

It is truly an honor to speak to you today – something that eight years ago, I never thought I would be doing.

As I thought about what I wanted to say, I decided I should title my speech something graduation-worthy like, "The Future Lies Ahead". The reason for this title is that it pretty much sums up what people are meant to say at graduations, so I thought I would take care of it in the title and move on to something else.

I am going to speak a little about my journey with this school. I feel as though I am also a part of the journey that you, the graduates, have experienced that has culminated to this day.

Our family's first encounter with Waldorf education came after a fateful meeting with a parent who had a child in what was then Linden Corner School. Our daughter Jaisal, a very vibrant, lively child, had become a shell of herself - not eating, not wanting to get out of bed and uninterested - after being in public school for three months. It was as if her spark was extinguished. Not knowing anything about Waldorf education - other than thinking that it was the "tree-hugger" school – and out of desperation, we brought her for a visit to spend the day. When we picked her up at the end of the day, she came running up to us, shouting "I don't want to leave, please just give them the money now!" Overnight, we recognized that the spark was rekindled.

At that time, in first grade, after our public school experience, I felt it was just important that she was happy to come to school every day. I truly thought that this school would just be a short-term solution until we got her into a "real" school. I mean – the school only went to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, we had to leave our location at St David's Church and had no clue where our new location would be AND we were already into the summer. Who would be crazy enough to send their child to a school like that? Not us - that's for sure..... But - we stayed.

So since we stayed, I started reading about Waldorf education - Developed by **Rudolf Steiner** in 1919, is an educational philosophy that is based on a profound understanding of human development that addresses the needs of the growing child. It strives to transform education into an art that educates the whole child—the heart and the hands, as well as the head. That sounds great on the brochure and website, but I never really understood what that meant.

My only idea of Waldorf education can be summed up in the following story. When Jaisal was in second grade, our family was taking a trip to India that would mean she would have to miss one week of school. Being the overly responsible parents that we are, we inquired with Mr McClain what work we needed to take with us on the trip so that Jaisal wouldn't fall so far behind – in second grade!

This conversation was overheard by a class parent who responded, "Oh don't worry, just take a coloring book and some crayons with you and she will be fine." While that

may have been a flippant remark, it only reinforced my concerns about what was happening in the classroom.

This again prompted several discussions between my wife Sonia and me about why our kids were in this “non-academic” school ruled by Placido Plus, Melanie Minus, and Judge Judy Divide. And we did as we do with everything in our household, we discussed it... and... we did what she wanted.

I can say today that I am truly thankful for that fateful decision made back then.

As the years progressed, I started noticing what was happening in and around the classroom. The story of Noah’s Ark became integrated with the study of measurement; the study of ancient Egypt and the pyramids led to geometry and understanding what a tetrahedron is; botany led to the keen powers of observation that are critical in science; form drawings expanded to cursive writing and free-hand geometry; the creation of bee’s wax figurines expanded to the creation of platonic solids.

As I began to understand what was happening in the classroom, I realized it was about the children experiencing that “Aha” moment when they gained true insight to the subject having experienced it in many different ways. In my mind, the “Uhh’s” turned into “Ohh’s” which then turned into “Wow’s” and I began to experience my own “Aha” moments - and I wished I could have been taught in this manner.

And then there is the music. I remember listening to your first winter concert only three months after you picked up your string instruments for the first time. It sent chills down my spine – to realize that in such a short period of time you could actually play music – and on top of that, sound good!

Since that first concert, I can honestly say that every concert I have heard has truly inspired me as I have witnessed the progression of your musical talents. In fact, in the early years, hearing your concerts alone were enough for me to justify the decision to stay at this school.

I have come to learn a lot about this educational philosophy, as you have had the incredible opportunity to experience it - the opportunity to experience what the ancient Greeks experienced by performing in the Pentathlon and learning the grace, beauty and form of the perfect throw of the javelin; to dance the dance of ancient Hindu ancestors from 5,000 years ago; to learn astronomy from a geocentric perspective as Aristotle and Ptolemy would have known it, and then to learn it again from the heliocentric perspective so you could experience that “Aha” moment as Copernicus and Galileo must have experienced.

But it is important to realize that this amazing experience doesn’t just happen. This privilege you have had is only because of the incredible commitment and enthusiasm of your talented teachers constantly thinking about you as individuals - asking themselves everyday, not only how they can establish within you your own high level of academic

excellence, but perhaps more importantly, asking how do they call forth the enthusiasm for learning and work, a healthy self-awareness, an interest and concern for fellow human beings, and a respect for the world? These are the traits that they have been instilled in you.

You have also had the great privilege of having classmates with whom you have been together with for many years. You have been open to people with different experiences, beliefs and talents than your own and you have expanded that openness to inclusiveness and compassion. This has allowed you to live not by fear, but through adventure and giving, as you experienced last week during your class trip. You have come together as a unified and cohesive group that nurture, support and elevate one another. This is a rare gift – absorb it and continue to live by it.

As you have grown through this wonderful journey, I have grown with you. Cherish the experience, because I can tell you that every parent in this audience is envious of the opportunity you have had.

So I can say that I got on board – both figuratively and literally. I realized that this school is run by truly passionate people who believe in giving the invaluable experience of a Waldorf education to their children.

If the courageous teachers, trusting parents and supportive community members had not been willing to fail at the just cause of starting a Waldorf pre-school class many years ago, you may not have had this remarkable educational experience. It is with courage and effort that brings a just cause to reality - as witnessed by the entire Linden Corner community getting together in the summer of 2002, tirelessly working to transform this campus to assure that this education will continue to thrive in Nashville.

You are faced with a blank page in your main lesson books everyday in class - it has to be filled with your thoughts and ideas. In real life, there is also no text book to guide you. But, the foundation and the capacity has been bestowed upon you to guide you – not only in art, science and music, but also in understanding, poise, awareness and sensitivity – the heart and the hands, as well as the head.

The future really does lie ahead - and it is better because of what has come before.