

The Circle of Life

Mary Hesser, Graduation speech 2012

(show video with song). The circle of life. Well, here we are! What an apt description of what tonight marks! And there you sit, class of 2012, excited and ready to launch into the next phase of your life. It's been quite a ride these past four years, hasn't it? You are an amazing class and we are enormously proud of you. I've seen you excel at sports and in the theatre, in the classroom and through so many activities. I've even been on Kairos with some of you (G8 is great!!). You have possible Division I athletes and TV stars among you. You certainly have future doctors, and lawyers, and artists, and I hope even some budding Lasallian educators. You are a very strong and caring class, but like all classes you've met your share of obstacles as well.

While you're in high school it is easy to forget that in the circle of life, high school is just one small step. However it is an important one. You were told day in and day out that what you did at Christian Brothers High School matters, that you were preparing for the rest of your life, and that's true. Yet too often we think of life as a series of steps preparing for something else. Grade school and middle school prepared you for high school, high school has prepared you for college, college prepares you for grad school and grad school for the job market, and in the job market one is always preparing to move on to the next big promotion. Sometimes it's easy to wonder when life actually happens...are we all preparing our whole lives for a few short years of retirement? No! In each step of life's great cycle we should remember to live in the moment, and appreciate where we are, what we have, and who surrounds us. So as you head off for college, I urge you to enjoy this next step in your life, because it will be over all too soon.

I realize you are anxious to be gone, but experience has shown me that it is not till you're gone that you truly appreciate what you've left. As you travel on in the circle of life I hope that the memories you have made at CB return to you often, especially the part about entering to learn and leaving to serve. Over the years so many former students come back to us and share their good memories, their sense of nostalgia, a sense of home, and the excellent education picked up along the way. In the greater circle of life high school is its own little cycle. Our days are set by routine, and each year as one class leaves another enters. Each year imparted to you a different role in the cycle of high school life. When you were freshmen you were the little guys, learning how to adapt; as sophomores you reveled in not being freshmen; as juniors you knew the ropes and eagerly awaited becoming seniors while struggling through the toughest academic year. Ah, but then came senior year! Top of the heap, king of the hill. Isaac Newton once famously stated, "If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." You have seen further and know more because you have stood on the shoulders of the classes before you. And this year you have been the giants that future senior classes have looked to as role models. However next year you will be starting a new circle of life as freshmen again, adding to the foundation CB has laid for you. Do you have the strength for that? I believe

you do. So do your parents and grandparents and teachers. You are surrounded tonight by people who love you and believe in you and want you to use the gifts God has given you to.

It takes courage to be all God created you to be. The future, while it brings opportunities, will also bring worries and problems, and one of the challenges will be to stay true to the values you have learned at Brothers. In college, it is sometimes easy to care too much about what others think and, in trying to please others, ending up being less than your true self. Eleanor Roosevelt said “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” This is a lesson that I am still trying to learn myself, but it is undeniably true. Let go of letting others define you. My late mother, God rest her soul, gave me some great advice. She said, “When you’re 20 you care what **everybody** thinks of you; when you’re 40, you don’t care what **anyone** thinks of you; and you’re 60 you realize that **nobody** was thinking of you – they were all thinking about themselves!” So put opinions from others aside, but value the convictions you have formed for yourself – the faith, the integrity, and the excellence that honors God and serves others.

When I was in college, I acted in a play called Davy Crockett. He had a motto that summed up his life: “Be sure you’re right, then go ahead!” Good advice. Stand on the shoulders of the giants in your life that taught you right from wrong. When faced with tough choices in the years ahead, check your motives, check the Scriptures, check your gut . . . and be sure you’re right, then go ahead. And don’t forget: live in the now, be giants, ask for help, offer help, stay true to yourself, and relish the circle of life. Congratulations and God bless you!