

Grace Anne Holladay

Step Singing Celebration

27 May 2017

A Toast to Harpeth Hall

Good evening! I am extremely humbled and honored to be speaking to you today, and on behalf of the Class of 2017 and the student body, thank you so much for joining us as we celebrate a period of transitions. Tonight, we honor the juniors as they step into their new leadership role, and we celebrate the seniors as we are scattering across the country and the world seeking to further our knowledge, taste a little more of life, and pursue our aspirations.

As Step-Singing shows, Harpeth Hall is a place rich with tradition. One of my favorite traditions is the senior toasts. During the last weeks of school, all senior English classes set aside one of their class periods to reminisce, recognize one another, and come together for one last time. My English class, led by the fearless Mrs. Powers, has become near and dear to my heart over the course of this year, and pausing to reflect on how much we cherish one another was priceless.

Today, as I stand at this podium and look upon you all – my community for the past six years that's shaped me, helped me grow, and poured into my life – I would like to extend this tradition and give one final toast: a toast to Harpeth Hall.

O Harpeth Hall, O place beloved. What a blessing it has been to have spent the past six years in these halls! Harpeth Hall has a lasting legacy and a generational impact. It's the kind of place where an alumna will stop you in line at a coffee shop to ask about her favorite teachers and her favorite traditions, because she remembers her days in our recognizable plaid.

It's a place where learning for the sake of learning is encouraged, a place where teachers love their subjects to the extent that some, like Dr. Echerd, host informal summer classes with no grades, no tests, and no homework, simply to teach students about the world, and more than a few students take a couple hours out of their summer to come and listen to these teachers, simply because they crave knowledge.

Harpeth Hall is a place that is very well-groomed. Thanks to Tim, we have the prettiest softball field in Nashville, and thanks to the maintenance team, we have not only a lawn full of perfectly aligned white chairs, but we also have a gym with the same setup just in case the rain decided to pay a visit. In addition to keeping the nuts and bolts of the school in pristine working condition, our maintenance team fixes flat tires and dead car batteries, and stands at the crosswalk to keep us from being run over in the morning. And if, (hypothetically, of course), I were to trip and fall down the lofty three steps descending from the senior patio, they'll rush over to help me up and put the books back in my backpack. Thank you Frankie!

Harpeth Hall is a place with the best teachers. When a student misses class, the teacher will use his or her free time to meet with the student individually, sometimes giving a one-on-one lecture, answering questions and ensuring the student is on track. Our teachers care about us inside and outside the classroom, asking about our families, listening to our rants, and coming to see our sporting events, dance concerts, and theater productions. They push us farther than we want to be pushed, and when we think we're working our hardest, they show us that we can work harder. Our teachers challenge us to become the best version of ourselves, and they give us all the tools we need – grit, determination, focus, curiosity, and a critically-thinking mind – to reach our full potential.

Harpeth Hall is a place where we are loved. Dr. Balmer not only knows all of our names, but when she passes us during the day, she stops and asks how we're doing because she genuinely cares. Ms. Hill herds students into her office and will just sit and listen to our concerns and struggles, and do what's in her power to help us. Your class will scream and celebrate with you when you sign the wall in the senior house. We celebrate together, we laugh together, and we honor one another. And even when something goes wrong, there is an entire community ready to back you up, support you, or just be that shoulder to cry on.

So to the juniors, cherish your last year at this special place. Do something spontaneous. Make memories. Be sentimental. Work hard. Treasure the spring days when the music is cranked up and you're dancing on the senior patio. Laugh more often. Enjoy prom without the planning. Thank your college counselors – they are superhuman. Love fearlessly.

To the underclassman, don't let these years pass you by. Soon enough, you'll be sitting where the seniors are sitting now – at the end of a journey. Don't get bogged down and miss the precious moments. Thank your parents. Make friends in other grades. Spend more time outside. Try something new. Smile.

And to my seniors, oh how I love you all. Thank you for making it so hard for me to leave Harpeth Hall. Thanks for the smiles in the hallways and the spontaneous dance parties and the GroupMe and the spirit with which you sing our class cheer. Thanks for standing by my side in the good days and in the bad days. Thanks for letting me be a part of your story. Go out and change the world, because if anyone can, it's you all. Write the next chapter of your life, but don't forget your early chapters and the lessons that you've learned here. And know that no matter how many chapters fill up your book, you have 102 other sisters that are willing to help you write the next one.

So let these songs today be a toast to Harpeth Hall and a toast to each other. A thank you of sorts, to thank this place for the best of times and the hard times, too, for gifting us with the wisest mentors and the friends of a lifetime, and for transforming us into confident, independent, and self-assured women. I'm deeply grateful for my experience here, and blessed to have shared my time with you all. Thank you.