



**Grandparents' and Special Friends' Day Remarks**  
**By Head of School Dan Miller**  
**December 13, 2019**

Welcome and thank you for being here today. It is wonderful to have such an impressive turnout this morning – a record number I'm told, and a direct refutation of an article I read just last week. According to the author, as extended families live farther and farther apart, they value one another less. Well, I would defy that writer to be here this morning and witness all of you, many of whom have overcome myriad logistical hassles, including, but not limited to, finding a parking space. Some of you have crossed multiple time zones and have come straight from the airport, but all of you made the effort to visit Urban to show a young person or two just how much you love them. One of the reasons I think a day like this is important is because it reminds us of the durable and timeless importance of extended family and friends, and in particular, the special role all of you can play in the lives of our students.

Let's start with your ability to provide what is often referred to as "unconditional love." Parents must boundary their love with limits, temper their love with reason, balance approval with expectation, and protect against indulgence. Schools too, even nurturing places like Urban, have a charge to educate – and education demands rigor and high standards. We push, we prod, we cajole. A meaningful education includes error as well as trial, failure as well as success. But grandparents have a different mandate because every young person deserves one voice that says, simply, "you're perfect;" one set of eyes that sees a masterpiece in every crayon drawing; a future NBA star in every bouncing ball; literary genius in every email. I once heard a story, perhaps apocryphal, of a kindergartner scratching his name into the paint of his father's brand new car – and his grandfather exclaiming, "Amazing, only 4-years old, and he can write his full name!" Or the story, which I have on better authority, of a grandmother, aghast that an Ivy League School rejected her granddaughter, who began a letter to the Director of Admission with the words, "Dear Sir, you are either insane or an idiot, but in either case I certainly hope to have you fired."

So while no one thinks you should be objective about a grandchild or the special young person in your life, wisdom and patience are often associated with advancing age, and rightly so. I want to mention a certain flavor of wisdom that is a particular birthright of the grandparent or cherished family elder. In my family, I refer to it as "subversive wisdom" and it works like this: It's 11 pm and a parent suggests his son turn off an extra innings baseball game; the grandparent chooses that moment to recount the magic of watching his beloved Red Sox win the pennant. The parent lectures the 16-year-old about the need to be far more responsible before owning a car; the grandparent waxes nostalgic about the '67 Mustang he bought in high school. The parent urges the daughter to study harder for the next calculus exam; the grandparent mentions that she hated math, and can absolutely guarantee it will not be needed in the real world. A steady diet of this kind is obviously not ideal, nor a good way to encourage visitation rights with your grandchildren, but it is rooted in the perspective that only passing years can bring. Besides, you may have heard the saying that teenagers and grandparents get along so well because they are united against a common enemy.

I could go on and on, for your contributions are many. When a media without memory bombards our children with images of international chaos and violence, grandparents offer the comforts of perspective and history – we have been there before; we will be there again. When a frenetic and accelerating world erodes our dwindling attention span, grandparents can bring ballast, steadiness and patience. In a world of negative media saturation and tarnished public figures, grandparents and special family friends can be real-life paragons of the virtues we hold dear. But finally, and perhaps selfishly, I know that the longer one lives, the more one appreciates the power and purpose of a fine education – the more one recognizes the value of a school like this one.

So thank you for supporting Urban, and thank you for supporting the young people whose lives we hold in common. I hope you have a wonderful, wonderful day.