

A Midland Moment

Graduation May 30, 2009

By Head of School Will Graham

Last week I was sitting in Chapel listening to School Prefect, Francis King '09, talk about faith and her belief in life's larger purpose. She was grappling with the idea that our plans do not always work out, we don't always get the results we want, and we may be left to wonder, "why me?"

On a larger scale, Francis led me to think that at times it is as if fate conspires against people in hurtful and devastating ways, certainly history and current events can support that notion. There are many times when I think, "why them?"

Francis talked about the books that help support her faith; she left us listening to the wisdom of the Indigo Girls, and I wondered about the unusual car ride conversations she must have with her family.

Like Francis I know I am not an existentialist, and I need to get up, get going, and have faith in each day. She helped me reach back to September, when I was thinking about the weight of the world, and the belief and trust I have at the beginning of each school year. At that time, I drew on the wisdom of environmental pioneer Rachel Carson, and once again I share her wisdom.

If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.

I said that this quote does not come from a fairy god mother who saw the natural world as a Disney movie with animation and talking animals. Rachel Carson saw the stark realities of environmental degradation; she looked into the future, cleared our vision, opened our hearts, and said "life is good," but it is threatened, vulnerable, and needs human care and attention.

We must trust and believe that that our actions can be true. It is our life's work to observe and to learn the lessons that are inherent in the natural world. The answers to the big questions of our age may well be found in opening our eyes to the simple details of daily living at Midland.

If we are willing to connect to our garden and kitchen, we see where our food comes from; we learn to understand and appreciate ecosystems, energy, water, waste streams

and recycling. We learn that sustainable living is not an abstract concept but a reality with lessons that help us to connect to life and live responsibly. We are also sustained by the beauty of Midland's natural resources, and reassured by the permanence of Grass Mountain.

If we are willing to access the information in our library and use technology responsibly, our curriculum helps teach us how to communicate effectively, to read with curiosity and to think critically. Over time the curriculum leads students towards the senior thesis and a level of mastery, confidence, and competency that demonstrates a readiness to become life long learners.

If we are willing to immerse ourselves in the Spanish language, and travel to México as juniors, we come to understand that the people of the world, and our neighbors, are moving ever more closely together. Natural resources are becoming more precious. Our economies, our businesses, our basic needs are linked. Although the world is divided by wealth, class, race, religion and politics, becoming knowledgeable and curious creates possibilities for adding to the richness of our lives. We become better able to move flexibly, and to contribute positively and find solutions to the problems that face us all.

If we are willing to live simply in our cabins, tend to our daily needs, build shower fires, and complete our jobs, we become useful. We learn to contribute. We demonstrate our own power, and we develop self assurance as well as self reliance. We leave places a little better off than when we arrived. We look forward to life's treasure hunts and enjoy the company of others.

Believing in the Midland process and participating willingly takes faith and effort. The senior class has done their best. They are leaving with excitement, nervous anticipation, curiosity and a growing sense of themselves. I hope that faith in the wonder of what is about to unfold sustains them. May they think of Midland often and be thankful for their teachers and for the opportunities their families provide. We have faith that they will find their way because today they are right where they want to be.