

In honor of Chloë Dalton-Tims and the Primary Partners class who think I am a tree-hugging, new games playing ex-hippie—I've decided that we should start by all holding hands and chanting.

JUST KIDDING

I love Baccalaureate and graduation. I have always loved Baccalaureate and graduation. Every year when we start the first practice for graduation and Peter Estes plays the march from Tannhäuser for you, tears come to my eyes. I love the ceremony and I am especially proud that Theftford's tradition is that this is a ceremony where students honor each other, honor their parents, and reflect on life.

One of the reasons that I love graduation is that I love being a teacher. I believe in education. I do not believe in war and violence. For me, education is the weapon of choice.

I believe in connections.

I believe in relationships.

One person at a time reaching out their hand to help another— that's how I think we can change the world. We saw many examples of this after Sept. 11th., people reaching out in small ways:

A. town which made and delivered apple pies to the work site, people massaging the firefighters and the police, and not only massaging the people, my nephew's girlfriend Bronwyn massaged the police dogs (Now, that's my kind of person).

After Sept. 11th I got a postcard from Sam Irwin who graduated three years ago and is studying at Eugene Lang College in New York. He told of his walking with Arab-American children back and forth to school to protect them against discrimination. By literally reaching out his hand and taking the hand of a child in a small act of kindness, he becomes one of our heroes.

I think that one of the lessons of September 11th is that we have everyday heroes among ourselves. The people who did the manual labor to search for survivors and to remove and honor the dead.

Could our vocational students please stand. These are some of my everyday heroes because I can count on them to fix my car and build my house and take care of my father so that I can do what I love doing.

We count on each other.

We help each other.

We learn from each other. [Vocational students may sit.]

When I said to Andrew Carpenter one day in class meeting, I'm beginning to stress about my speech, he said, "Oh come on, Barb, it'll be good for you." Which is exactly what I had said to him about reading his piece having to do with his accident to our class. Andrew was so nervous he had to have Steve Niederhauser read it while he stood in the hall. I admired that he allowed his piece to be shared despite the fact that he was nervous. And so to honor his example, I would like to ask Andrew to read the rest of my speech while I stand in the hall.

Emma Spata-Burk said, "Oh, come on, Barbie, you can do it." And despite the fact that I don't know of another school where a student would call their teacher Barbie—let alone Barbie doll—that gave me courage.

I am inspired by the courage of Fabienne Stearns and Michelle Cook when they read their pieces about their families to the women inmates from the Dale Correctional Center.

I am inspired by the honesty of Emily Cook reading an entry from her diary and Meghan Hewitt telling about her stroke and her struggle. I strive to be as nice as Caitlin Ball.

And then of course there is the laughter, the humor. I want to tell you that you have not lived until you have seen Gage Ecker, Jordan Kendall, Darren White, and Corin Lucero-Totin doing interpretive dance.

I recognize each one of you in the class as a hero. I hope you accept that part of yourselves that can reach out when the time comes to help someone else.

My wish for each one of you is that you find work which is as rewarding and challenging, as moving and as filled with humor as I have found and find coming to Thetford Academy every day and learning with you.

Honestly, I want to thank you all.
It's about having relationships and
It's about caring
It's about being connected and
It's about community
But, most of all,
It's about heart.

My friend Cora Brooks sent me this poem attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson:

“To laugh often and much;
to win the respect
of intelligent people
and the affection
of children;

to earn the appreciation
of honest critics and
endure the betrayal
of false friends;

to appreciate beauty,
to find the best in others;

to leave the world a bit
better whether by a healthy
child, a garden patch or a
redeemed social condition;

to have played and laughed
with enthusiasm and
sung with exultation;

to know even one life
has breathed easier
because you have lived...
this is to have succeeded”

And now, because I rarely do anything alone, I have bullied lots of people into singing with me. The words to “Lift Every Voice and Sing” were written by James Weldon Johnson for school children to sing at a birthday celebration for Abraham Lincoln in 1900. The music was written by his brother Rosamond Johnson.

Over the years the song has become known as the African-American National Anthem. It speaks of strength, perseverance, and, to me, everyday heroes. Peter Estes was kind enough to help us.

You all are my heroes
I’m grateful to have been your teacher.