May 22, 2020

Dear Members of the Ransom Everglades Community,

There’s no question we have all spent time this spring contemplating what has been lost. For the Class of 2020, those losses have been agonizing. Yet as I reflect on the virtual commencement ceremony that ended moments ago, I can’t help but think about what we have learned, what we have gained, and how powerfully we have come together. Our seniors have shown endless good cheer and resilience. They say the pandemic has united their class, cemented their connection, brought them closer than ever. Their expressions of happiness during last Sunday’s Senior Send-Off Drive-Through made us all happy. The late Harry Anderson ’38 left me with remarks to read at tonight’s commencement, and he got it exactly right. To the Class of 2020 he said: "You have learned at Ransom that its priceless assets are the people: faculty, administrators and classmates."

Our seniors have learned many lessons well, perhaps especially that one. A school’s soul reveals itself in the quality of interactions – the human connections – that happen between students and faculty. Whether it be in the classrooms, playing fields, the theatre, art studios or on Biscayne Bay, those relationships are fundamental to our school. And, we now know, they don’t break even when stretched to the max by social distancing. The best of those relationships exist for years beyond commencement.

The first email I opened up this morning was from a recent alumnus of Ransom Everglades, a college student and obvious night owl, who pushed send at 3:44 a.m. He wrote to say that he understood how much we would be missing today’s on campus commencement, and he went on to compliment his former teachers’ response to the pandemic. He also gave a "special round of applause to the less technologically oriented sector of the faculty who has been forced to adapt, learn and embrace the new-fangled contraptions." Apparently he has been spying on us; his younger sister is enrolled. I am deeply touched that it has mattered to him to keep up with us.

The ending of this alum’s email made me smile. He wrote: "I’ll be there later today, ‘Rising Up for Old RE,’” quoting a verse from our Alma Mater.

That line has been on my mind all day.

In 2018, on the occasion of his 80th reunion, Harry described his seven decades of dedication to Ransom Everglades as repayment for "a life-forming experience." He added that he was determined to "continue the creed laid down by Paul Ransom, the founder, to do for others before you do for yourself," and that "The school deeply influenced my life and I expect it will continue to shape young lives for good into the future."
Where else could you find an alumnus, 80 years removed from his school days, sharing such a powerful sentiment? Our seniors seem to have grasped his words already, as they step out into the world as Ransom Everglades alumni. Perhaps no one shaped more lives here than the legendary Dan Bowden, who spent 63 years at RE, most of those as an English teacher. He was not with us at graduation, but we can still hear his benediction.

Dan’s beneficent stewardship of the school, always reaching out to and staying connected with alums and their families, was steadfast and always from the heart, and it made a difference for generations of RE students.

By following Paul Ransom’s words to create individuals who will "give back more to the world than they take from it," Ransom Everglades – by which I mean the extraordinary faculty, students, alumni, parents and staff that make up the school – has been a place that helps students find meaning and purpose in their own lives while discovering their place in the greater community.

There is no better gift we can give our graduates, and it’s a gift that nothing can touch. It’s theirs for the keeping.

Congratulations to the great Class of 2020.

Penny

P.S. Enjoy a few senior videos and memories on our new senior web page.