

“Dear Drew,

Hi! How are you, you big senior you? I’m so proud of you (I hope). 8th grade was fun, but hard. How was high school? Oh, Megan says hi. So, did you ever get a girlfriend? You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to. Is Megan doing all right? You did good this year. Congratulations! Did you get valedictorian? Oh got to go now. Have fun in college and the rest of your life!

Your Friend,
Drew”

Words from an eighth grade Drew. A few weeks ago, those of us who were here in eighth grade had the opportunity to open a time capsule and see what it was the littler versions of ourselves found important. It’s funny to think that these little notes have reached across time to greet us again. A 13-year old boy wrote this note four years ago to someone he had never met, someone in whom he entrusted his hopes, his dreams, his future. It’s fun to see what he scribbled down and locked in time.

Let’s now look at a boy another four years younger, nearly half a lifetime ago from where that boy is standing today. I wish he would have written, for he is the one I would like to hear from most. He, like so many of us, lived in a world that no longer exists. Regrettably, there is no tie spanning the years from him to me, so let’s tell a little story about him instead: a story of a boy who represents us all, a boy whose story all of us, at one time or another, has shared.

Once upon a summer day, whose precise date has been forgotten, there was a little boy who had just celebrated being able to represent his age on two full hands, who was enjoying his summer, who was remaining blissfully ignorant of the few weeks that separated this forgotten summer day from his first day of fifth grade. On the morning of this forgotten day, he thought he would be going to the same school as always come September. He thought he would go through school, enjoy the summer, and grudgingly reenter a grade higher than before in a cycle that would only end, he supposed, in his graduation from that school, at which point he had no idea what he would do. On the morning of this day, his world consisted of a town whose populace could fit comfortably in this room and a precious few tokens of memory of places he’d been, tarnished from over use. By the end of this unknown day, his mundane reality had been shattered forever, a page irrevocably turned, and he never once looked back. He had learned of a place called the Marshall School.

I have always had the view on life that it is not a single stream, one continuous fluid motion beginning at birth and ending some time after, but a series of personal selves that our souls move through, like stars moving across the sky. A star you see as the sun sets may be the same being as when the sun rises the next day, but it has moved, faded, changed its name. So, too, do we rise and fall. These three people, a small boy of ten (we were all ten once), an 8th grader (the 8th grader that has come back to visit) and the one you see before you shall forever remain the same in the times in which they were set, living forever in the places they love. This brings a great comfort to me, knowing that as our days at this school we have loved so much draw to a close, as our stars for this time, a

part of us will remain here for all eternity. So long as we remember our time here, so long as trophies and plaques bear our names, so long as our fingerprints are left on the desks, doors, halls and hearts of this place, we won't really have had to leave.

I have a box at home that contains every assignment, note, test, award, program, and other memories I've had in the last five years. I've unfortunately misplaced those from middle school. This box represents for me all the triumphs, all the frustrations, the memorable moments, and painstaking hours that have gone into this school. I suppose we all have our boxes, in one form or another. In the nearly eight years that I've been coming to Marshall, my mother and I have driven 164,120 miles, which is over six and half times around the circumference of the globe and nearly 70% of the way to the moon. I have spent 2,752 hours in a car, the equivalent of four months of my life. I am one of eighty-five who all have their stories, their miles, their struggles, their memories. I haven't regretted a single second, nor a single inch of the journey.

My favorite person in the world, the one to whom I've looked up for years, once made me one wish. He said, "Kiddo, if I could wish you one thing in the whole world, it would be wonder and awe. Wonder and awe." I should think it would please him to know that I've found that here. (I think he already knows.) Wonder and awe at the most beautiful sunrises from our hilltop home, wonder and awe at the sound of rain pattering on the art room roof, wonder and awe at the books we've read and the worlds we've discovered. We've marveled at the creativity and quasi-insanity of our teachers. Our teachers have written dissertations to earn the highest degrees attainable in their fields. Our teachers have written books, and won national recognition for their contributions to sciences. Our teachers have bushwhacked through the jungles of Central America. Our teachers have chased cyclones. They speak dozens of languages, they teach jazzercise in their free time, and save animals on the side. They bike, swim, run, ski and hike. They have served their country in more ways than one. They can create an entire network of computer systems only to play Rachmaninoff moments later. If you're lucky, you might catch one brushing aside the most complex integrals before she jets off for France to teach English to kindergartners. They teach, bring opera to the school and the city, and throw festivals in honor of humanity in one fell swoop. They play the guitar with their tongues. And they make some mean nachos without setting off the smoke detectors. Wonder and awe live here.

These are the teachers who have inspired us to pursue our own forms of wonder and awe. Our students shatter records in every field. They can dance, skate, ski, run, debate, spell, compute, and sing their way to state year after year after year. They have competed for the US in international sporting events. They have lived for months in Mexico. They have traveled as missionaries to Jamaica. They have sung in Carnegie Hall and played at the Magic Kingdom. They have mastered instruments and written symphonies. They have organized a breathtaking benefit concert. They have selflessly donated hundreds upon hundreds of hours of their time. They have learned to fly. Yes, wonder and awe live here.

Another of my favorite people once commented on the thousands of life-changing events we experience, often without even realizing until years later what had happened. Each of

these moments offers us the opportunity to shed ourselves and become the people we've always wanted to be. Today is one of those days. Someone here said, "You know we've done our job when you don't want to be here anymore." I'm afraid I would have to disagree. Marshall, you know you've done your job when your children are no longer children, when they are looking off into a bright future shining with limitless possibility of limitless wonder and awe and then they turn back to you grinning from ear to ear, with tears streaming down their faces, to say goodbye, knowing they will miss you forever.

Today we are going to be swept off by time, away from childhood to that world of possibility. The time has come for our stars to set. It is time to say adieu to these days we knew must end. It is time to close our boxes and end our journey. It is time for our hearts to break, as we watch our teachers who have watched over us bid us go. It is time for their hearts to break, too. And it is time for our parents to see this day they always knew must come, this day when we realize we've grown up. We all know deep in our hearts that we will never be the same again. Today, the young people here will pass away, to live in these hall as memories, to stay in this place they've loved forever.

A few days ago, I was greeted by a former self who was bursting with questions, wanting to know how everything would turn out. If I could write back to him, here is what I would say,

"Dear Drew,

High school is wonderful. Enjoy it. You may forget, or you may not believe me, but it will be over faster than you are ready for. Your best friend is doing fine, and she says hi. She will leave for a long time and it will hurt, but it will be okay. You never got a girlfriend, and though you may regret it, you still have all the time in the world. I made it to be valedictorian and I hope you are proud.

Love, Drew"

To the ten-year-old perched at the edge of one of the greatest changes he will ever know, and to my family of eight years perched on the edge of theirs I would write,

"Dear Drew, Dear Friends,

Your world is about to end. You are about to witness a glorious new beginning filled with countless small moments that will change everything. I wish my grandpa's wish. I wish you the best, wonder and awe throughout your life. You have so many dreams. Know that they are safe and be brave. Let your new world begin."