

The Arbor Update
Special Graduation Issue
June 2010



Arbor Class of 2010

The Graduation
Ceremony

May 26, 2010

Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Atlanta, Georgia 30030

6:00PM



Speeches...







Nancy Fernandez


Lead Elementary Teacher

Los Regalos



"Oh and lest we forget, I hope you all remember to live your lives a little Cubanified!"

Wow, it seems like only yesterday when I was standing up in front of the last graduating class of the Arbor Middle School. When I gave that speech last year I had no idea that my life would have changed so dramatically and I don't just mean my hair color. I thought the change involved giving



something up in order to begin a new chapter in my life but I am beginning to understand is that all that I had I still have and will always have. Some of you have shared your lives with me for 4 years, some for less but you all have given me so much more than I ever could give you. I had always hoped that I could give you all so much.

I hoped that I was filling your heads with such intellectual pursuits like the difference between ser and estar and when to use them. Let's review: Ser is the infinitive...just kidding. Yet each day you filled my mind with your questions; you gave me the opportunity to continue my education, to find new information and expand on what I already had. I hoped that I was inspiring you to change the world yet the more I looked into your eyes the more I knew that I must be the one to change myself and the world. You gave me the gift of servitude.

I hoped that I was inspiring you to create fabulous projects, concepts and ideas, like fruit murder mysteries, singing fruit commercials, Cribs, strange pet videos and your American Idol- worthy music videos (the early tryouts that is). But what really happened is that you stretched my mind in ways that I could never have imagined. You gave me inspiration.

I hoped that I was helping you to find who you were but it was you who gave me a mirror to see the real me rather than the broken one that I had always used.

I hoped I was showing you how to be patient but day after day you kept loving me even when I was a grump and helping me to see when I was wrong. You gave me the gift of humility.

I hoped that I could show you how to challenge yourselves and push yourselves but it was you who gave me the courage to take on things that I thought I couldn't do.

I hoped I was giving you the opportunity to see life as a wondrous experience that is meant to cherish. But it is through you that everyday I see the endless possibilities to experience and cherish life.

I hoped to help you to be who you were and yet it was in the way you were you that gave me the courage to share who I really was.

I hoped to show how to be compassionate but it was in your sincere ways that you showed me compassion.

I hoped to show you that love is all around but once again it was you who gave me such boundless love that I am overwhelmed with your gift. Yours was the gift of life, of hope and of belief.

You have given me the ability to see that when I give from my heart, what I give is infinitely smaller than what I get back. My love and my deepest gratitude for each and every gift you have given me.

Les quiero a todos con todo mi corazón. Gracias.

Alumni Speaker

"One Way or Another"

Good evening Arbor families, friends, and most importantly graduates. My name is *Robyn* and I am an Arbor graduate from the class of 2002. When I was asked to speak at this year's graduation ceremony I felt incredibly honored but also an incredible pressure; of all of the things that I could tell you graduates about my experiences, what would provide you with the greatest service in the next few months and years as you begin your own path through high school and beyond? I think that Jan Deason knew that I would feel this way when she asked me to speak, but I also know that even though my gut reaction was to back away quietly from the offer, in reality I have so many things that I would like to share with you. That said, I'd like to tell you just a little bit about my own transition from Arbor to high school to college and share a few of the most valuable lessons that I have learned that have now become a part of my daily mantra.



As I was graduating from Arbor, I felt excited about high school but that I was truly leaving my safe space. Although I only started at Arbor as a fifth year in Kate's class, I grew to love everything about it: the River Trip and Cumberland Island, baking for coffee houses, writing our own play to perform in the middle school, and of course the incredible trips to Costa Rica and Boston. I felt unsure about what to expect in high school at Paideia- although I chose to attend Paideia so that I would no longer just be the little sister in my family, it was nerve-racking to forge my way into a new school where no one would know who I was. I felt unsure of who I was going to be, how to act, or where my place would be in high school. In many ways I felt as if high school was the end of the road and the only thing that mattered- if it didn't go well, I might as well disappear. Graduates, DO NOT BELIEVE THAT. There is so much more to the world than high school. As a general rule, in high school I felt excited... but nervous. Or excited... but concerned about what other people would think or feel about my choices. These 'buts' were limiting- so that is my first piece of advice. Just be excited and adventurous without the 'buts'. I figured that out in college. I want you to figure that out now because you'll be all the better for it.

