

Chapel Talk
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Family

One of the great things about teaching at St. Andrew's for nearly 30 years is that I have taught, advised, coached and worked with so many remarkable people and have been able to stay in touch with them, especially because of the work Mr. Roach and I do together, through letters, emails, reunions, Christmas cards, visits and even by convincing many of them to return to St. Andrew's to work - in fact, at the moment, I have *seven* former advisees working at this school, although with John and Monica leaving next year, my numbers suddenly drop to five!

A year ago, with the help of one of these former advisees, Bernadette, we launched the St. Andrew's Women's Network. We wanted to bring together St. Andrew's women - alums, mothers, former faculty - and reconnect them to the school, engage in conversations, and deepen their bonds to each other and to the school. I knew that I had known many remarkable women, but in the 11 different events in 5 different cities that we have had in the past year, I have been awed by what so many of these women have done with their lives, by who they are as people. Mostly, I have been struck by how much my sense of family has grown - because every time I see alums or mothers, I immediately feel our connectedness, our natural bond that was formed at St. Andrew's and has remained, despite distance in years or geography. After all, the nature of a family is that, no matter what, you stay connected; you can pick up after many years just where you left off. We are there for one another especially in moments of great happiness, celebration, sadness and tragedy.

My mother taught me many things but one of the most important things she taught me by example was that family is not narrowly defined by blood relatives, that family, instead, is about how expansive and loving and welcoming you can be to others. She lived her life with remarkable openness and generosity; she had an uncanny ability to make people

feel as if they were immediately part of our family. When I was growing up, our house was always full of extra people, often teenagers because I had four sisters and there were sixteen years between the oldest and youngest. My mother was happiest when her house was full of people, and when we had all gotten married and moved away, my parents spent most of their time visiting their daughters and adopting more teenagers on boarding school campuses where not only I but two of my sisters live and work. Many of my former students and many of the faculty still here - just as you all do now with Griz - simply called my mother "Granny" because that was who she was to them. And this, I think, is the real ethos of St. Andrew's: it is a place where we learn to open up ourselves to others; we learn empathy and compassion, generosity and love; we respond to each other as family members and we remain family well beyond the walls and fields of this campus.

Recently, the power of this St. Andrew's family has hit me hard. A few weeks ago, Mr. Roach and I, Mr. and Mrs. Duprey and Sophie Stenbeck, who you all heard speak so powerfully in chapel earlier this year, met in New York for dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Duprey did not know what we were doing that night or who we were meeting for dinner. You see, as Mr. Roach recently told you all, Sophie had decided to endow the Cristin Duprey Scholarship, a gift that would allow a student to come to St. Andrew's every year on a full scholarship in Cristin's memory, a gift that would allow there to be a Cristin Duprey scholar every year *forever*. And on this January night, Sophie was going to tell Stacey and Wallace that she was going to make this happen.

It was a night that I will never forget. It was a night that crystallized my life at St. Andrew's for the last 29 years. It was a night of family.

When Mr. Roach told Stacey two months ago that we wanted to take her and Wallace out to dinner on January 15 but would not tell her why, she began to imagine what this night could be about. She thought, "Would Dad (she has called us 'Mom and Dad' since she was a student here) take me to New York to fire me?" Mr. Roach and I could not spend too much time with Stacey during this interim because we were afraid that we might

betray the secret. As we rode up to New York on the train together and then spent two hours in a coffee shop talking before dinner, we all tried to ignore the suspense, the mystery and the butterflies in our stomachs. But perhaps, even in suspense, we realized the magic of our connection. Stacey often says that she would never have made it through St. Andrew's without me, but it is equally true that Tad and I stayed at St. Andrew's, committed to St. Andrew's because of Stacey and Treava and all of the students whom we loved and who inspired us and our family. For a few hours caught in suspended time, we sat and marveled at what time and St. Andrew's had wrought in our lives. But finally it was time to go to the restaurant for our family dinner.

And what an unlikely family we were as we sat in that restaurant in New York. Not many people who saw us would have guessed that we were family: two white 50 year olds, two African American 40 year olds, one Swedish 30 year old. And yet we were a family. It certainly felt as natural and real and connected as any family dinner I have ever had.

Stacey, my advisee at St. Andrew's in the 1980s, and Sophie, Mr. Roach's advisee in the 1990s, had only met for the first time last September. They had both felt an immediate and profound connection that day, one that continued to resonate in Sophie's soul as she headed back to Los Angeles. At dinner (in a restaurant, appropriately, where the Stenbeck family has always gathered to celebrate and mark important family moments), Sophie described how, after hearing from Stacey about losing her daughter, she returned to California and began to feel the force of Cristin's presence: "Cristin came at me hard. She told me that I had to do this." For Sophie, her gift was the natural extension of the connection she and Stacey had made in September. What I had originally thought of as a miracle suddenly seemed to me to be an organic moment of shared humanity. Sophie has always been a person, as Mr. Roach said, "with a tremendous heart" and her heart found another place to love when she met Stacey.

