



School on Wheels

Inspire Learning • Empower Kids • End Homelessness

St. Richard's School Commencement Address – 6/1/12

-Sally Bindley, MSW – Founder & CEO of School on Wheels

Good morning, graduates. It's an honor to be back here at St. Richard's. I enjoyed working with many of you at the Entrepreneur Academy. I was impressed with the level of creativity, teamwork, and intellect that I witnessed during those few days we spent together back in the spring. I am happy to be back here to speak to you today as you embark on a fabulous journey.

I remember being in your position back in 1984 when I graduated from 8th grade. And I vividly remember the mix of emotions I was experiencing. Pride in my accomplishments; excitement about the future; sadness to leave my friends; anxiety about the unknown. And sheer happiness that I wouldn't have to wear uniforms anymore. When I sat where you are sitting I had no idea what I wanted to do when I grew up, where I would go to college or how my life would turn out. I was mostly focused on when I was getting my braces off, if my brother would ever stop annoying me, and if I would get a car when I turned 16. When I was graduating from 8th grade I had no idea that I would start a nonprofit, spend my days with homeless families and my evenings with my husband and children. All of these things happened over time through hard work, careful planning, a little luck and a lot of perseverance.

Most of us are familiar with the classic fairy tale about the 3 little pigs. Although the story dates back to the 1840s, there are many themes that are useful today. The three little pigs all built their houses but used different materials as their foundations. Here at St. Richard's you are fortunate to build your houses out of several building blocks: quality academic experience, civic responsibility, leadership, faith, classic curriculum and global readiness. I'd like to share with you my thoughts on a few more blocks you can add to that foundation to guide you through the next four years and beyond.

So many times I pray for help with things. I want someone who is sick to get better. I want my pain to go away. I want things to improve. I have so many questions and I want answers. I want to get unstuck. And sometimes those prayers leave me more stuck than ever. So I've tried a different approach. I start my prayers with things that I am thankful for. Some days the list is a mile long. These are great inspiring spiritual days. I hope all of you have many of them. But some days my list is really short and I struggle to find even one thing I'm thankful for. Before you go to sleep tonight, try to write down at least one thing you are thankful for. It can be hard to face the uncertainty of the future without focusing on what is going right, right now. Try it and see what happens. And if it works, pay it forward and say thank you to someone else. This is the building block called GRATITUDE.

What makes you angry? I'm not talking about when your parents take your phone away or set a curfew that is too early or when you get a bad grade on a paper that was really worth an A. I'm talking about the last time someone said or did something that fired you up because it was so

unfair and unjust. Was it a comment someone made about your non-traditional family or a reference to your friend whose skin is a different color? Or was it when the person in the car in front of you threw her trash out the window? Whether it is about human rights, animal cruelty, or disrespect of the environment, turn that anger into passion and turn that passion into a conversation. I was angry that homeless children didn't have the same educational opportunities as non-homeless children. Now that I am a mom and see the opportunities my own children have for academic success, I'm angrier than ever. My School on Wheels kids deserve the same quality education and support that you have and my own kids have. I started talking to people about what makes me angry and 11 years later I'm still talking. Robert Kennedy used to say that 20% of the people are against everything all the time. It's true. Spend your time talking to the other 80%. This is the building block called PASSION.

These days we are totally connected to others by email, texts, tweets, check-ins and status updates. We live in a world with lots of distractions and lots of noise. And we need that noise to stay connected. But do we? I've got a crazy idea for you. Turn off your phones, iPads, computers, TVs and iPods and give yourself the gift of quiet. Turn it all off and sit and listen to the silence. Not forever or for Lent or for the weekend. Try it for only 5 minutes. You just might connect to someone else in those brief moments. Or better yet, connect with yourself. This is the building block called SILENCE.

For the next four years (and the rest of your life), you will be presented with amazing opportunities to strengthen your faith, deepen your knowledge, and make a difference in your school, your family, your community and our world. And here's the challenge - just like in the fairy tale - The Big Bad Wolf will appear. But you will find that he's not a wolf after all. He masquerades as intolerance, fear, cynicism, greed, and apathy. He'll tell you all the things you can't do because you aren't smart enough, fast enough, pretty enough, or you aren't the right gender or religion or race. You don't live in the right neighborhood. You don't have what it takes to succeed. And when he huffs and puffs and tries to blow your house down, remember that your house was built on a solid foundation. Your house was built on the knowledge and values for a lifetime that that you received here at St. Richard's School. Add to those the building blocks the things we talked about today: channeling questions into gratitude; anger into passion; quiet into connection. So the Big Bad Wolf can huff and puff and it might shake your house, but he won't blow it down.

As you leave here today, you will be embarking on an exciting journey. Many of you have been together for a decade and will be apart for the very first time. The friendships you have made here will last you a lifetime. The new friends you meet will also enhance your life over the next four years. The high schools you have chosen will spark new interests and challenge you in meaningful ways. You will be faced with obstacles and opportunities. You will have the chance to become a more active participant in your life and the world around you. I wish you the best of luck in all of your future endeavors. My hope for you is that you take everything you have learned over the years at this fine school and use it to enrich your life and share those lessons with others. My parting words to you don't come from me because if you Google Sally Bindley you won't find any famous quotes and words of wisdom out there. So I am sharing you someone else's words of wisdom. Because professor, psychologist and author Leo Buscaglia probably said it best, "Your talent is God's gift to you; what you do with it is your gift to God."