College was another transition full of unknowns and bizarre expectations that couldn't even compare to the incredible experience that waited for me. By the time I started college at the University of Georgia, I had finally come to a pretty important realization for myself- and this is really the story that I want to tell you. By the time I started college, I realized that one of my major goals was to travel the world. I became close to a family that seemed to have nothing but incredible stories- they would casually mention "the time they lived in Dubai" or "that time they lived out of a mini van and worked for a kayaking outfitter," and I thought it was so amazing that that was their life story. I decided that I wanted to be someone with an interesting story, and then I realized that the only way to make it happen

was to start creating it. So I started making decisions that seemed fun to me at the time, for whatever reason. First they seemed pretty small and safe—for instance, I went on a winter camping and snowboarding trip with the National Outdoor Leadership School my freshman year of college. It seemed pretty normal to me, but when I got back to Athens after the trip, I realized that sleeping in igloos sounds pretty cool in hindsight. I realized that I had just created the perfect material for all of the ridiculous getting to know you games I would have to play at the beginning of every semester in college. And it felt kind of nice.

Then about two years ago, I was starting to plan my last summer of college and I just couldn't figure it out. I knew that I wanted to go abroad, but couldn't figure out how to make it happen or where I wanted to go. One day that fall I went to meet a good friend at my favorite coffee shop in Athens on a gorgeous afternoon. We decided to sit outside and the table we sat down at had a stencil lying on it of a car with a bike on its roof rack and the caption "one way or another." It looked like it had been torn out of a magazine so we asked the people around us if it belonged to them or who it might belong to, but they said they hadn't seen anyone with it so I decided I'd take it home, not thinking much of it. I liked the design in a sort of environmentalist way, but didn't think about it in any broader context. As it turns out, this stencil became absolutely fundamental to the rest of my college experiences and my overall outlook on life. One late night when studying seemed fruitless and impossible, I plastered my walls with six or seven copies of the stencil so that it would be the first thing that I saw in the morning and the last thing that I saw before going to sleep. Everything that seemed impossible or daunting I could only approach with this attitude; one way or another. Everything would have to work out one way or another, so what was the point of worrying.

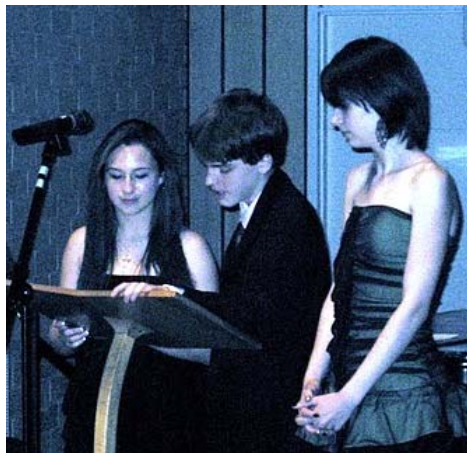
This attitude brought me everything I sought and applies in so many contexts. I ended up just deciding that I WOULD make my summer plans happen. I chose the countries, the programs, the dates, and then it happened even though I couldn't believe that it would. When I was traveling through Turkey and India that summer I was on a trip without plans, but when I came to an unfortunate situation, I just made it work. One night my best friend and I arrived in a small town in Turkey at 11pm because our bus trip took 16 hours instead of the expected 12, and all of the internet cafes were closed and we had no place to sleep. It was a bit of a mess, frustrating to say the least, but we made friends with a guy with a cell phone and after many many phone calls, ended up in a hostel in the most perfect paradise that I have ever seen. While the frustration and slight panic we felt that night wasn't ideal, I can't imagine what that experience would have been like if we hadn't ended up where we did.

I could talk to you about that summer forever. I will swear by that slogan until I die and probably be more optimistic than you care to hear. But here is my advice to you, graduates. There are many ways of doing things; the obvious, and the not so obvious. The obvious for me would have been just paying for my trips myself and not going if I didn't have the money, or planning every day out to the last minute, ensuring my safety and taking the guesswork out of every day. But I think I chose the not so obvious. I made things work that shouldn't have. And this is what you all excel at too, because of Montessori. You are good at the not so obvious. From two or three years old, your Montessori education has taught you to be adventurous, curious, to explore, and to do things at your own pace.

Now, as Arbor graduates, you have the foundation to get what you want. You'll always be good at making it happen because of these qualities that Montessori has cultivated within you, although they may be such a part of you that you don't even notice. I think you all know what you want, at least a little bit, and you should start with that. Put it out there and make it happen the other way. If you don't have big goals yet, make your small ones happen. I was never one for big goals in middle school or even high school. But as soon as you can, DREAM BIG. HUGE. Be extraordinary in everything you do, and do only the things YOU are most passionate about. I don't think this is really an easy task, or at least it wasn't for me, but my uncle just sent me a card for my own graduation that I really want to share with you and I think it will help. He wrote, "You have great skills and a great foundation. Don't be timid about decisions or failure. It only counts if you fail on the last try." You guys are not about to fail for the last time so I hope you have the courage to be WILDLY YOU. Whatever that is. Be the ruler of your own life. You have already made huge accomplishments. You are already amazing people with amazing talents. Take what you have, decide what or where you want to be next, remember that you are OUTRAGEOUSLY CAPABLE, and make it happen one way or another. If you put what you want out into the universe, you'll be amazed by what it, and YOU, give you in return. Good luck and congratulations, graduates of the class of 2010. You have an awesome life ahead of you so savor the past and get excited about what comes next!

