



## Crossroads Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Remarks

Mary Beth Klee (Oct 21, 2016)

Thank you, Mr. Choyt for such a kind introduction, and I want to start out by saying: Happy 25th Birthday, Crossroads! Happy Birthday, all you Crossroadians!

I get kick out of coming back here after all these years. Crossroads has always brought joy to my heart, but you know what the funniest thing for me is every time I come over here lately? I drive down Route 10, turn into the School entry and there are arrows pointing right and left to the different buildings. And the first thing I see is a sign that says: "All Visitors Must Check in at Klee." That's me! I've become a building! That amuses me no end, and it makes me laugh every time I see it. I don't feel important enough or old enough to have a building named after me.

It reminds me of the time I was here for an assembly several years ago, and I slipped in to sit behind the second graders, who had just performed the Ancient Greek Rock (they were adorable). Mrs. Behnke – your wonderful Head at the time - said "the School's founder is here" - and she asked me to come up and say a few words. And as I headed to the front I heard one of the second graders say, "I thought she was dead!" I'm working on it, OK? I'm getting to dead as soon as I can. But I'm still enjoying being with you before I go. Even though I realize that to some of you - 25 years ago may indeed seem like "Back in the Ice Age."

Well, what a long and rich and exhausting day you've all had. Mr. Choyt told me that it's been a special day of festivities – with service projects in the morning, time capsule burial, and the parade in the afternoon. And now this great celebration together. I'm going to keep my remarks short because I know everyone must be tired, (and also because the Parent Association has very graciously given me the opportunity to do a longer evening presentation on January 18 – and that will be more of a formal talk). But I am so thankful for this opportunity to say a few words of congratulations to all of you and all of us.

I see so many old friends in this audience to whom I am grateful: friends who were with us in the basement of St. Denis church between 1991 and 1994 – teachers and parents, like Mrs Warren, Mrs. Price, Mrs. LaMontagne, Mr. and Mrs. Stearns. And a special friend who joined us that very first year we came to Dartmouth College Highway – Mr. Peter Tenney. And Larry Shaper, who has been roped into Board service twice, and whose

daughter Kate was in the last class of Kindergartners for whom I personally did the admissions testing. And so many good friends among the teachers and staff, who have done the work of this school for decades.

But most of all, before me I see you children – all 133 of you – and I want to congratulate you and tell you what I hope Crossroads, this special place where you spend seven hours every day, does for all of you. Here are my hopes for you.

First, I hope – that just like Crossroadians for the last 25 years –**you learn a LOT of fun and important stuff!** I hope **the important knowledge you gain here lifts your mind and your spirit.** I looked up the records of what exactly we were doing twenty-five years ago on October 21, 1991. Some of the first Crossroads Kindergartners filed into the basement of St. Denis Church in Hanover with Mrs. Warren to study “The Solar System: Your Corner of the Universe.” Mrs. Warren read them a beautiful picture book introduction, and taught them that hit tune “the planets revolve around the sun, hurrah, hurrah; they spin on their axis every one, hurrah, hurrah.” (Of course, this was back in the days when Pluto was still a planet...)

A day later, on Oct 22, Kindergartners embarked with me on a unit called “Naturally Geographic: A Child’s Introduction to the Continents. They made their own passports and got ready to fly off to Africa to visit the Serengeti, and Asia to see the Great Wall and to Europe to visit Neuschwannstein, the German castle etc. They sang with full heart the “Continent Cantata.”

By 1992, when we opened as a day school, our kindergarten teacher Mrs. Kilibarda had that unit on the solar system down to an art form. After she finished her phonics and math instruction, she read *The Magic School Bus Lost in the Solar System* and showcased Vincent Van Gogh’s painting “Starry Night.” The children painted their own version of a starry night (with watercolors, crayon, and salt) – all the while listening to Gustav Holst’s, “The Planets.” Later in her class they fashioned planets out of clay made from 20 loaves of stale bread and Elmer’s glue... (Thank you, Nancy Izenon.)

