



OFFICE OF THE HEADMASTER

For Others

Peter H. Quimby

**Opening Chapel Talk
Moseley Chapel
10 September 2014**

So, here we are. Classes have started, you have lessons to prepare, homework to do, dorm duty and dorm chores, and a number of teams will have scrimmages this afternoon. The New Year is under way and with it begins a voyage that will take us to unexpected places. It can be tempting sometimes, I think, to believe that the school year is a journey that happens to us. That it's a ride we get on at the start of the year and stay on until spring comes and it's time to get on a different ride—the summer vacation ride. And at the end of summer we repeat the cycle all over again. But in a fundamental way I don't believe that's true. I believe that we have the ability to direct our journey, perhaps even a responsibility to direct our journey, and it's that responsibility that I want to talk with you about this morning. I want to start that conversation by sharing some thoughts about who I think we are as a community, and what it is that differentiates us.

I spent a fair amount of time this summer thinking together with senior administrators and the board of trustees about what it is that makes this community so distinctive. We came up with a list of four things that resonated with everyone involved in the conversation: alumni, teachers, current and past parents. First, the

group noted that we are a community committed to academic excellence which we strive to achieve by challenging students to reach their full potential in a rigorous curriculum. Second, they noted that we are a school distinguished by the quality of its faculty, a group of individuals dedicated to working with students in all areas of school life—the academic program, the afternoon program, and residential life. Third, the group noted that we are a school that believes in promoting balance in the lives of students to foster their development as intellectually and emotionally healthy individuals. And finally, the group highlighted the fact that Governor’s intentionally creates a family-like atmosphere that leads to enduring relationships among students and between students and faculty members. Academic excellence, a dedicated faculty, balance in the lives of students, and a commitment to a family-like atmosphere: these may not be the only qualities of our school, but they certainly speak to the core of who we are.

Now, I know that there’s no school that would say that they aren’t these things. Every school says they’re warm and cuddly. I’ve always said I’d love to hear the head of school who would say at an open house: Come study here. We’re the cold and impersonal place where students and faculty members can’t stand each other. And yet, I can say with confidence that there’s something that happens at Governor’s that’s different. I can say it with confidence because I hear it all the time from visitors to our campus. From the folks who drive our busses, from the Red Cross volunteers who run our blood bank, and from the parents of prospective students who visit many other campuses and tell us that Governor’s feels warmer, and friendlier, and more welcoming than the other places they go.

New students, I suspect this rings particularly true for you—you chose Governor’s in part, I hope, because you could see yourself fitting in and being happy here. I know that some of our new faculty members came to join us this year for the same

reason. They wanted to be a part of a community where people care about and are invested in each other. I also suspect that it's the reason that we have the fourth most senior faculty in a group of the top 40 boarding schools in the Northeast. This is a community that people don't want to leave once they get here. And that warmth and kindness and friendliness certainly serves us well as we travel through each year. It gives us a great background and foundation for the good times, and supports us and nurtures us through the hard times.

So how does this relate to what I said a few minutes ago about shaping our journey? Well, I think there's a risk here for us as a school. If we see our year as a ride that we're on but don't direct, and if we take for granted that this is a place that's kind and generous, and where people are invested in each other, there's some risk that we will stop being the thing that we cherish most. So today as we enter a new school year and set out on a new journey, I want to encourage us all to rededicate ourselves to living out our values. We are a school that has a reputation for providing a family-like environment not because that's what the universe has ordained, or because that's what we print in our admissions materials. We're all of those things because, and only because, in how we live and work and learn and interact with each other we make it so. Our school doesn't happen to us or have characteristics of its own. We make it what it is.

On Saturday night when many of you were hunkering down here on campus in the midst of some pretty severe weather, the seniors were gathered around in a small room at Brantwood listening to Mr. Bidstrup share a few words of advice with the class. One thing he said really jumped out at me. He encouraged the seniors to be guided this year by 5 words: How can I help you? Five simple words. Put together, they form a very powerful question. How can I help you? It just so happens that

this question calls on us to live up to our own highest expectations for ourselves as articulated in our school motto—*non sibi sed aliis*—not for self, but for others.

Let me suggest to you that as we think about our year, we would all do well to be guided by Mr. Bidstrup's question. The reason so many of us came to Governor's, and the reason Governor's is known for the quality and character of its community, is that people have taken this question to heart. And if we want to ensure that we remain a school distinguished by these values, we can't ever stop doing that.

A few weeks ago I was pulling onto campus from Route 1 and I noticed that some trash had been thrown along the side of the road. It looked terrible and I knew there would be a large group of people visiting campus that day so I pulled over and got out to pick it up. Now some of you may have seen a black Prius in the driveway of the Mansion House and I was driving the Prius that day. I mention this because the Prius is a hybrid. If you have never driven a hybrid before you should know that it can be a deceiving experience. When you come to a complete stop, the gasoline engine often stops running and it gives you the feeling that the car has turned off. So, I pulled over, got out of my car, and walked back to pick up the trash. When I stood up to walk back to the car, I was puzzled. I didn't think I'd walked that far away from my car. My next thought was: Why is my car driving away? My next thought was something I can't repeat in Chapel.

That's right. I hadn't put the car in park. So I did the only thing I could, I started running up Elm Street after it. Of course the driver's side door was closed, so as I ran alongside the car I had to open the door and get in while the car was moving. So I jumped in, banged my head on the door frame, pulled back into the right hand lane, and drove home praying like you wouldn't believe that nobody had seen what just happened!

I think there's a metaphor in there somewhere. The school year may not have started the way we wanted it to. The weather forced us to change much of what we had planned for Unity Days. Preseason tryouts might not have gone as you would have liked. We experienced a great loss over the summer and I know many of us are still in pain. But whether we were ready or not, the year has started. So let's remember that this is our year to shape and define, and this is our school nurture and cherish, and the kind of experience we have will be determined by the decisions we make along the way. So even if we feel at times like the car left without us, let's jump into the driver's seat and steer our course through to the best year that we can imagine. And let's do it by thinking about what we can do not for ourselves, but for others.