

We live in a society that is full of standards for what is “normal”. The way we dress, what we like,

and what we say are all judged by those that surround us. We want to fit in. We change. We

hide our differences. We. Forget. Our passions. Graham Moore, Oscar winner of “Best Adapted

Screenplay” for “The Imitation Game” addressed this point in his acceptance speech. After

discussing his high school hardships due to his differences, he said, “I felt weird and I felt

different and I felt like I did not belong. And now I'm standing here and so I would like for this

moment to be for that kid out there who feels like she's weird or she's different or she doesn't fit

in anywhere. Yes, you do. I promise you do. You do. Stay weird, stay different. And then when

it's your turn and you're standing on this stage, please pass the same message to the next

person who comes along.” As I sat there in awe letting his words sink in, I realized that it

correlates to one of the ideas in Mike Rowe’s S.W.E.A.T. pledge, or Skill and Work Ethic Aren’t

Taboo. And, yes, Mike Rowe is “that guy” from the show Dirty Jobs. Rowe is a big advocate for

trade school education, where he says, “I reject the idea that a four-year school is the best path

for the most people". He created the SWEAT pledge with 13 different points on it regarding how people can work hard to put themselves into the best situation possible. The fourth point in his pledge states, "I do not "follow my passion." I bring it with me. I believe that any job can be done with passion and enthusiasm."It might seem as though it's difficult to relate these two ideas, but hopefully my story will help. When I came to Hardin Valley Academy, I felt like an outcast. I was the shy girl who wasn't really sure what to do with my high school career. I had a hard time making new friends in our new school. I felt like I had to be an entirely different person in order to fit in. In short, I felt weird. I felt different. And I hated it. I joined the robotics team freshman year, despite the fact that some people thought they were the so-called nerds of the school. I was soon welcomed into a family that helped me to discover my **ENGINEERING** passion, and for me to be...well... weird. From that point forward, I wanted to spread my passion wherever I went, whether it was at a robotics competition or at local elementary schools. Since the robotics team helped me find my passion, I now bring that passion with me wherever I go,

just as the pledge says. I bring it with me when I visit elementary schools. I bring it to the girls

afraid to be engineers, afraid to show their passion. I bring it to the veterans looking to find

themselves a place in society after their military service. You have to embrace your passions

and take them with you wherever you go, whether it be on social media or talking about it with

your family because you never know who you'll inspire to pursue their passions. I see

passionate people all around me that inspire me to keep doing what I love. I see it in Caroline

Rowcliffe's pictures, Austin Christianson's videos, Brandon Pollock's perseverance in making

sure local heroes get recognized, and the list goes on. Hardin Valley has allowed us all to

realize our passions as we grow into adults and continue into our future. This school has taught

us all that we learn best when we are completely invested in what we love, and that helps us to

keep going down the path towards our dreams. We have teachers that stand behind us every

step of the way to guide us, but one thing is they are not there to hold our hands. They give us

that push we need to fully engage ourselves and learn to the best of our abilities. This will take

us far into all of our futures, thanks to those that believe in us at Hardin Valley. So, I was asked if

I was ready to sign the S.W.E.A.T. pledge Mike Rowe wrote, but the thing is, we all signed this

pledge when we first walked through the doors of Hardin Valley. When we came to HVA, we

decided that we wanted to work hard in everything we do, from the classroom to the ballfield, to

make sure not only our school, but we as individuals were the best we could be. I know my

peers that have been by my side all four years will agree with me when I say that Hardin Valley

and its faculty have encouraged us as we grow into adults to pursue our passions, and to

always stay weird. Thank you, and congratulations HVA class of 2015.

-Sierra Palmer