

Thank you Susanna and thank you members of the Holton alumnae board.

My story at Holton started in 1977 when I entered the school as a new student in fifth grade.

I learned a tremendous amount during my 8 years at Holton. Some of what I learned was what Holton intended: perseverance; strong writing skills; how to factor a polynomial. An equal amount of what I learned, I learned by struggling against Holton's norms and pushing limits.

I learned...How to read people: like which teachers would enforce the uniform, and which I could walk past when my socks were royal blue instead of navy

I learned...How to multi-task: like how to study for a chemistry test during European history class

I learned...How to interpret the rules in my favor: like the time I wore roller skates to final exams

Some of my happiest memories are of my time at Holton:

Getting to play the wonderfully wicked Miss Minchin in the middle school play opposite my new best friend Gina, who played Sara Crew. Gina, who is here today, is still my best friend.

Getting elected president of chorus, and singing in concerts all over the east coast with our amazing teacher and choral director Nancy Theeman.

And getting coached and stretched to my limits—in speech class, acting class, and numerous plays and musicals—by the extraordinary Judy White who is also here today and who has become my lifelong friend and mentor.

I remember 7th grade anthropology class with Jack Caussin and his incredible stories of his time as a Marine; Nick Gilbert's passionate reenactment of his favorite moments in *The Great Gatsby*; Sally Alexander's famous lesson on being succinct, in which she showed us a wordy three-paragraph narrative-description of a man who dressed outrageously, and distilled it down to a three word phrase: *Marvin sports polyester*. (It was the '80s.)

These wonderful educators are retired from Holton now. But you who are in the class of 2015 have some excellent teachers today just as I did.

But Holton was by no means an easy place for me. When I started Holton in 5th grade, I was the only new person in my class. I struggled to find my place among my classmates, at first thinking I wanted to blend in—to look, and act, and think like the other girls. I struggled for several years to find my place, to conform to the way I thought others were, and the way I thought they wanted me to be.

But instead of blending in, I began to appreciate the unique qualities in my classmates and also in myself. I began to share my voice, literally as an actor and a singer, and in more subtle ways, challenging my classmates and even my teachers to consider alternative perspectives. That's how I began the process of creating a place for myself. Of making Holton a place where I could thrive.

Though I didn't recognize it at the time, I was embracing Holton's motto: *I will find a way or make one*.

This motto continues to shape my life, and my story.

30 years after graduation, I define myself in many ways. I am a mother to the amazing Mira and Isabel. A wife and partner to my extraordinary husband, Michael Brodsky. And a daughter of the inspirational Larry and Doris. I am an artist, a social entrepreneur, and a friend. But above all I'm proud to call myself a teacher.

There are many narratives, many stories, of people who go into the teaching profession. Some of the most prominent teachers and education reformers tell a story that goes something like this: I started out in a high-powered, high-paying profession. I was a consultant, an investment banker, someone important. And gave it all up so that I could become a teacher.

This is not my story. And it is not, I believe, a story that serves the teaching profession well. As I crafted and embarked upon my career path, I was determined to do the most intellectually stimulating and challenging, important and joyful work possible. After a circuitous route through which I built my skills as an actor, dancer, and director, I discovered that the most intellectually stimulating and exciting and important work is the work of the teacher.

And then I was reminded again of Holton's motto. When I entered the teaching profession in the early 1990s, the general expectation for teachers was that we were to be followers: follow the curriculum, follow the textbook, follow the district mandates, and ensure students followed accordingly. So after spending a few years as a classroom teacher, and struggling to teach in a way that I believed was best for students but went against the norm, I decided it was time to find a way or make a way to change the teaching profession.

And so I founded Center for Inspired Teaching, a nonprofit organization here in Washington, DC that engages teachers as co-conspirators in education reform. We teach teachers how to shift their practice, so they build students' *imagination*s along with their intellect. Center for Inspired Teaching is based on a simple premise: Change the role of the teacher from knowledge dispenser to Instigator of Thought. And change the role of the student from passive recipient of knowledge to active learner and emerging expert.

I engaged in a productive struggle for many years to get Inspired Teaching's message into the education reform conversation. Now, as

Inspired Teaching is celebrating its 20th anniversary, the organization is beginning to get recognition for our way of teaching and learning. For many years we worked *around* the DC Public Schools to train teachers to change the way children are educated, running our teacher training programs outside of the system. But today we are engaged in a formal district-wide partnership with the DC Public Schools to train thousands of teachers citywide to be Instigators of Thought. And this program will soon scale to school districts in other parts of the country.

We are getting international recognition too. I just returned from the Lego Idea Conference in Denmark where Inspired Teaching won an international award for Reimagining Learning in K-12 education. There is still much more work ahead to create lasting change in education, and I am invigorated by what's next.

To the newest members of the Holton-Arms Alumnae Association, as you craft your life stories, as soon to be high school graduates, I challenge you to dream big as you build on the skills and knowledge you have developed during your time at Holton, and choose—or design—your own unique and important path.