

Mother Daughter Breakfast Speech

October 21, 2017

By Zee Pendleton

Good morning, Dr. Balmer, Faculty and Staff, Students and Moms,

It's so nice to be back at the Hall! When Kerry Wilson asked me to speak I was honored, yet a little puzzled. After all, I am not a distinguished alum, or even the mom of a distinguished alum, not yet anyway, but give Bitsy a few more years. Some of you may know me as Bitsy's mom, and some of you know me as Lia and Margaret Anne's mom. Some of you girls might even know me as Ms. Zee if you attended St. George's Kindergarten. However, most of you probably don't know who in the world I am, and that's fine too.

I am blessed to have been a parent here from 2002-2017. I remember the excitement when Lia received her "big envelope" that said she had been accepted. My husband tells people that I hyperventilated on our front lawn because I was so excited, and couldn't even open the envelope. We were all thrilled. Little did we know how Harpeth Hall would come to mean so much to us over the next decade and a half.

So many things have changed around campus since Lia started in the 5th grade. She began her middle school years in the old middle school building, 6th grade brought portables named the Harpeth Acre Woods and the opening of the Visual Arts building. Margaret Anne started the 5th grade in a brand new beautiful middle school. When Bitsy approached the scene, there was a remodeled high school and the athletics and wellness facility was in the planning stages. Indeed, the facilities are top notch around here, but that's not why we sent our girls to Harpeth Hall, and surprisingly enough, it wasn't even the superb academics. Although though both were a factor, the real reason we wanted our girls to go to Harpeth Hall was the environment. We wanted them surrounded by people whose goal it was to help them succeed, to empower them to do anything they dreamed, and to walk through life with confidence.

Raising 3 girls is the greatest joy of my life. I am sure that it's the same for bringing up boys, but I will never know. The one thing for which I am sure is that a house full of girls never makes for a dull moment. They are wonderful, passionate, energetic, dramatic, challenging, exciting, and hormonal. I didn't know I was having a girl when Lia was born. She came into the world when I was a few weeks shy of 25. I was a baby myself! Brad and I had just been transferred to Richmond, Virginia. I had no idea how I was going to take care of this tiny little baby without my mom. I remember looking down at her in the hospital before we went home, and I panicked! I couldn't believe they were going to let us just walk out with her. Seriously, I was hoping for some instructions? I fretted and fussed over her, took her to the doctor weekly for something

or other, and the baby reference guide of the day, *What to Expect the First Year*, became my Bible. If the book said it, it must be true! Believe me, that first year was not the only time I wished for some instructions! But by the time Margaret Anne came along 26 months later, I realized that babies were going to get sick, fall down, and cry, cry, cry. I was blissfully unaware of the middle school and teenage years to come!

Having two girls that close together was chaotic, challenging, yet so much fun. Lia loved being a bossy big sister, dressing Margaret Anne up with boa's and headbands when she was barely home from the hospital. Lia spoke early, Margaret Anne spoke late. I did everything by the book with Lia, bottle gone at 12 months, Margaret Anne had her "baa" until 2. And guess what? Neither one is any worse for the wear! By the time Bitsy came 5 years later, life became even crazier. Thank goodness for Margaret Anne. She could change a diaper, make a bottle of formula, feed her and dress her. She was the backseat babysitter as I began my chauffeur days. Those were happy days, and there are days when I would go back in a New York minute. Mostly, though, I enjoy the phase of life that my children are currently in. I have always tried to treasure each and every milestone. I remember vividly Lia wanting to walk herself into Kindergarten after the first couple of days. I was worried that she would not remember the way to her class, but she adamantly said, "Mom, you may not walk me in!" She jumped out of the car, but as she got to the door she turned, waved, and blew me a kiss. I bawled all the way home. I remember when Margaret Anne's 5-year-old teacher at St. George's told me she would be Mary in the Christmas Pageant. If you know Margaret Anne, then you know how sweet and what a kind heart she has, and that she was perfect for the role. Yes, we thought she was starring on Broadway! And, of course, I have to share a Bitsy story. The spirited, funny, wacky Bitsy. So different than my other two girls, but everyone needs a spicy one! I have probably enjoyed each milestone of hers the most because she was my last. I savored every single "the last time" moments, except maybe potty training and teaching her to drive. Last May when she walked across Souby Lawn I wanted to cry, but immediately after receiving her diploma from Dr. Balmer, she turned, and in true Bitsy fashion, lifted her diploma high above her head and shook it towards the crowd. She worked hard for that, and she let everyone to know!

