

2013 Lower School Closing Assembly Remarks

Lower School Head Laurie Gruhn

The Olympics of last summer had many “big moments.” Those huge moments that the whole world saw and reveled in. In Lower School, many teachers talk about the importance of the “small moment” when their students work on writing. This refers to those quiet moments in time that very specifically define an event for you, the tiny details that you always remember. It is that moment when you discover something clicked, that one nano second when you look back on this achievement or experience and know that this is what you will remember.

For me, one of those “small moments” came this past February, while standing at the front door around 8:09 on a cold Tuesday morning. It dawned on me, as I shook the hand of a senior and congratulated on him on a recent college admission, that while I had not worked closely with him in about six years, I had shaken his hand pretty much every Tuesday morning for the past 13 years. And I saw him, clear as a bell, as a Pre-Primary boy walking in that same door with red cheeks and gloves that were a little too big. Immediately behind him, as that “small moment passed,” I shook the hand of first grader and admired his red cheeks and his gloves that were a tad too big. As Joni Mitchell says, “And the seasons, they go round and round..” Watching boys for over 13 years walk in and out of those red doors, how those boys change! And how they remain exactly the same! And how they do not know that! And yet, how they never fail to tell us exactly who they are!

Mr. Clement alluded to another of these moments last week at our Lower School Awards Assembly. He spoke of how, at the start of this school year, the Pre-Primary boys looked up in confusion the first time they heard the School Song. Last Thursday, they were singing it with gusto. It is now your song. It was a moment. Just a moment.

My hunch is that in this past year everyone in this room experienced many “small moments” which made a permanent mark on your mind or heart, whether it is seeing the sun on the School’s new flag as you watch the Panther wave from the Cook Room Window; the very first time you meet your new fourth grade buddy and you notice how tall he is; that second when you look at a math problem you have been staring at for 10 minutes and suddenly – click! The numbers make sense and you “get” long division! The moment you realize the courage it takes to apologize to a faculty member and to discover he cares deeply about the gentleman you will one day be. The moment you realize you actually remember how to spell the word “Wednesday;” that second you realize why it is unkind and wrong to call anyone names, and the earlier you learn this the better; coming back after a rough performance moment and “cinching” it, having the Upper School Head help you tie your tie before your drama club performance; seeing your teacher start to cry after your class play because it is her last one, or even being sent to someone’s office and realizing there are games in there. These are those moments. And these are the moments you remember, not the big stuff.

I first heard this story earlier this year when I saw a clip of Noble Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai. It, too, speaks of small moments.

One day a terrible fire broke out in a forest; a huge woodland was suddenly engulfed

by a raging wild fire. Frightened, all the animals fled their homes and ran out of the forest. As they came to the edge of a stream, they stopped to watch the fire, and they were feeling very discouraged and powerless. They were all bemoaning the destruction of their homes. Every one of them thought there was nothing they could do about the fire, except for one little hummingbird.

This particular hummingbird decided it would do something. It swooped into the stream and picked up a few drops of water and went into the forest and put them on the fire. Then it went back to the stream and did it again, and it kept going back, again and again and again. All the other animals watched in disbelief; some tried to discourage the hummingbird with comments like, "Don't bother, it is too much, you are too little, your wings will burn, your beak is too tiny, it's only a drop, you can't put out this fire."

And as the animals stood around disparaging the little bird's efforts, the bird noticed how hopeless and forlorn they looked. Then one of the animals shouted out and challenged the hummingbird in a mocking voice, "What do you think you are doing?" And the hummingbird, without wasting time or losing a beat, looked back and said, "I am doing what I can."

He took the moment.

Lastly, the title of this morning's program is "1888." It was quite a year. This year we celebrate Mr. Clement's 25th year as Head of the Browning School and the School's 125th birthday. This is a very important moment in the School's history as well as its physical space. What moments this School has seen!

Year 1888 (MDCCCLXXXVIII) was a leap year starting on Sunday. Currently, it is the year that, when written in Roman numerals, has the most digits (13). This will be surpassed as late as 2888.

In 1888:

- First wax drinking straw was patented.
- National Geographic Society founded
- John Reid of Scotland demonstrates golf to Americans
- English Football League established
- Soccer team Sparta forms in Rotterdam
- Eastman Kodak forms -George Eastman patents "Kodak box camera"
- DeWolf Hooper first recited "Casey at Bat"
- Leroy Buffington patents a system to build skyscrapers
- Democrats nominate Grover Cleveland for president
- Congress creates Department of Labor
- Frederick Douglass is first African-American nominated for president
- Republican Convention, in Chicago, nominates Benjamin Harrison
- Philip Pratt unveils first electric automobile
- Theophilus Van Kannel of Philadelphia patents revolving door
- Edith Eleanor McLean is the first baby placed in an incubator
- Thomas Edison files a patent for the Optical Phonograph (the first movie).
- John J. Loud patents ballpoint pen
- Benjamin Harrison (R-Sen-Ind) beats President Grover Cleveland (D), 233

- Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh cuts off his left ear
- First indoor baseball game played at fairgrounds in Philadelphia

Gentlemen, every day this school year, like the hummingbird, you each have done what you could. You have added to the history of this important year, moment by moment. I salute you for the difference you have made (school would not have been the same without your efforts). I salute your teachers and your parents for making such efforts possible, and I salute the School on its 125th birthday as it prepares to recognize another 125 years of small, unforgettable and permanent moments.