

A “Midland Moment” Graduation Address: May 31, 2008
By Will Graham, Head of School

All week I have had this growing sensation that I am taking off my back-pack, and a long hiking trip is nearing the end. Old age aside, you may know how this feels. My shoulders ease; my body feels lighter. I am peaceful, thirsty, and maybe even a little light headed and slowed down, after traveling such a long way.

Of course, I have not been alone, and I feel the energy of the adventures, the mishaps, the joys and setbacks that were shared. Like any good trip, it isn't always clear at first what has been accomplished, and in fact the experience is unique to every person who had the courage to come along. However, the magic of the Midland journey is that we started in this same place; we did not venture very far, and we have returned. So, I am naturally led back to a reading from my first chapel last September, by Terry and Renny Russell.

The brothers wrote:

One of the best-paying professions is getting a hold of pieces of country in your mind, learning their smell and their moods, sorting out the pieces of a view, deciding what grows there and there and why, how many steps that hill will take, where the creek winds and where it meets the other one below...which contour lines on a map mean better cliffs and mountains. This is the best kind of ownership, and the most permanent.

It feels good to say, “I know the Sierra” or “I know Point Reyes,” but you don't. What you know better is yourself, and the Sierra and Point Reyes have helped.

To stay in this place for some time and to know Midland is to know oneself, and each student's Midland experience is their own, it is unique to them, and it is permanent. Midland has been their life's work and profession. Whether it has been for one year or four, each student has willingly and at times unwillingly, given themselves to this common effort in order to arrive where they are today.

Their job is comprised of countless check-ins, work details, washed dishes and seated meals. It is experience that comes from the lap board and the classroom. It is grounded in the familiar contour of the roads and trails underfoot, the sound of the owls at dusk, or the surprise and wonder of the full moon rising over upper yard. Midland experience covers us like the ever present dust that we breathe, push, and move from place to place each Sunday morning. It

comes to us in cold bathrooms in January or when we are the first to turn on the Stillman lights for a Graveyard shift in February. It is the comfort of Gloria's breakfast or learning to wash a pot under BG's watchful eye. We see ourselves as we truly are when we respond to this place with calm, focus, and humor or with irritation, impatience, and intolerance, when things don't go our way and our wood and matches are wet. To learn to know oneself, and one's moods, is a lifetime profession, but a job made easier by growing up at Midland in the shadow of Grass Mountain. It is a fixed icon and guide that is as reassuring a landmark today as it must have been to the Chumash several thousand years ago or the first Midlanders in 1932.

Each senior has permanent ownership of their Midland experience. To know Midland is to know yourself. Today, you have arrived in the same place from which you started, and you are right where you want to be.