling for Brandeis. Professor Breen offered the opinion that the Brandeis University motto is likely due to Brandeis’ determination and commitment to know the true facts before taking any action, which is highlighted in his words, “Knowledge is essential to understanding and understanding should precede judging.” As we enter the real world, we cannot forget the “light of reason” and the importance of truth-seeking.

The word ‘truth’ is hard to define. It is a challenge because our view of the truth is intertwined with our perception. We all see the world through a different set of lenses because it is the sum of our experiences that form our perspectives and our fundamental beliefs. That being said, in this day and age of social media and search engines, regardless of personal experiences, we are continuously surrounded by a multitude of facts, which often complicate realities. Information
spreads rapidly, and the distribution of misinformation is a threat. We must continue to question, fact-check and most importantly, we should not always simply accept what is stated as “truth”.

In the center of our campus, stands a statue of Brandeis with his robes flowing behind him in the winds of adversity. He is leaning on his left leg, strongly yet peacefully challenging the opposition. Whether basking in the sunlight or covered in snow, the statue of Justice Brandeis is a constant reminder of the importance of continual activism in spite of any climate. Although we will no longer pass this iconic statue on our way to class or just as we stroll through campus, we must take with us Brandeis’ strength to face job or graduate school interviews and any other challenges in life.

It is not the job offers or opportunities themselves, but rather our perception that will play a heavy role in our future because as Charles Spurgeon, an English preacher stated, “It’s not how much we have, it’s how much we enjoy that makes happiness.” We often quantify how much we possess as though the amount of friends we have or amount of As we’ve received speak to who we are, but I beg to differ, it is not how much we have, but how we react to what we have that truly defines personality. Additionally, it is good to know your personality, your strengths and weaknesses, but do not confine yourselves to a subset of traits. Stand tall, and please overcome the urge to ever put up walls that are confining.

Class of 2017, it is our turn to toss the dice, each of us will roll differently and of course in the game of life there are far more than only six sides. This game doesn’t come with set instructions, but I urge you to be truthful and although you may not land the best number on your first try, remember to just pick the dice up and roll’em again. In closing, I ask you to proudly, with high spirits repeat after me this common chant often heard at our Brandeis sporting events: Roll ‘Deis Roll!