I have been trying to understand what made this moment possible. I know that part of it is Sophie's generous heart, but it is more than that, I think. As you all saw and heard last

September, Sophie emanates a serenity that a person has only when she is deeply happy, deeply at peace. She has found her mission and passion in life working with underprivileged children, so her life is emotionally full and real. So perhaps it was her own serenity, her own authenticity that allowed her to open herself up to Stacey and her family, to intuit what needed to be done. Sophie has also suffered loss and sadness in her life, losing both her parents when she was only in her twenties - certainly, she implicitly felt Stacey's pain and devastation. But even more, I think the communal St. Andrew's experience, the inherent bond of St. Andreans also made Stacey and Sophie connect on a deeper than usual level. St. Andrew's allows people to realize how fundamentally similar we all are, how connected and intimate we are, even in moments we might not be fully aware of. In many ways, Sophie and the Dupreys are actually a perfect pairing - even though it is invisible in a literal or societal way, their connection is allowed to be seen - and seen powerfully - because of their common St. Andrew's family and experience.

But I also think that this place actually makes us into people who feel for and listen to others in unusual ways. Of course, everyone has the capacity to live in this way, but St. Andrew's emphasizes and nourishes and reinforces this approach. We perhaps are not even aware of what we take away from our lives, our experience here, because this empathetic lens becomes the way we automatically understand people, the way we live, the way we experience the world around us. I have realized that the reason I have been so awed by so many alumnae in the past year is that I have seen and talked to people living their lives with this very lens - it is a subtle, intangible, almost imperceptible but incredibly powerful lens. We have all seen the power of that lens the last few weeks as the Friends of Africa and BECA joined Ali and Ann to help the victims of the earthquake in Haiti and united the school in their effort to help others - once again, a tangible embodiment of this very empathy. We understand and live, fundamentally, this shared humanity, and just as we felt at dinner that night in New York, despite our apparent differences, we are all the same.

Of course, when you live your life in such an open, sensitive, and empathetic way, you are also opening yourself to pain and sadness. The power of these moments of shared

humanity is that they are not singular emotionally. That is, when Sophie told Stacey and Wallace about the realization of their dreams in the Cristin Duprey Scholarship, there was tremendous joy and gratefulness, but of course, this moment was based on the most tragic moment in their lives - the death of their daughter. The emotion of that moment then was a kind of fusion of celebration and sadness, a complex layering of what is the very best and what is the most devastating about being human. We experienced this duality of celebration and sadness today in the dining room as Mr. Roach announced the news of John Austin's appointment as Headmaster of King's Academy. We feel such joy, celebration, pride and excitement for John, Monica and their family. And we feel such sadness and pain at the thought of losing their presence in our lives. As Macduff articulates in *Macbeth*: "Such welcome and unwelcome things at once, 'Tis hard to reconcile."

We most often experience this kind of emotion within the framework of our own families, for you can only experience this emotional intensity when you love and care deeply about the people involved. Because the St. Andrew's family is far reaching, because this family continues to grow and take on many different shapes, the intensity of our own lives also deepens. We feel others' losses much more profoundly; we feel others' joys much more profoundly. And in the end, we live more meaningful lives.

Wallace captured the essence of this complexity when he said at the dinner that for him Cristin's energy, spirit and soul resided at St. Andrew's. As much as she loved and celebrated New York City, Cristin found her peace, fulfillment, joy and home at St. Andrew's. And so, Wallace said, "It is beautiful and inspiring to know that Cristin in the person of the Cristin Duprey Scholar will always be at St. Andrew's."

On a cold February day three years ago faculty, staff, students and alumni gathered in a church in Harlem to celebrate Cristin's life, and on that day and in that congregation, we sensed the immense possibilities, the goodness, love, redemption and peace that lay within the soul and spirit of a young woman named Cristin, of a family named Duprey and a school called St. Andrew's. In this moment of great loss, the Duprey Family found

a way to actually enlarge their family. They showed us that tragedy can lead to an expansion, an assertion of family, of life, of connection.

I am grateful to this school for the people, for the family it has given me, and I am grateful to this far-reaching, ever-growing family for enriching my life in indescribable ways. What I can guarantee to all of you is that you now have a family beyond your own family; you now will see and feel and understand more about others, and you now will live lives of more empathy, more intensity and more meaning because of your St. Andrew's family.