In October of that first year as a day school, our first graders (after doing a lot of reading and math) plunged deep into the Age of Exploration, and they dressed up like important explorers – Leif Erikson, Marco Polo, Vasco da Gama, Colombus, Vespucci, Balboa – to give their explorer reports. We all knew of course, that exploring wasn’t just a European thing. The fifth grade did a unit on the Middle Ages in Africa, and they learned all about the kingdom of Mali under Mansa Musa, and the Arab explorer Ibn Batutta (1324), and they sang that hit tune “Ibn Batutta: Medieval Guy.” And so on and so on. Great books about intriguing topics, projects, reports, experiments, essays, and always poetry and songs.

This fun and important stuff that you learn, the knowledge you gain, opens doors for you. It helps you crack the code of the world around you. You can walk into the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and stroll through their African kingdoms section and see those bronze sculptural heads of kings with stacks of necklaces that go way up their necks, and say *I know what that's about*. Or you can walk into their current Della Robbia exhibit, and see the gorgeous blue and white glazed terracotta wall sculptures from Renaissance Florence – depicting Mother and Child or the virtue “prudence.” And in each case, a little bubble of triumph will rise inside you. You say to yourself: I know what that's about. So, I hope you learn a lot of fun and important stuff, and that the world becomes your oyster!

Here's my second hope for you. **I hope that while you have lots of *fun* learning, you also learn and come to accept fully that -- learning isn't all fun.** No siree. Sometimes it's just hard work. We have a very challenging program here at Crossroads. It asks a lot of you and it requires certain virtues. Certain inner excellences that inspire you and which you can cultivate.

For example, there's the whole second and third grade business of learning math facts. Seven times eight; four times nine, nine times eight. Sure, teachers can come up with games and catchy rhymes, but often it's just a question of working in a quiet space, concentrating to master those hard, unchanging math facts. And memorizing them. And drilling them. Time and again. Over and over. That takes time and effort. That's why we need the virtues, for example, of “diligence” and “perseverance” “patience” and “self-control.”

OR how 'bout the stick-to-it-tiveness it takes to solve systems of linear equations by graphing? (I saw that on Mrs. Gorman's math assignment last week.) That's not quick and easy, I bet. Or how bout: for homework in fifth grade you might have to write a reflection comparing medieval European codes of chivalry to bushido in Feudal Japan. Your first job might be to do an outline. Some of this task turns out to be intriguing. But after 20 minutes, you may just be annoyed and ready to play soccer or check your Facebook. Instead, you've got to reach deep inside you and summon up those virtues of self-control and resolve and never-never-never give up!

Learning and life are sometimes hard. So, that's why your teachers spend time each morning reading you those inspiring stories about those whose lives and actions exemplify key virtues. They want you to have a heart and mind full of examples of people who strive, and know that not everything is fun and easy. In life, there's usually a challenge – sometimes a hard challenge. But hardest things teach the most and they make us the best people. So here's the next thing I hope for you:

Number 3: **I hope your Crossroads experience teaches you that it's not just about “what you know” and “how smart you are,” but WHO you are, the sort of person you**

**become.** Do I try hard? Do I think of others? Do I act with respect and compassion? Am I faithful to my commitments and my responsibilities?

Look at what you did today – to start the day. In celebration of the School's birthday, you had a whole morning of service projects. You took time to celebrate this school's founding by thinking of others. Congratulations! Here is a school founded to pursue knowledge and virtue, and you were practicing the virtue of service, of helping others with a cheerful heart. You were just like the Hobbits, who give presents to others on their birthdays! Finally, about the others....

Here's my fourth and last hope for you. **I hope your Crossroads experience is one of community and belonging and brings you faithful friendships -- life-time bonds.** It's likely that it will. Look around you, and get excited about the fact that you'll probably leave this school with some friends for life. Some of the people sitting next to you, are probably going to be at your wedding. Some of them will be your bridesmaids and groomsmen. I'm very proud of the fact that friendships formed here have been so lasting, and that our students have often remained close, long after they leave our doors.

