



Convocation

A celebration the 94th school year opening

Friday, August 23, 2019
Keeler Theater with grades 5-12

As delivered.

As many of you know, my family and I live in Broadwell House on the edge of campus. With two of our boys off to college this year, the house feels a bit smaller, but it remains a warm home for my family and, I hope, for the Country Day family too. This year, we'll host faculty and staff, trustees, sports teams, newly admitted students and the senior class at the holidays for a gift exchange, cookies, and cocoa.

Broadwell House is fantastic! It has running water. Double-paned windows. Even electricity. It wasn't so fancy in 1804 when it was built. Warmed with wood fireplaces, a kitchen, and an outhouse outside the back door. In need of water? A walk to the well with a bucket on each shoulder. And what about the neighborhood? No Kroger, no UDF, and no CCDS at the time.

John and Phebe Broadwell were not the first people who lived in this part of Ohio. The Shawnee, Miami, Delaware, and Ottawa Indians were here for centuries, but the homes of the Native Americans were not permanent settlements like Broadwell House.

What brought the Broadwell Family and other pioneers to this region of Ohio? Surely it wasn't the luxurious housing. After an arduous journey over mountain ranges and through uncharted waterways, towering old-growth trees welcomed the Broadwells. John and Phebe cleared an area of trees and built their home with limestone. This must have been incredibly challenging, but they did a great job – much of the original craftsmanship remains intact.

What attracted the Broadwells to Ohio? Probably the same reasons the Shawnee and the Miami called it home – the vast richness of resources available. David McCullough in *The Pioneers* writes about this area of the Ohio during the time the Broadwell House was built. "The rivers teemed with catfish weighing from three to eighty pounds, buffalo fish, sturgeon and pike...wild turkeys and passenger pigeons were in in unimaginable abundance. White-tailed deer, otter, elk, buffalo, beaver, wolves and bear filled the woods in all directions."

The Broadwells did not keep written records and so we don't know all the reasons they settled in Ohio, but I imagine that they, like many others leaving the East Coast for this part of a new nation, did so

because of a pioneering spirit. No home? Build one. No food? Hunt some. No transportation? Figure it out.

While the pioneers were independent, they were not alone. In fact, building cities like Cincinnati, out of the wilderness, could never have been accomplished without the cooperation of others.

This type of cooperative behavior is unique to human beings. As Yuval Noah Harari argues in *Sapiens*, individually, we are not much different from other animals. It is how we, as a collective, cooperate. What did this cooperation look like in early 19th century Ohio? Civic organizations including granges, houses of worship, mutual aid societies, as well as neighborhood workshares such as barn raisings provided the glue to make a productive collection of people.

My own family knows about the importance of relying on others. When our family moved to Shanghai 10 years ago, we were alone in a city of 25 million. Mrs. Jaccaci did not know who to list as an emergency contact when she registered the boys for school. We didn't know where the closest shops and transportation hubs were. It was difficult to figure out if something was expensive or not when using Chinese renminbi currency. And the dishwasher? No clue.

What we did find, though, was a community of expats from around the world making their way in a new culture. These families became our support network and helped us navigate life in the city, and we did the same for other families who relocated to China. John and Phebe Broadwell would have relied on their Indian Hill neighbors in much the same way. Broadwell House was not built on its own – that's for sure.

Today, however, we have become more isolated. In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam writes about the slow but significant demise of community-building organizations in America. Why bowling? When the book was written in 2000, the number of Americans bowling was increasing, but the number of people in bowling leagues was dropping. Putnam argues that this decline in civic engagement contributes to the lack of collective government – an idea that is at the core of the American experiment.

And how America has changed over the last two decades since Putnam first wrote about the decline of social groups. The explosion of personal technology has pulled us away from human interaction and into our screens. The world seemingly has transformed from dialogue to monologue.

The overall effect is the atomization of our human species. We are dividing ourselves into smaller homogeneous units at the very time our planet is desperate for a unified response. Every generation has its challenges, but the global scale of threats today is unprecedented.

What can we do? Well, we have our own community here. We can take simple steps to build community that will enrich the experience of each student here today.

First, we can start with hello. To create a welcoming and inclusive feeling on campus, the act of looking at someone in the eye and saying hello goes a huge way. One of the key traits we hope you will bring into the world is compassion. Making eye contact and saying hello says you care about the other

person. It is, in a small way, giving of yourself to make someone else feel that he or she belongs. And you do belong. You all do. Each one of you belongs here.

Second, we can augment the social. Social media has become part of who we are today. Instagram, twitter, snapchat – all platforms in which we craft and curate our own personality. I know there are many older people in your lives who say things like “I wish you would never look at your phone – its ruining your life!” Well, maybe not ruining but certainly changing. We’ll never be able to put the social media genie back into the bottle. Instead, we need to adapt to how we use technology and enhance its use with genuine communication. As I said at convocation a year ago, digital communication is sometimes easier but can be inauthentic if cloaked in anonymity. The best relationships for building community can be hard-going and require the work of face-to-face communication.

Finally, we can bring the exclamation mark. Cincinnati Country Day School is an awesome place! We have some of the best teachers in all of Cincinnati, and I would argue the country sitting behind me here today. We have a fantastic campus and well-resourced classrooms, labs, and athletic facilities. But, most of all, we have you. An incredibly gifted group of scholars, athletes, artists, and leaders. I challenged the faculty and staff to bring an exclamation mark to this year, and now I challenge you. The adults here can make plans for a great year but it’s your school – not ours. And specifically, I want to call out to the class of 2020. You are the leaders of our school this year. When you’re receiving your diploma in June, what type of year do you hope will have transpired?

Go to games to cheer on your classmates, visit art openings, attend plays and concerts. But also, join. Join clubs and academics teams, create study groups, spend time hanging out together - think about the ways you can push back against the forces pulling you into places, both real and online, where you are alone.

John and Phebe Broadwell certainly benefited from the power of the collective, and I hope we will do the same this year.

We are Country Day.

No wait, we are Country Day! Thank you.