

## There's No Place Like Grace

Thank you.

Before I start I want to thank Ms. Danish, Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Yarrington, the Grace faculty and the students of Grace Episcopal Day School for inviting me here to speak at the Founders Day Celebration.

My name is Mary Di Martino, and I am a proud Grace alum from the Class of 2013. I am so honored to be back here with all of you on founder's day.

When Mrs. Danish first asked me to speak today, she told me to write about what Grace has meant to me, which turned out to be really hard, because she said I had to keep it to 2 minutes - which is impossible - because Grace has meant so much to me it's going to be hard to keep it short. But here goes, I guess.

First, I'd like to start with a question.

How many of you have seen the movie the Wizard of Oz? [wait for hands to go up].

Thank you.

As you know, in that movie, the main character Dorothy gets swept up in a tornado and lands in OZ, and spends the entire movie trying to find her way back to Kansas, because, as she says when she clicks her heels, "THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME."

As a high school student, with homework, after school sports, science projects, history papers, and just being a teenager, it sometimes feels like I'm living through a tornado. Except when I think of Grace – which I get to do every day when my sister Tess, who's a fifth grader here, comes home from school.

For me, and for everyone I know that ever went to school here – no matter where we are, when we think back to being here, we can confidently say, “There’s no place like Grace.”

At Grace, I learned about friendship. Here, there was never a difference between me and my classmates. We all learned together in the classroom-- helping each other with our math problems or our wordly wise exercises. We all eagerly awaited recess, where we played spider ball and threw dodgeballs at one another with a deadly accuracy. (Spider ball being the *only time* when we were sworn enemies, of course.) Even though we all might not have looked the same, or come from the same families or places, in our hearts we were equals: the perfect P.E. opponents and the best of friends.

At Grace, I learned many things that are still part of me today. I can still remember the banner above my kindergarten classroom: written in glitter, the words “treat others the way you want to be treated.” This is where I learned how to treat people, how to make friends, how to be compassionate.

Grace also taught me the importance of diversity. While I was a student here, I was exposed to lots of different cultures. Whether it be through Mrs. Muys’ art class, or my own classmates bring in snacks from their native countries, Grace exposed me to worlds beyond my own without ever making it feel forced. I gained a genuine interest in my classmates and their ethnicities and how that made them who they are. And this experience at Grace is a big part of who I am.

Every day at Grace I felt loved. I felt loved by my teachers, who worked tirelessly to prepare engaging lessons for us. I felt loved by my classmates always, but especially when they gave me a group hug after I was the ONLY one to cry after we watched Old Yeller. Everyone in

in this community from the teachers to the parents each contributed to an experience so unique, that I can never forget it. This community showed me what it means to be caring and compassionate and what it means to be valued and to value others.

I could go on but I think you get the picture now. As you can see, I loved going to school here. Our school song says that "Grace is the PLACE." But it's so much more than a place. For me, it's a feeling - like the feeling of Christmas morning or when I hug my dog. While I love being at Stone Ridge, there really is no place like Grace and there's no feeling quite like being part of this strong, diverse, and loving community.

Thanks again to Ms. Danish for inviting me. Thank you all for having me. Happy Founders Day. God Bless you and God Bless Grace.