Student Speakers

*Matthew, Danielle,
and Sammi*



How do you sum up Arbor in only one speech? Many have done so in the past, why was it so hard for us? Well how do we start? How about a quote? Seth Heller did that. But all our quotes seem a little more, well, off topic... Well okay never mind. How about a theme to base our speech around? Friends? Classes? Teachers? Music? Colors? Colors Danielle? Really?) So maybe not any of those; maybe all of those. What, truly, is Arbor?

Well the truth is there's not one thing that sums up any one persons experience at Arbor. Everyone sees it differently. Everyone has a different journey. But certain memories will stay with us forever.

Not everyone starts their journey at the same place in time Matthew: I came when I was 3. Sammi: I came when I was 4. Danielle: I came when I was 12 but I still feel like I've been part of this community since the beginning.

Community. Isn't that what it's all about? Growing up, becoming part of the

world in which we live. There's something, there's a point we can use. Arbor is a community. It is a place in which we learn how to live. It is a place we can foster and grow as a class, as friends, as a family.

Useful. Here we don't just learn how to memorize facts, we learn skills that will take us far in life. Humanities teaches us to take lessons from the past, occupations teaches us how to live, debate teaches us public speaking, basketball teaches us how to work as a team, leadership roles teaches us how to take responsibility, productions cycle teaches us how step outside our comfort zones, and being with each other teaches us respect.

Respect. Respect for ourselves, respect for each other, and respect for the world around us. But this is not the old fashioned type of respect. It's not calling your teachers Ms. Miller and Ms. Fox. No, it's being able to look at someone who's different from you and only see the similarities between yourselves.

Diversity. Seeing the world as one. Knowing in your heart that we are all the same inside, we are all people and we all deserve compassion.

Compassion. Teachers who care about you. Teachers who listen to you. Teachers who help you through thick and thin without ever having to be asked. Teachers who come in early and leave late, always going the extra mile to show their dedication to their students. Teachers who accept us for who we are and who give us the freedom to be who we want to be.

Freedom. From your very first day at Arbor you will notice something. There are no desks, the teacher doesn't stand up in front of the class and give a lesson, there are less rules. But does that mean that there is more chaos? No way, the students care for each other and help each other out. A class of forty primary students only needs two teachers because each student takes responsibility for themselves and their surroundings.

Responsibility. Being responsible for others around you, like when we take up our leadership roles and take responsibility for our classroom. We have a responsibility to learn as much as we can so we are ready to take on the roles of adults. And the responsibility that is taught at Montessori schools makes even the smallest children want to learn more.

Desire to learn. Wanting to take in as much information as possible, and wanting to use that information to do something more with your life. Even young children want to become doctors, fire fighters, engineers, writers, and ballerinas. And children will take in anything they can to help them achieve their dreams.

Dreams. Dreams are not just what happens when you sleep. Dreams are your hopes and wishes for the future, and here at Arbor we learn the skills we need to reach those dreams.

Our speech is starting to come to a close, as is our time here at Arbor. We just need one more word that reflects our experiences here at Arbor. Something strong, something powerful. Hmm...Matthew: Elephants? Sammi: Wrestlers? Danielle: Guys, be serious here. What is really one of the most

powerful things here at Arbor? All Three: Friends. Friends that will last a lifetime.

Friends that will always be there for you. Wherever we go, whatever we do, whomever we meet, we will always be there for each other.

So we come back to our original question, what is Arbor? Arbor is all of this and more. Community, useful, respect, diversity, compassion, freedom, responsibility, desire to learn, dreams, friends and so, so much more. And so this speech must come to an end just as our time at Arbor has but no matter what the lessons we have learned here at Arbor will stay in our hearts forever.

Hugs and Handshakes...





Many parents of younger children have been surprised by the effect that the graduation ceremony had on their family.

Should I come to graduation even if my kid isn't graduating?

YES!!

"I was encouraged by others to attend graduation while my kids were in Primary. The speaker's eyes would get a far-away look and they'd say, 'You should just go; you'll love it.'

'Right,' I thought. 'I'm too busy; I'm too tired...I don't know any of the graduating class members!' Attending seemed so irrelevant to our Arbor experience at the time. Then, one year, I packed up my Lower elementary kids and went to graduation. I'll never **not** go again.

I have only had the pleasure of knowing one or two of the graduating class members well...all the others I just know their faces, or have only talked with briefly. It doesn't seem to matter. When I watch those kids stand up for their colorful and well-written speeches--

nervous, but doing it anyway; sometimes faltering but always gathering themselves together and proceeding with poise--and when I see the genuine respect that flows between the teachers and the students, I know we'll be back each and every year to watch and gain a renewed sense of why we chose Arbor and where we, as an Arbor family, are headed.

~Rene Iverson



Goodbye, Class of 2010! We will miss you!



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