

Good evening. For those of you who do not know me, my name is David Bridgers. My wife Anna and I are blessed to be the parents of Andrew Bridgers, who is one of the 12 graduates. I was one of the two parents chosen to speak on behalf of the parents of those graduates. I am honored to do so. In the next couple minutes I will share with you a little bit about our experience at Linden Waldorf School and explain why we are grateful for that experience. In the case of Andrew, and many of his classmates, that experience entails 11 years here at the School.

Let me say at the outset that I speak for all of the parents of the graduates when I tell you how deeply grateful I am that this School exists. On a more personal note, let me say how deeply grateful I am to Anna that she suggested we go to an open house at the school in January of 1998, right about the time Andrew had turned 3 and a couple months before our daughter Emily arrived. To paraphrase Robert Frost, that Sunday afternoon visit made all the difference.

Before getting more specific about why I am grateful for this School, I think it is important to talk a little bit about exactly who the School is, and hence, to whom I am directing my gratitude. Obviously, the School consists of the teachers and the members of the administrative staff, and we are grateful to everyone who has been a member of the faculty or the administrative staff over these last 11 years. The School, however, is so much more than its employees. All of you who are gathered here tonight, and many of your compatriots who are not, are the School. Whether you are a fellow student, alum, parent, grandparent, other family member, community volunteer, Trinity Presbyterian member, or otherwise connected to the School, the parents of these 12 graduates thank you for everything you have done and all that you have given to make this School the place it is. I applaud you and my fellow parents do as well.

Let me say a word about what that work has created. Those of us who have been a part of the Community over these last 11 years, and in some cases, even longer, have seen incredible changes. Let me share my perspective.

When Anna and I joined the Community, when Andrew was 3 years old, the School consisted of two rooms that were rented from St. David's Episcopal Church in West Meade. Out of those two rooms, Linden Corner School, as it was known then, served 30 or so preschool and kindergarten students. The School's "office" was in Igor and Linda Popovich's basement, the payroll consisted of two teachers and two assistants, and there was a phone in the hallway that people answered when they were close by. A Waldorf grades program was a dream, but when we joined, the conventional wisdom was that it was several years off.

Fortunately for us, the School Community included some folks who were anything but conventional. With Sylvia Hurdle leading the charge, and followed closely by a group of parents, including several parents who also have children in this class, in the Spring of my family's first year at the School, the School decided to start a grades program that next fall, the fall of 1999, with Sylvia as the first teacher. I joined the School's Board a couple weeks after that decision had been made. At my first Board meeting, I not only learned that the Board had voted to start a grades program, but also that the School had neither the money nor the classroom space for that program. What the School did have was the will to do it. That first class set up shop in the storage area for one of the two classrooms. When it came time for the current group of graduates to start first grade, we convinced St. David's to permit us to cut one of the two classrooms in half, and this class spent first grade in that half a classroom. While the School's quest for a new site consumed the School's early years, that is a story for another day. Suffice it to say, by the time our graduates reached the spring of first grade, the School was busting at the

seams. Through a series of fortunate events, the School made its way to Trinity Presbyterian, and during the intervening years, the School has grown into the institution it is today, serving over 100 children and their families and sharing these beautiful grounds with Trinity Presbyterian Church.

So, against that backdrop, for what exactly are we Waldorf parents thankful? I, for one, am thankful that I never have a dull moment when meetings with clients and adversaries turn, as they often do, to talk about where my children go to school. Many of you, like me, have probably experienced the joy of trying to explain Waldorf education in 2 sentences or less to say, a petroleum engineer or a driven business executive, or in my case, even to my colleagues. They often look at you like you are nuts, and the conversation becomes even more interesting after you explain that you actually pay money for a school that frowns upon early academic achievement, for a school whose kindergarten curriculum consists primarily of free play, making soup and baking bread, for a school that teaches kids to knit before it teaches them to read, for a school that does not even give their students textbooks.

Obviously, I am joking, but those conversations point to a deeper truth about Waldorf education. What I have learned about Waldorf education is that the longer I am exposed to it, and the more I come to understand about it, the more difficult I find it to explain to a complete stranger in the two or three sentences I have their attention. It does not matter how careful I am in trying to express myself, what I say cannot begin to convey the depth and richness of this education.

What I can do is begin to list some of the reasons why I am grateful that my family found its way to Linden Waldorf School:

- I am grateful there is a school that takes seriously the idea that the education of children should be attuned to the development of children
- I am grateful there is a school that believes children should spend their childhood doing child-like things, like playing
- I am grateful there is a school that understands you must develop the imagination and the emotions if you really want to develop the intellect
- I am grateful there is a school that understands that learning is not simply a cognitive process, but that it is also an emotional process and a physical process so that we must educate not simply the head, but also the heart and the hands
- I am grateful there is a school that understands that all subjects are interconnected so the teaching of all subjects must be integrated.
- I am grateful there is a school that understands that the Arts—the performing arts, the visual arts, and the crafting arts—help further the healthy development of our children’s heads, hearts and hands
- I am grateful there is a school that understands the true measure of success is found not simply in one’s achievements, but instead, is found in one’s striving
- I am grateful there is a school that teaches our children to revel in their friends’ accomplishments
- I am grateful there is a school that understands that we really are all in this life together and so emphasizes community and the common good rather than glorifying individual achievement

I could go on with that list, and I know that you all could join me in creating an infinite list. Because I do not have all night, let me close by saying that above all, I, and all of my fellow

parents are grateful there is a school that provides an environment in which children can grow into the sort of beautiful, vibrant young people that these 12 graduates have become.

On behalf of the parents of each of these graduates, we thank Linden Waldorf School from the bottom of our hearts.

Thank you.