



## OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

### **Peter H. Quimby Opening Chapel Talk 14 September 2021**

I have a secret to share with you. Dr. Laurie was not my first love. That status belongs to someone I first met in the summer of 1975. Her name was Eldonna Summer. She was tall and had long black hair, and she was the most talented arts and crafts councilor I had ever met. The way she would subtly burn the edges of a postcard before gluing it to a board and applying just the right amount of shellac to the finished project was magical. And do not get me started on her skills making boondoggle nametag lanyards. Box stitch, twist stitch, even the zipper stitch—Eldonna could do them all. She was 19. I was 8. And I was infatuated with her.

Time spent in arts and crafts was the thing I remembered most about my first summer at 4-H Camp Wabasso. That and the tears I shed on having to depart at the end of the summer. In the months that followed I sent Eldonna gifts and wrote letters expressing my undying love for her. And all year long I dreamed of returning to camp so that I could recreate that perfect summer. At long last that moment finally arrived and I remember waiting in line with my parents for registration just outside the arts and crafts building. At some point I could not stand the suspense any longer and I broke from the registration line and ran into the crafts building to see Eldonna. I think my nine-year-old self thought that camp counselors, like teachers, never left their classrooms, so I had always assumed that when I returned, she would be there. But not only was she not in the room, another counselor—an interloper whom I did not even know—told me that she would not be working at camp that summer. The tears I had cried on leaving camp the summer before were no match for the despair I felt on hearing this news. I returned to my parents and informed them that they did not need to register me for camp after all. I would not be staying. What was the point if Eldonna would not be there?

It might not surprise you to learn that I did not go home that day. My older brother and two cousins also attended the camp, and they swung into action to comfort and reassure me. Even the new arts and crafts counselor—the one I was sure had stolen Eldonna's job—came out to try to get me excited about the projects they had lined up for us. That community rallied around me and helped me through my disappointment. As it turned out, my second summer at camp was even better than my first. I finally made it out of the advanced beginners swim class and could go outside the protected area of the swim dock. I tried new activities, made new friends, and was just as sad at the end of that summer to leave camp as I had been at the end of the prior summer. In fact, I loved it so much that I went to Camp Wabasso every summer for the next 9 years.

There was a moment this past summer when I had an adult version of my Eldonna-like meltdown. Think back for a moment to what life was like in New England last spring. We were finally able to unmask outdoors for spring athletics. When the school year ended and we brought

the senior class back to campus for some time together before graduation, they were able to unmask in the dorms and we dropped the outdoor mask requirement on campus. Many of our students had already begun to get vaccinated. By the time we arrived at commencement, all COVID safety protocols had been withdrawn by the Governor and it looked like a return to fully normal face-to-face interactions was likely for the fall. In July I was conjuring images in my mind of the first day of school with all students, faculty, and staff gathered together in the Bergmann Theater for the first time since the COVID crisis began. I was imagining a school year where masks and COVID-testing swabs were not part of our daily routines. And most of all, I yearned for a school year where I could see people's faces, hear their laughter and see their smiles, and just as importantly, learn their names. But in early August the reality of the Delta variant and what it would mean for our daily routines began to set in. Once again we would start a school year masked indoors. Once again we would have to follow a testing protocol for allowing people to return to campus, and we would have to implement some limitations on the number of people gathered together in indoor settings. While I didn't give up hope for the year ahead as my nine-year-old self did in looking at a summer without Eldonna, my glass was decidedly half empty.

At some point, through conversations with colleagues and the energy they brought to the start of a new year, I was able to change my perspective, to look at the world through a lens of progress made and opportunities ahead. Members of the Govs community helped me to see the glass as half full. We might have to be masked indoors now, but it is a wonderful thing to be able to see your smiling faces unmasked and radiant when we are outdoors. We do not have the entire school in the Chapel right now, but we have all juniors and seniors listening to Chapel talks live. We are back to swabbing our noses regularly, but as we start the year this is what will tell us whether the safety protocols we have in place are working. When your glass is half empty, you are disposed to worry about how and when more water might leak out. When your glass is half full, you are imagining the steps you might take to add even more water. That will be our collective task this year—to do the things individually and collectively that add water to our glass. In abiding by the Social Compact, we decrease the likelihood that we will contract COVID and spread it to other members of the Govs community. As a brief aside, I confess that I struggled with this very concept myself yesterday morning. I had felt ill all night and was feeling weak and exhausted when I woke up yesterday morning. But the first day of school is one of my favorite days of the year. I could not imagine missing it and thought that I could find the strength to rally, at least for morning meeting if not for the entire day. I also knew, however, that coming in would have been a violation of the Social Compact. And so I did what I knew was required of me. I asked others to fill in, got tested for COVID, and waited until I had a negative result before rejoining the community. I was delighted and relieved when I learned from Mrs. Fyrberg an hour and a half ago that my test was negative. If we can get through the first few weeks of the school year in good shape, perhaps we can get to the point of relaxing our indoor mask requirements, and a little more water will go into our glass. If our tests are consistently coming back negative, perhaps we can reduce the frequency of testing, and the level in our glasses will rise even higher. At some point I am optimistic that we will have more classes together in one room for all-school meetings—more water still.

If the school year is not starting in the way that you had hoped, whether because of COVID or for any reason, how are you looking at the situation? Are you worrying about what will go wrong next, how more water will drain from your glass? Or are you looking for opportunities to turn

things around and make them better, to add even more water to your glass? My summer certainly did not start in the way that I had hoped when I realized that Eldonna was not working at camp. But other counselors and my brother and cousins rallied around me to help me see the world through a different perspective. The Govs community can do that for you as well. If your year is not what you hoped it would be—now or at any point along the way—remember that there is power in this community. Take advantage of the resources at your disposal. You have friends and transition leaders, proctors and dorm parents, advisors and teachers, coaches and deans, all here to help you make the most of your time at Govs—especially when things are not going well and you are most in need of support.

When Eldonna deserted me, my glass looked half empty and I was sure it had a hole in it. But now I have Dr. Laurie, and even though she is better at suturing than making boondoggle lanyards, I do not see how my cup could be any fuller.