



COMMENCEMENT 2015

June 5, 2015

Remarks by Head of School Elizabeth J. McGregor

“The Power of One”

Honored guests, Trustees Emeriti, Trustees, Westridge administration, faculty and staff, families and friends, alumnae and the Class of 2015!

Good evening. I’m Elizabeth McGregor, Head of School, and I’d like to extend a warm welcome from all of us at Westridge as we join together in celebration of the Class of 2015.

I’d also like to share with you a few remarks about the powerful young women sitting before you.

There is a beautiful description of the power of drops of water in the book *Enduring Love*, written by Ian McEwan, one of my favorite modern authors. In the portion of the story from which I will read, Joe, the main character, is speaking to 10-year-old Rachael as he steps into the muddy ooze of the river bed. He breathes in “the rich earth-and-water smell,” turns to Rachael and says:

“Imagine the smallest possible bit of water that can exist. So tiny no one could ever see it...”

She was screwing up her eyes the way she had on the lawn. “Like the weeniest droplet,” she said.

“Much smaller. Even a microscope wouldn’t help you. It’s almost nothing. Two atoms of hydrogen, one of oxygen, bound tougher by a mysterious powerful force.”

“I can see it,” she cried...

“So,” I said. “Now think of billions, trillions of them, piled on top of each other in all directions, stretching almost to infinity. And now think of the riverbed as a long shallow slide, like a winding ... chute, that’s a hundred miles long, stretching to the sea.”

This image, of the tiniest drop of water having the potential to join with others to become a forceful river eventually reaching a larger body of water, resonates through its intentional parallel with the destiny of one human being and the impact she can have while leading a life of meaning and purpose.

I see this power when I look at today's graduating class.

I first saw this in many of you when you were in sixth grade. I was visiting Westridge before I joined as head of school, and as I came down to Ranney Court, I dodged a determined herd of girls pretending to be horses galloping ferociously around the yard.

Others were sitting in Ranney tree, completely absorbed in their latest favorite book. *Matilda* by Roald Dahl was popular —the feisty young girl who possesses an intellect beyond her years. And who can forget Hermione Granger, described by J. K. Rowling as “very logical, upright and good” but quite a “little know-it-all!”

We are shaped by the essence of the animals or human characters we choose to be or associate with in our imaginations or in reality —as we delve into books, write, watch movies, act in plays, or lead our daily lives. These characters stay within us as memories, as part of our rich internal lives, encouraging us to tap into those qualities and character traits that mean so much to us, such as determination and resilience, and as Ms. Greenstone indicated last evening at Vespers, our sassiness!

At Westridge, in seventh grade, when I really came to know many of you, I saw you literally embrace the Power of One as you engaged in projects with Ms. Bizar. You stepped out of yourselves and interviewed community members who make a difference. You presented your findings and reflected deeply on what it means to be an upstander.

During your high school years, you have continued to benefit from a superb liberal arts education. You have been challenged to think critically and ethically, to become the independent thinkers that you are today. You have been supported by dedicated and talented teachers and parents who love you and wish the best for you. You are empowered, and have a responsibility to be conscious of the world around you and the impact that you can have.

This year, you have seen the power of unexpected heroes, such as Kim Phuc, the girl with outstretched arms in the iconic photograph of the Vietnam War, who when she visited campus spoke about how she chose the lesson of forgiveness, starting in small ways, eventually taking her message around the world.

And you've watched Malala win the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize because she dared to speak up for the right of women and girls to have an education.

Today as we join together at these commencement proceedings, we have a unique opportunity to look back and to pin our hopes on the future. “Now what?” you ask.

You are on a journey. You are one drop of bright, shining water, joining with others in your class. You are ready to spill out of our gates to join Westridge alumnae, such as Sarrah Shahawy, our speaker today, each finding her way on her personal and powerful journey.

We believe in you, and today is the day to reflect on the power of one, the power of one girl, the power of a Westridge girl, and the power that collectively you can harness in small and large ways to make a positive mark on the world.

Already, you have made indelible marks on Westridge, your sisters here, and on all of our hearts.

We stand with you today, full of anticipation of what lies ahead for a world that you will hold in your sure, strong, compassionate hands.

Reference: *McEwan, Ian. **Enduring Love**. Anchor Books, New York, 1998.*