

Baccalaureate Address for the Ashley Hall Class of 2018
Friday, May 25, 2018

I want to thank you for the opportunity to deliver this Baccalaureate address. It truly is an honor and a privilege.

All over our nation the season of high school commencements is upon us. There are likely to be many speakers who point to things we know in general about the class of 2018 that a number of us here this evening will find astounding. First of all, you were born as the 20th century ended and the 21st began. You have no idea of the fear that permeated the world then- the Y2K scare. There was great uncertainty about whether or not computer systems around the world would crash. Some very skeptical people even took all of their money out of the bank and stored up canned food! But we rolled without event at midnight into the new year and new century and now we are 18 years in. A fascinating fact to me about those of you born around 2000 is that you have a predicted life expectancy of 100 years. Imagine that-100 years! You live in a digital world that largely did not exist when you were born. In fact the first Apple Store was opened in 2001. Your parents are likely to remember several tragedies that galvanized our nation- the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster and the horrific events of September 11. In fact, the America you know, the one after 9/11, is dramatically different from the country we knew prior to it in terms of attitudes and concerns about vigilance, safety, and privacy. You have never known your nation not to be involved in conflict overseas. And yet we have great faith as your cohort is standing up against violence, bigotry, and hatred. You are saying #NoMore! In general, you of Generation Z have the opportunity- and some of us would say imperative- to change this nation

and world for the better. And that has been precisely for which your Ashley Hall education has been getting you prepared, producing educated women who are independent, ethically responsible, and prepared to meet the challenges of society with confidence. We are counting on you to do big things!

So how did the Ashley Hall class of 2018 get to this place today? Onto the Rutledge Avenue campus in the fall of 2002, Rebecca, Marianna, Gordon, Caroline Clark, Ann, and Natalie Smith arrived as bubbly two year olds. Over the course of the next three years, you were joined in Ross by Caroline Bevon, Natalie Jennings, Grace, LouLou, Laura, Sara Chakeris, and Hannah Reuther. The EEC was a magical place of exploration and adventure. Mrs. Muti became the Head of School in 2004 and immediately your education was impacted for the better. You had strings for the first time- you played *Each and Every Ant* E- Each, Each, Each, Each and every A- Ant, Ant, Ant, Digging in the D- Dirt, Dirt, Dirt, All the way to Greece to learn how to play your open E, A, D, and G strings. It hurt your arms to play, but you persevered, some of you for the next thirteen years! Pardue Hall was under construction, and you had to move cautiously as you walked to your swimming lessons with Mrs. Laney.

From 2006 until 2010 you made your home in Pardue under the direction of Ms. Woodson who played the guitar and sang the Big Yellow Taxi with you at every Morning Meeting. Your class grew when Meaghan, Lauren, Abigail, Kinsey, Olivia, Mallory, Eugenia, Eliot, and Sarah Volpe joined in first grade. Already 39% of the class of 2018 was onboard. McKenna and Hollis enrolled in 2nd, Chasity in 3rd, and in 4th Anna, Addison, and Lily. How many of you remember getting your teeth pulled by your caring teachers in Lower School like Mrs. Bolden and Ms.

Slay? You learned to read, write, and calculate with great efficiency, and you dabbled in the arts and sports. You were stars as first grade angels in the Christmas play, you staged a 2nd grade production that featured the fairy tales of Rapunzel, Cinderella and the Three Pigs, and then in 4th grade, as part of Ashley Hall's fabulous Centennial Celebration, you performed in the Noah's Flood Opera at Memminger Auditorium. You had to make animal masks in art as part of your costumes- it might have been an easy task for some of you but you had to form them so they would not cover your mouth because you had to sing. And, of course, you all had to work, get along, and move about in pairs! It was rated the hardest musical EVER by some of you- but it was a resounding success. As "seniors" in the Lower School, you were kept in check by Ms. Rainey, Mrs. Saunders, and Mrs. Gibson- well, they tried to keep you under control but they had to finally ban your entire grade from playing four square at recess because you were too aggressive. The John Rivers Library and the new Upper School Science classrooms were completed during your years in Pardue, and you were thrilled to come to the new story well for reading! How many of you remember Mr. Ervin and his pet snake Vanessa that he sported around his neck as he walked about campus? Imagine everyone's chagrin when Vanessa disappeared from the classroom and was never found!

