

Commencement Speech by Matthew Sims, Salutatorian

May 16, 2010

Before I say anything else, I'd like to pause for a second to remember a special member of this class. Ali Mills may no longer be with us, but not a day goes by where her presence goes unnoticed at St. George's, whether it be Ali's Way or that plaque in the school that reads "don't let your nightmares crowd your dreams," or even simply a warm fuzzy feeling deep inside when you think of her. Like a great athlete raises the play of his or her teammates, Ali brightened the lives of everyone around her. Something I've noticed about Ali is that basically everyone who knew her has some sort of story about how she brightened their own life. For me, it was sixth grade. I still remember the surprise and excitement I felt when I received a call from Ali asking me if I would go the movies with her and Elizabeth Compton. This seems like nothing special, but you have to understand, other than sports, I really did not get out much, especially with girls, so this was a first. The movie, *Barbershop II*, I think it was, was not that good, but we all had a great night. I did not think much of it at the time, but as the years have passed, I have come to realize just how special that night was in my life. Ali probably had no idea, but she opened me up in a way. She unintentionally reached out to me and showed me that it actually is fun to go out with friends and do something that does not involve playing with a ball. Like I said, I have noticed that everyone has such a story about Ali. It may be nothing like my story, but they all come to the same conclusion. Ali positively changed everyone's lives. I have always wondered if she knew just how much she improved the lives of everyone around her. One thing is for sure, though. This class, and this community miss Ali very, very much.

I was talking with Caitlin Plath the other day, and don't ask me why but we started talking about when I moved houses in the fifth grade. Ever since my family had moved to Memphis when I was three, we had lived in a house in Germantown near Riverdale Elementary. This was really the only house I had ever known, and when I came home and saw my parents had put the house up for sale, I immediately ran out into the yard and started kicking the "for sale" sign. The thought of leaving my childhood home, of leaving my good friend, Robert, who lived across the street, absolutely terrified me. Now, looking back on all of that, I feel pretty silly. The house we live in now...well let's just say it is much better, and to top it off, I made a new best friend, Trey Lasley, whose driveway was side by side with my driveway. I could not possibly count the number of hours we spent in the driveway and our yards playing basketball, football, soccer, and a number of other made up sports. Needless to say, I am now very happy with my parents' decision to move.

Now it's time to move again. I've been at St. George's for 13 years, and right now, I am kicking at that "for sale" sign again. I don't want to leave this place, and I bet many of you feel the same way. I am excited about college. I can't wait to meet new people. I can't wait to basically live on my own, and I can't wait to join the 110,000+ that fill the Big House on fall Saturdays to watch a pitiful team attempt to play football.

Still, the thought of leaving St. George's fills me with dread. St. George's has been a second home for me, a place where I have literally grown up. I don't understand why anyone would want to leave this place, but the more I look at the situation, the more I see that we are moving on to that bigger, better house. This is nothing against St. George's. I am 100% confident that there is not a single school out there better than this

one, but I think when we look back out our days here in three, four, five years, we'll think to ourselves, "What I had at St. George's was great, but what I have now is even greater."

As I mentioned earlier, I've been at St. George's for 13 years. Now, that does not quite literally feel like yesterday, but it sure doesn't feel like it was that long ago. We have come so far, and I have grown so much both mentally and physically...well maybe just mentally, but I can still clearly remember my first day at St. George's in senior kindergarten. I walked into the classroom with my Star Wars satchel bag sort of backpack, was welcomed by Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. Mullen, and was shown my cubby, the biggest one I had ever seen...I immediately knew I loved this school. Only a couple of days later, Drew Schneider gave me an electronic digimon game at recess, and we've been best friends ever since. My career at St. George's was off to a great start. Senior kindergarten was also the year when Nathan Rose set himself apart as the leading candidate for Head Prefect. Every day at recess over a period of two or three months, he would lead the entire class in digging a hole to China through the mulch around the swings. I knew then that Nathan would have the determination and perseverance necessary to be the Head Prefect because each day the work would progress slowly, and each day we would come back to find that our work from the previous day had been undone by the feet of other classes, and each day Nathan would urge us to press on.

The next five years were a blur, well, except third grade when I had to sit on the bench all recess every day without fail. That was the longest year ever. The year was not totally lost, though. This was the year that St. George's announced the forthcoming addition of a middle and high school and also the addition of Mr. Taylor and his family to our school. This was easily one of the most important events in all of our lives for a very

obvious reason....I mean, where would this class be without Allyson Taylor? As for fourth grade, those of you who don't still have nightmares about "Falling Rock"... well, I envy you. Thank you, Mr. McCreery. Fifth grade was easily the best year of elementary school...oh I almost completely forgot. Sallie, Mr. Robken called, and he wanted me to tell you, he's still mad that you broke his hog.

Soon we were crossing over to the middle school. In a time where we were all so impressionable, we were blessed with the greatest teachers: both Mr. Millers brought an energy that made everyone excited to go to class. Mr. Thompson not only taught many of us to ride a unicycle but also graced us with many stories that may not have been relevant to the curriculum but nevertheless taught us in one way or another. I could go on, but none of it would have been possible without the presence of Ms. Cook...excuse me, Mrs. Burruss. I think the fact that four years later I still wander down to the middle school just to talk to her speaks for itself. Middle school was not just about the teachers, though; it was also about our lunch lady, Ms. Sue. The whole city came to know that you can take our food, but you cannot take our lunch lady. Middle school would not have been complete, though, without our trip to Tremont. Who could forget Mr. Cooper making Connor, Jake, and several other guys run laps at 2:00 in the morning?

Before long we stepped up to high school. When I sat down and started to think about high school, my brain became so flooded with memories (mostly good, some bad) I got a headache. I could sit up here and talk about these last four years all day long, but instead I've decided to leave you with one last thought. These last four years have been the happiest of my life. Just last week, my dad asked everyone in the family, "What makes you happy?" When he finally asked me, and I thought about my answer, I came to

a deep realization. Of course, I was not going to give my family any sort of emotional one-up, so I sarcastically replied instead, “Being with my family.”

I’m ready to give my answer now, though. What makes me happy is simply being with the people I love. The secret to my happiness these last four years has been exactly this: I have surrounded myself with people that I love. Notice I did not say “people that love me.” People can love you as much as they like, but until you open your heart and love them back, you won’t be happy.

I love my family. My response may have been sarcastic, but I really am happy when I am with my family. You probably already know this, but the Sims family can have fun doing the most mundane things by turning it into a competition.

I love my friends. I am so lucky that St. George’s has provided me with friends that I have loved throughout my years here. I have always said that if I could go to school and not have to go to class, I would have no problem with getting up early and going to school. I could sit there all day in that senior lounge and just hang out and sing Michael Jackson songs with Asa, Ashland, and Mary-Ashley. Even when we didn’t have the senior lounge, my only motivation in going to school each day was the opportunity to be with my friends. Outside of school, I am not happiest when I’m playing sports, as hard as that is to believe, I’ve always been happiest when I am with my friends that I love. I know who my best friends are, because when I am with them, I lose all my problems. I could have just lost an awful game and be extremely upset, but as soon as I meet up with them, I am happy again.

What more could a person ask for than to be happy even when they are deeply upset? I feel like the luckiest man in the world today, because I have so many people that

not only love me but also so many people that I love and that I would willingly spend every moment of my life with if I could. So my advice to you today is this: surround yourself with people that you love, not just during these next four years but for the rest of your life. Life is too short, too fragile not to spend every possible moment with people that you love.