



"The Only Failure is a Failure to Rescue": Reflections on St. Andrew's by Bre Pierce '13

Liz Torrey
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These remarks were given by Associate Director of Admission Bre Pierce '13 (seen here in her senior year Form photo!) at the 2020 VI Form Dinner, which welcomed the Class of 2020 to the SAS alumni body.

Some of you may know that this is my last year at St. Andrew's. This precisely means that on Sunday, May 24, I will have graduated from St. Andrew's twice, first as a student and now as a faculty member. My first go 'round, I focused my efforts on being present both physically and emotionally for all of those last moments; the last Frosty Run, the last Parents Weekend, my last volleyball game, my last basketball game, my last prom, the last Arts Weekend, and maybe the last Free Day I would have in my life. This was of course before I knew my path would lead me back to St. Andrew's. During my senior year, my emotions were scrambled. I would go back and forth between excitement about the freedom I would have in college to complete panic about the thought of living my daily life without my close friends and the guidance and mentorship from the faculty. I felt joy, impatience, regret, and relief. This year has been similar in many ways, but those feelings are a little more intensified now because we can't be together to enjoy many of those last moments. It is hard to find closure in the midst of all of this. St. Andrew's has always been a place that thrives on human connections. We believe in the power of genuine relationships by getting proximate with one another. I want you to know that it is okay for this journey to feel incomplete. The reality is that a St. Andrew's experience never truly ends. The relationships that you build last and continue to grow beyond your physical presence and time at St. Andrew's and the ethos created and sustained by every member of this community lives within all of us.

When Mr. Roach asked me to share some words of wisdom on behalf of the alumni community, my mind immediately began racing. There was so much from my St. Andrew's experience that I could pull from. In true Mr. Roach fashion, I started jotting down my ideas on a notepad. The difference between me and him is that I had no clear vision or message that I wanted to leave with your class. Once I got my initial thoughts on the paper, I decided to step away from the pad and continue experiencing my last year at St. Andrew's. I figured, this is what we tell our prospective students to do all the time when going through their admissions process: enjoy your 8th grade year and gain as much experience as you can; then reflect on your time through your

essays. So, I spent my final year both consciously and subconsciously reflecting on moments that left an imprint on my life. I would like to share some of those moments with you tonight.

At the beginning of my senior year we had the traditional St. Anne's Chapel. This chapel service in particular resonated with me differently than any other chapel in my four years at St. Andrew's, because I didn't know at the moment how useful these words would be to me and my classmates in the near future. Mr. Roach spoke about **Dr. Atul Gawande's commencement address** in which he focused on the art of rescue. He challenged us to think deeply about what Dr. Gawande was suggesting in his phrase, "The only failure is the failure to rescue." I wasn't sure at that moment what to make of the phrase but it stuck with me for many years after that chapel.

In the fall of my freshman year in college, my St. Andrew's classmates and I made sure to make our way back to 350 Noxontown Road for homecoming. I vividly remember taking a picture with my classmates: Emily Troisi, Morgen Ricketts, Alexandra Porrazzo, Will Bowditch, Peter D'Agostino, Will Hughes, Sydney Young, Betsy Neil, Irene Rajarigam, and Faith Loehr. Peter D'Agostino was positioned perfectly in the middle of the picture. He was the heart of our class and truly embodied everything we strive to be as St. Andreans. This was especially amazing because he came to St. Andrew's as a new junior. I had never met anyone who had their finger on the pulse of the school so intensely. It was because of his leadership and commitment that our class elected him as one of the school's co-presidents.

Not long after homecoming our class received word that Peter had passed away. When I got the news, I immediately thought back to that St. Anne's Chapel. I thought to myself what it might look like to rescue Peter's family, my classmates, and so many others whose lives he had touched. I also knew that I couldn't and didn't want to do it alone. St. Andreans have a collective commitment to stewarding our community and, in this moment, we leaned on one another to do so. My class and the St. Andrew's community rallied together and began planning ways to show our support to Peter's family. The hashtag "Peter Project" became a way to honor his life. Whenever we felt like we accomplished something greater than ourselves we dedicated it to Peter and proudly posted a picture with the hashtag "Peter Project." We channeled our creativity through musical arrangements, quilts, and even pushed ourselves to our limits running marathons—something Peter seemed to do so effortlessly. You all may have even seen a painting of Peter in the Arts Center next to the ceramics room. We did anything to connect with him and live our lives with the same enthusiasm, resilience, integrity, and love that he brought to everything that he did. Our focus shifted from self-pity and grief of a loss to what we could do to lift each other up.

Similarly, to our initial feelings of sorrow and loss after Peter's passing, during this pandemic we have often spent time reflecting on what we used to have, what we used to do and how certain restrictions now hinder us from having those last moments of celebration and recognition together. It is easy to feel bad for ourselves, to feel robbed of an opportunity, but I encourage you to shift your perspective to action; to empathy, trust, concern for others; and an appreciation for what we had, knew, and loved before this time.

Dr. Gawande's phrase "the only failure is the failure to rescue" also alludes to the idea of preparation. Last week, I had a conversation with Steph about her feelings on transitioning to college. She expressed worry because college is "clearly not as sheltered as St. Andrew's." After that conversation, I took a moment to think about the St. Andrew's experience more broadly and came to the conclusion that St. Andrew's is in fact a trial run. But you shouldn't be worried because you are all ready for the next level. From annotations to analysis, exhibitions to colloquiums, you've done the work of scholars. From practice to games to state tournaments, you know how to leave it all on the court and field and pond. From gallery openings to performances on campus and beyond, you know what to do when the lights come on. From Adaptive Aquatics to mentoring to the work at Andrew's Place, you know how to serve others with humility. The only way to fail is if you don't take these lessons and put them into action. That seems pretty simple until you're thrown into a completely new environment with people that haven't had a St. Andrew's experience. The values that you have developed will be challenged. You might even have moments when you struggle to choose whether or not to be your true self.

In my junior year of college, underrepresented students on college campuses around the nation joined together to shine a light on policies and practices that were rooted in racism and homophobia. We also worked to gain more diverse and culturally competent counseling staff to support students of color. I became a leader in Dickinson's efforts to promote equity and inclusion. As you can imagine, this was no easy feat. I put myself in a position to be criticized and scrutinized daily, but I stood firm in who I was. While your efforts don't have to be that large in scale, I want to challenge you to be yourself—unapologetically—at all times. Parkie Moseley, hold those Breakfast Bible Studies on your new campus. Tim Odutola, continue to bring joy to children and their families who are unable to spend the holidays at home. Iris Hwang, use your voice to speak on injustices and build a new-age rainbow coalition. Dante Soriano, share your political views with your peers in hopes of bridging the gap of understanding and creating new common ground. Lilly Howard, keep saving the wave. Camille Strand, continue providing spaces of support for black women. Whatever you all decide to do, always remember that the lessons you learned in practice at St. Andrew's have prepared you for any moment of rescue.

The last thing that I want to share with you is that whenever you need to be rescued, your alumni family will be there; in fact, they are everywhere. I can name multiple times in my travels or just in the grocery store when I've seen someone that is an alum of St. Andrew's. It doesn't matter if your times at St. Andrew's overlapped or if you are generations apart, there is always a spark that connects you to that person. Furthermore, seeing your fellow alums is always a reminder that this is a community that we all had a hand in building. It is a reminder to value authentic relationships, to be your true self, and to lead a life of service to others. That is the art of rescue. Class of 2020, it is my honor to welcome you into the St. Andrew's alumni community. Thank you.