Chapel Speech: Temidayo Olopade '03
1 April 2003

In the grand tradition of sixth form, oh-crap-I’m-leaving-St.-Paul’s speeches, I have something of a confession to make: I am a huge crybaby. I know it doesn’t really seem like it, but I cry pretty easily. About lots of stuff. Big small, you name it, I’ve probably cried about it.

And the thing about crying is you can always feel it coming. The roar just behind your eyes, filling them and finally spilling over.

And there have been quite a few tears as part of this experience. Before I even got here. Maybe when my sister left for St. Paul’s. Actually, I think I was halfway psyched to have the house to myself, so never mind. But maybe my last night at home, when my best friends had said their goodbyes and left and I sat in my packed room, realizing that this was it. That I was really doing this whole boarding school thing. Or maybe the final hugs and kisses from my parents in my tiny 3rd floor double in Wing. Yeah, I definitely cried then.

Now that I think about it, there were lots more to come. Last night service after third form year, I was a basket case. How about just a week ago, as I said goodbye to some of my new friends in Paris. Or the first day of block classes my newb year, as I ended up in a field behind Alumni, oh man, sobbing, because I was supposed to be in some building called “Schoolhouse” ten minutes ago. Or on the erg, my 4th form year… I think I cried after every single 2k. Backstage after closing night of the Shape of Things. Or when I got kicked in the face my first soccer game in goal. On September 11, 2001, right there in that seat. Or on the senior couches yesterday evening when I thought about the exceptional form of people I’ve almost made it through here with.

And all the frustrating times, too: in the Pelican office past 12 on a senior fall night. Or tracking down Jim Hernandez for a debate, 8am Sunday morning, only to find him hiding on a Drury toilet wearing only tighty-whities and a smile. Or moting a paper, class, or person, only to be disappointed in the result. Or when I hated the school, the administration, the town, the “man”. When the friends I was so sure of let me down. When a teacher just didn’t get it. When practice or a game was awful and I knew it. When I felt like people here were insensitive, callous, racist, sexist, classist, conformist, cruel… when I just wanted to go home it hurt so bad. And I cried.

But you also want to cry when the friends you had given up on surprise and amaze you with caring and insight. When a teacher does something special for you and just you. When practice kicked ass it was so intense. Or when it’s Cricket and you’re in a stolen canoe with one of the best friends you’ve ever had. Or when you’re playing an 10-minute, extended air guitar concert in a certain unnamed Nash double. Or crying with laughter when you’re prank calling or bumping 50 cent before seated or just because… Those are times to cry as well…
Because doesn’t crying really just mean something has affected you, for better or worse? In that sense, it seems St. Paul’s has always affected me.

I’m sure you can either imagine or already know what’s to come this next 2 months, slush outside notwithstanding…Spring term is my favorite. But honestly, the best part isn’t necessarily on the docks with friends and sun and milfoil and walking somewhere in the woods at night wearing only shorts, a t-shirt, and goosebumps, where when there’s a moon it’s great but when there isn’t it doesn’t matter, because you could walk that particular route with your eyes shut…

No, that’s all great, but the best part is knowing. Knowing St. Paul’s, feeling like the incredible texture of living and having lived here isn’t lost on me. There’s so much to absorb here, I know I can’t have done it all. And I’m certainly not done yet. But when you know the place, you know.

When you know to use the little bathroom off the Rector’s office because it’s closer to class. When you know that getting lost and jumping over the little stone wall deep in the woods leads you to highway 89 because you’ve done it, at 6:30 AM with your soccer team. When you know that the toilet paper is nicer in the library and dance building, because…well, it’s pretty obvious. When you know that the water under the highway bridge isn’t really as deep as it looks, because you’ve hit the bottom jumping off it. When you swear that that weird bulge in the Meadow moves, seriously it does, because you’ve been here enough winters and springs to tell. When you know which water tap thingy in the upper goes faster, where the best candy in the Schoolhouse lies, because…well, it’s pretty obvious. When you know that the toilet paper is nicer in the library and dance building, because…well, it’s pretty obvious. When you know which water tap thingy in the upper goes faster, where the best candy in the Schoolhouse lies, what excuses work at the Health Center, and which Trustees are cranky. When you know what the pond looks like as you’re being dumped into it, because you had awesome seniors third form. When you know every face in the early break or late to chapel crowd because you’ve been thrown together at the toaster or scurrying along the library path more often than you’d think. When you appreciate constellations because you know you can’t see them in Chicago. When, through trial and error, you’ve perfected the art of meeting someone on the path, figured out that fragile equilibrium of looking away, looking away, looking away…until the perfect moment, then making eye contact, smiling and nodding “hey”. And then smiling again after you’ve passed because dammit, it’s hard, and you know they’ve perfected it, too.

When you know something so well, that you can feel it coming.

And that’s what I mean. I mean I know this place. I know it because every walk or touch or laugh or glance or hate or love or sigh or scream or tear I’ve shared with this place and all of you is knowledge now. Knowledge and appreciation stored up and saved for the proverbial rainy day.

Yeah, but I should be more specific. I mean those rainy days in the spring here. When it’s dark but not dark yet, when sports are over and maybe dinner’s about to begin and it’s warm but not too warm and you’re hearing and watching the rain hit you and bead up on
everything green … April showers. When the pond is restless, when each drop hits and forms a ripple.

Because think about how a storm or any rain begins and ends. Drops at a time … each circle on the pond extends, slowly, quickly, whatever. Until it meets another drop making its own circular progression.

And I like to think that’s how we are. Or at least that’s been my experience. One circle at a time, we are each dropped into St. Paul’s, in a new dorm, a new sport, in a field somewhere behind the schoolhouse, around a harkness table, on the rug after seated, or even in some café in Paris, and we ripple out, slowly, quickly, at our own pace, whatever. And we expand and extend until we hit another ripple. And then another. And then….well, it’s just all water, eventually. In the pond, in a tear, everything about this place is joined, absorbed, consolidated into one memory… eventually.

And that’s what’s important to take away. Just keep trying to know the place, to extend and expand your little drop, your ripple here, and you’ll be just fine. Because whether it’s while you’re here or on your graduation day or in college or decades later, you’ll someday realize that you’ve rippled out far enough that St. Paul’s has become a part of you, maybe without you even knowing it. That you’ve become a part of a pond, a river, a sea, an ocean—stop me please… But anyway, that’s the power this place has.

And the more I think about it, I see that crying is just a way of showing that this place makes you feel.

So thank you, everyone here, you might not even know how, for making me a crybaby. While I haven’t loved every minute, I’ve loved a lot, and a lot of you, and I’ve felt each one.