Raising these girls has been my biggest challenge, and my biggest blessing. I remember asking my mom how I was ever going to love another baby as much as I loved Lia. She said, "Your love multiplies, it does not divide". And, of course, that is so true. Over the years the girls have asked me and Brad if we have a favorite. Even last week when all three were home one of them asked. I always reply, "yes, but it depends on the day." Which is always followed up by, "Who is your favorite today?" I often reply. "Wouldn't you love to know!"

I have seen many changes in the world over the 26 years I have been raising my girls. I am sure if you asked my parents they would say the exact same thing, as would their parents. The world is different for better and worse. Technology has changed the lives of parents and kids. I enjoy telling my girls how we had to look up information in an encyclopedia at the library when we were doing research for a paper. There were no computers; we had to use typewriters and

white-out. If only I had had Google in college! And, of course, no cell phones. I have to admit as a parent, cell phones make it a lot easier in the high school years. I have watched as social media went from 0 to 100 in the blink of an eye. From AOL instant messaging, to Facebook, Instagram, snapchat, and probably many things I am not even aware. I remember Lia and Margaret Anne's reaction when I joined Facebook. "Mom, really???? This is not for adults." And, laughing when my own father joined a few years back, and I had to show him the like button because he was typing out "like" in the comments. Life happens, and comes full circle. So, girls, when your mom wants to snap chat you, let them, when they message you in full, complete sentences with punctuation, its ok. We just want to be part of your world! When they want to track you on Find Friends right after you get your license, it's not because we must know where you are at every moment (that's a plus), its simply that we are worried, scared, and beside ourselves that our little girl just left the house driving a car, when minutes ago you were just learning to walk. And, moms, allow your girls the freedom to make mistakes. It's hard, I know, but they will be fine.

My little girls outgrew their plaid, wore their floor length white dress and walked across Souby lawn. Their father and I have seen the benefits of their time at Harpeth Hall. But more importantly they recognize this gift. They are grateful now for the long nights of homework, the many times that we made them tackle a difficult situation on their own, and the pride that comes from attending Harpeth Hall. I secretly love when they would bring new friends home to visit. Whether it was girlfriends or boyfriends, inevitably we would end up driving by campus. This always ended with wide eyes and jaws dropped, the new friends exclaiming "THIS is your high school?! It looks like a college campus. A drive by always starts the "remember when" stories, and conversations about what this place is really about. Anecdotes of the place that helped my girls to flourish. Just last week Bitsy had three girls home for fall break. During the drive by, the new friends were telling me that Bitsy was their proofreader for papers. Bitsy looked at me and said "can you even believe it?? Shocking!" Thank you, Mrs. Meltesen. We can all attest that this place makes a difference. Harpeth Hall has been a milestone and cornerstone in my girl's life.

When I first became a mother, I had no idea of the highs and lows that I would face with each season of their life. It's hard setting boundaries and being consistent. It's hard to not to give them every little thing their heart desires, and its hard watching them struggle with what to do with their future. It's devastating to watch your little girl's heart get broken for the first, second or third time, and it's even harder to see them left out by their peers. However, if you ask my girls, they will probably say, "Mom says life's not fair; life is full of disappointments." Followed by, "Tomorrow will be better; it always is." Though those may not be the words of a scholar, president, or CEO; they are the simple words from a mom who has raised three girls.

I have enjoyed my time with you. I truly miss this school, and the Harpeth Hall plaid!