Last year 6 Crossroads graduates from our oldest class – third graders in the first year of the day school, gathered in Paris for the wedding of one of their classmates who had settled there. Six young men and women, grade school friends now in their thirties, pursuing all very different careers and walks of life (scientists, musicians, mothers, designers), still close after all these years.

Or I look at Bob and Elaine Stearns sitting in the front row, whose son Thomas was in our first full day kindergarten class along with Harker Rhodes and Ben Simonds. And those three boys have done very different things with their lives. Thomas pursued math, which he studied thru grad school at Syracuse University, and he's now a senior data engineer at a Boston firm; Harker's path was law and he went to Harvard, then clerked for Justice Kennedy; Ben Simonds studied history at Oxford and helped write a constitution for the people of Fiji. And they would get together thru college and go hiking in Europe. And earlier this year Harker Rhodes, got married in NYC with at least four of his Crossroads classmates and their parents in attendance.

One year, we even had a wedding of one of our first graduates, Jenny Warren, - RIGHT here on campus under a tent. Jenny had been in our first third grade class and is now the mother of 3 terrific boys. Her maid of honor was fellow Crossroads student Amy Swift (who now resides in Rome). And we were all there – and it had poured the night before, and the tent flooded. Jenny says one of the images that remains etched in her mind, when she, the bride, arrived, was that of Mrs. Price “pushing a wheelbarrow full of water towards the stream. That should've clued me in that the wedding venue was flooding.” (The wedding turned out splendidly.) But that's Crossroads. It is about caring people like Mrs. Price, literally baling you out, friendships, and a community of caring.

How much has Crossroads changed? I don't know. It's easy to look at the difference in buildings and facilities. And they're great. By the time we left the Church hall (all 40 of us) and moved here to Dartmouth College Highway, we were VERY ready for this bright and beautiful campus. That year, September 1994, we grew to 70 students and more teachers, and the next year, 1995 to 90, and that's how it went. Lots of growth, which hopefully makes us grow and get better.

I'll end with this story. One former Crossroads student, my son Andy is now 30 and a Mechanical Engineer with his PhD from MIT. He has 3 kids, works at the Mathworks in robotics, and until recently spent his days teaching robots to drive cars or climb ladders or put out fires or power down nuclear plants. (He built his first robot at Crossroads, by the way). For my 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, my sister assembled a book of memories for me and she asked him to write something about what he remembered about his early years at Crossroads. And you tell me, how much Crossroads has changed. He wrote:

*"I don't remember a lot of my own stories from my first years at Crossroads – I was only five when mom started the school, after all. But I remember many of the stories I learned there: I remember the Babylonian queen, so homesick for her mountain village that the king built her the Hanging Gardens. I remember Confucius counseling the warlords of pre-Qin dynasty China to choose peace. I recall Romeo and Juliet as acted out by my classmates (Stephen Goodrich and Helen Dwight respectively, if I'm not mistaken), and Longfellow's "Paul Revere's Ride" as performed for assembly in front of the parish-hall's kitchen ... the list goes on and on. I remember the world that was opened up to me in those years before we even had a building of our own..."*

*It never seemed odd to me that our school grew so much with each passing year. We were a year older, and someone should learn the stuff we'd learned the years before, so why wouldn't there be another class coming in behind us? I was so excited about the new building on Dartmouth College Highway, and about the hills and woods surrounding it, of course. It was all so big! But even though it was such a big change from the church basement, it always felt right – it was where we Crossroadians belonged.*

*That's what I remember most, thinking back on those years – belonging. I loved elementary school. I may not remember much in the way of personal narrative from my first years at Crossroads, but I remember the things I learned there, and I remember that I was happy there, and I remember that it felt like a second home."*

So, that's what I wish each of you Crossroadians on our 25th birthday – all those gifts: knowledge, virtue, friendship, belonging – a second home.

Happy Birthday Crossroads!