You spent your intermediate school years of grades 5 and 6 in Lane Hall under the guidance of Mrs. Ruggiero. The class of 2018 welcomed Mady and Ella as fifth graders, and Shelby, Morgan, Brooke, and Madison Whelpley as 6th graders. You had real lockers, not cubbies, for the first time! What a production it was on Orientation Day to bring all of the materials to decorate that special space- and what an ordeal it was to clean them out at the end of the year, finding all kinds of lost goodies at the bottom of a heap of half-dirty sweatshirts and empty snack

Tupperware containers. You learned that you were either Purple or White, and that distinction will last you for the rest of your life. Mrs. Lee taught you about Harkness discussions, but many of you were terrified to speak. Remember Tuck Everlasting and how Mrs. Lee would look at you quiet ones and open her eyes wide in a stare and draw you out with “Got anything to say?” Mrs. Bowden, then Ms. Sill, had you participate in an entomology project and you had to dress up like the bug you were researching. In fact, she called you all “her ladybugs”! Your art teacher Mrs. Wellein had a way of reminding you about taking care with your projects: “Girls, tiny tiny tiny dots of glue,” and whenever things went badly in class, she would utter “Oh, poopysnots.” You traveled as a class to Atlanta and to Green River- two totally different trips but chances for you all to bond. Look around: 60% of you Seniors here today had those experiences. But one of your favorite memories was the dance parties that happened the last five minutes of Friday afternoons. Your teachers would run up and down the hall (well, some of them did!), encouraging you to join in, with Gwen Stefani’s *The Sweet Escape* blaring through the building. The Whites won the Cup when you were in 6th grade (that’s hard for me to say- after all, I am a purple). The new Dining Commons was constructed during this time and Pierce was renovated for a classroom space, forcing the entire student body to eat lunch under tents spread across the grounds. Unfortunately all this work in McBee House had an undesirable effect: the Ashley Hall STAR infestation- which was the code word for the rodents (Get it: STAR spelled backwards=RATS) that were disturbed from their home under the house and made their way to the gym and classrooms where you had terrifying encounters with them. Did you know that Mrs. Muti thought someone was stealing candy from her desk and had Mr. Bourque set up a hidden camera- only to catch the midnight escapades of some very large mice eating her chocolates?!

In 2012, you entered high school. Emily Clarke and Allison joined in seventh grade and Sophie, Erin, and Isabelle matriculated into 8th; Sara returned. In Morning Meeting you had to sit in the back of the auditorium but you had a great team of teachers who were helping you make the transition into Upper School. Mrs. Webb told great stories about law and kept your interest in history strong because of her anecdotes. Remember the 12 page Iliad essays you had to write.....that she somehow misplaced.....but then you all got A+s when she could not find them? They are probably still in her classroom. She spearheaded your participation in the Youth in Government program where you apparently had to spend three “lifeless” days in a windowless room in Columbia working on a bill to propose to the Senate and House. It sounds as if you all hated it, and the teachers must have also because you have never been taken on a class trip since then. You tackled algebra with determination. Madame Dougherty began her French teaching of you in seventh grade; it is fitting that she retires now that she has seen you through the French program. Ms. Rhett had to constantly tell you to “Simmer down”- I think you still show a lot of that spirit and spunk that was a bit unbridled back when you were twelve and thirteen! Oh, and yes- there was sweet revenge- the Purples won the Cup.

In August 2014, your class was ushered into the final four years of high school. As freshmen, you were joined by Claire, Joy, Jules, Amelia, Whitney, Hannah Meeks-Kitrell, Maggie and Jenny. Eliot returned. You endured oral tests by Mr. Muti; he would pull from a bag a date or vocabulary word to which you would have to respond- in front of everyone else in the class. Mortifying. You Harknessed more, you immersed yourself in biology (especially the part about

the human reproduction system), and you faced Oral Proficiency Interviews in your language classes.

