

December 5, 2011

Dear Friends of Chatham Hall

A long, steep hill runs along the full length of Main Street in my gritty hometown in Upstate New York. Every block a street heads up that hill from Main. At the bottom, Main meanders with its grocery stores, small businesses, banks, and town offices.

Once a week our high school cross country team ran that hill for its full length—down the hill, over a block on Main, up the hill, over a block on the top, down the hill, over a block on Main, up the hill and on and on. All the way from the Navy Depot at the edge of town to the library near the river. The only mercy: the hill is short—steep but short. Back and forth through town we went on those autumn afternoons. The firemen waved to us and cheered halfway.

We called that snakelike workout “Spaghetti and Meatballs.” Today we would probably name it for some video game of jagged, abrupt turns, of pain relieved momentarily by a rapid downhill glide. Chutes and ladders?

Over the holiday I ran that course early one morning. In fact, I did spaghetti and meatballs for Thanksgiving. Yum. Or, rather, ouch. And I finished it with the long, steady uphill near the library, then down one more street, through the alley, and I was back at my mother’s. Life felt like a John Updike novel.

We are now entering the spaghetti and meatballs of the academic year. That one long stretch, that steady and lengthy incline toward Thanksgiving, the most concentrated, sustained period of teaching in the year, is over. Now, Christmas break is days away, then Long Winter Weekend breaks the winter weeks, followed by Spring Break, then the sprint to the end of the year, with AP exams, traditions, final exams, and all the hustle that brings a year to conclusion.

So, at this point, we take stock. Where have we been recently? Where are we headed at this moment? Some random details and thoughts:

- We assembled and delivered 18 Thanksgiving baskets for a range of people formerly and currently associated with the School. Great generosity on the part of this big-hearted school.
- Field hockey ended the season brilliantly, with a 1-0 loss for the conference championship to the #4 team in the State. What a team we had. A boatload, so to speak, of swimmers are out for this competitive season, and some of them can churn up the pool. Basketball ran out of steam in the second half of a recent game, after leading, at one point substantially. Conditioning should do it for them.
- *Little Women* was charming—a sentimental drama delicately and movingly acted. A treat for the heart. Now *Into the Woods*, a horse of a completely different color, with much emotional dissatisfaction, longing, and existential angst. Plus a couple self-absorbed princes. And a truly unsettling wolf. Not to mention a witch with

some seriously bad attitude. Sondheim at his sophisticated best, and the girls are to be praised for taking this musical on.

- As we are completing our first semester in this our transition year from trimesters to semesters, a number of us are noting how ragged we were during that week before Thanksgiving. A mid-semester long weekend (perhaps tacked onto Parents Weekend) may be needed in the future. That seems to be the pattern in other schools and colleges. We are looking at this kind of change for next year.
- Walker Abbott '14 has written a strong application for our Hallam Hurt Travel Award, and she will be off to Argentina this summer to study organic beef production. This week a representative from The Experiment in International Living will be on campus to start this year's application process. Last year, through an alumna's generosity, we were able to send three girls off to France, Costa Rica, and China. Hope to send three more this year ... Also, this week the seminars begin to prepare our group (12 students, 3 chaperones) for this year's spring break trip to Cape Town.
- Apropos of matters international... Ali Neff, a graduate student at UNC Chapel Hill in Communication Studies with a concentration in Cultural Studies, and her husband, Bomba, recently presented one of our Wednesday evening World Culture Talks on their work chronicling tribal rituals in Senegal. Fascinating. Some great dancing, too. Also, our Model UN group is just back from their conference in Montreal, where they represented Iceland.
- Final exams are in one week, vacation in two. Whew. Between now and then, there are many School traditions, including decorating the School, a Chapel service of Lessons and Carols, our Christmas Pageant, Senior Night in the Well, and Secret Santas. And did I mention exams. We're in a one-horse open sprint.
- The college application deadline for seniors is looming. Earl Macam wants all applications in by December 15, and the seniors seem to be on his timetable. Congratulations to them for their hard work. Also, senior parents have received his e-mail about his financial aid Webinar on December 12.
- The sophomore class seemed to have a great time recently at the Blackfriars Theater watching one of my (although I was not there ...) favorite plays. Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Nothing like Lady Bracknell being played by a man, and the actors speaking directly to our students sitting on the stage. Ah, the famous exchanges:

JACK: Gwendolen, it is a terrible thing for a man to find out suddenly that all his life he has been speaking nothing but the truth. Can you forgive me?

GWENDOLEN: I can. For I feel that you are sure to change.
- The first iPad semester draws to a close... We'll be undertaking a formal evaluation of how things have gone, of successes and challenges, to plan for the future. It is amazing how that nifty device has integrated itself into the lives of a number of us.
- Our riders have been, well, off and riding. Many blue ribbons. The stables look fabulous. We've taken the white paint off the brick and are about to paint the woodwork black. Striking and beautiful.

- It is not too early for you to have your eyes on Family Day this year on April 20. Students can have a friend or relative—a possible prospective student—stay over to acquaint her with life at Chatham Hall. Also, we are planning special activities for parents of juniors and their daughters to move them along in the college application process. Information will be coming your way.
- Study groups are gearing up for the visit of this year's Leader in Residence, Gloria Steinem, on January 17-18. You are welcome to attend her address at 7:00 p.m. on that Tuesday (the 17th). We are very excited and expect a lively time with Ms. Steinem.
- Something exciting and new. Two items now available to you through the parent section of the Web site: the online version of our student newspaper, *The Columns*, and a range of photographs of life at the School, which you can download or order through Flickr.
- And, finally, we are all excited today (yes, this very day when you are receiving this) about the Grammy Award winning Carolina Chocolate Drops being on campus for a concert this evening. Great group. Fantastic female lead singer. If you want a sense of how we will be rocking tonight, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1P18qlKq41o&feature=relmfu> and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QuM_9UlcSck&feature=related.

Happy holidays to all of you!! No spaghetti and meatballs for me

Gary Fountain
Rector