As sophomores you added Lixue, Madison Jenkins, Kelsey, Docia, Jena, Emma, and Emily Rapach. The class of 2018 was then complete. Under the direction of Mrs. Harper and Mrs. Newton you completed a fauxDP around the following essential question: How does literature reflect the region's cultural dynamism in a polycentric world? What a mouthful! You had to pick a region and time period, assimilate resources provided by the teacher, and then chose a painting or a piece of sculpture and pull the elements together to answer the prompt. Some of you chose Europe, thinking you would get off easy, and remember your surprise when you were assigned- not France, not Italy, but the Balkans!! However, this difficult project made the second semester ODP feel like a breeze. You learned geometry and applied your knowledge to design quilts for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at MUSC. Some of you became beekeepers; some of you poured yourself into special community action projects and encouraged your classmates to participate with you. You were fabulous Big Sisters, and you also were wonderful role models and teachers as your own academic classes paired with others in the Lower School. You derived physics equations, you programmed robots, and you explored the rich vistas of literature. Your junior and senior years were marked by some of your most favorite memories: kidnap, banquet, and prom; getting your Ashley Hall rings; the Christmas Play; winning athletic contests, especially against your rivals Porter Gaud; fabulous travel experiences to places like Russia, Ireland, India, Italy, Spain, France, Japan, and China; college applications and acceptances; AH Senior Dragon Boat (who won their division by the way); a great Square Dance; senior thesis and senior project. How about that last Pep Rally? I dare say there has not

recently been such an outpouring of love from your faculty as there was on that day. Just think about it- over 30 teachers, from all parts of the school, rehearsing hours with special dance moves and spending days finding outfits to fit their decade of graduation- all to put on a memorable performance for you- a final gift.

Even though you have been busy and perhaps stretched thin at times, I'll bet you feel tonight as though these years have simply flown by.

Over your time at Ashley Hall, you have shared your gifts of laughter, song, poetry, music, art, athleticism, and generosity. Nearly half of you have a sister or mother or both who are Ashley Hall girls. 82% of you have participated on an athletic team; 49% of you have been a member of a performing arts group; 65% have been a part of campus organizations; 78% have traveled internationally with your school. You have taken full advantage of all that this school, soon to be your alma mater, has to offer. Overall, Class of 2018 at Ashley Hall, you fifty-four seniors have excelled in all aspects of school and community life. Nearly 50% of you are either only children or the last to leave the nest; your homes will be quiet next year, and your parents will have to adjust. Please encourage them not to become strangers on campus. 36% of you are the oldest in the family, the first to go off to college. Never forget that your younger siblings are looking up to you and watching how you manage this transition. It is totally normal that you are filled right now with a range of emotions: in your own words, you are excited, grateful, sad, confident, determined, pumped, and filled with nostalgia. So are all of us as we anticipate your Commencement, day after tomorrow. Look around at your faculty; I hope you know the passion they have for what they teach and more importantly, the beautiful and open hearts they have

offered to you as they have walked beside you in your educational journey. Know that they are so proud of who you are becoming.

When you think about your next phase of life, you say that you are most excited about making new friends, living in different towns and cities, exploring your passions, and enjoying the independence and freedom that comes from leaving home. Lean into that tension that comes with change- and know that you are ready!

A few weeks ago, a large group of you Seniors gathered in a circle on senior lawn- you kicked off your shoes, you cued up music and began to sing and dance. In that moment you were aware that you are a member of a very special family. Look to your left and right- these girls right here in these pews with you are your family. And while next year, your class members will be scattered across America and even abroad, your memories, your stories will be your glue. Your reflecting on your shared experiences over these past years at Ashley Hall will be a key to your re---membering- that is, your bringing this special group back together in thought and in reality. Do it often- let your classmates and teachers know you are thinking about them. Tell them what they mean to you. Re----member.

Class of 2018, I want to leave with you a charge. I grew up in the Episcopal Church and its Book of Common Prayer offers this prayer for young people that seems so timely for you today. So girls, as I call your name, please stand and remain standing for your charge.

(READ NAMES ONE BY ONE)

God our Father, You see your children growing up in a unsteady and confusing world; show them that Your ways give more life than the ways of the world and that following You is better than chasing after selfish goals. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith and to keep alive their joy in your creation. Amen

(Be seated)

Class of 2018, you have been blessed with a fine education; you are a valued member of a community that loves you and believes in your ability to accomplish what you set your mind to. Possunt quae volunt- Girls with the will have the ability. Godspeed as you journey forth from Ashley Hall.

Delivered by Anne T. Weston, Ph.D., class of 1973, Assistant Head of School