

The Altamont School
Distinguished Alumnae Award Speech
Monday, March 16, 2015
Assembly at 2:15 pm

Good afternoon to all in attendance here today - colleagues, faculty and students - at the Altamont School! If you had told me I would be standing here giving this speech as a Distinguished Altamont Alumna (Mrs. Forbes would be so proud!) in 1967 when I graduated, I probably would have laughed out loud! Now Mrs. Gainey would be proud – although this is not extemporaneous! I am not going to play the piano, sing or Tap Dance – but know Mrs. Lynch and Mrs. Webb would be proud!

What Altamont did for me was provide excellent teachers who taught – not just the facts – but how to learn the facts and how to study, and how to apply the information! Thank you Mrs. Gage! And that prepared me for a world outside of High School that put me in a position to learn anything I worked for – and in light of the fact that my adult – post college “career” has been through so many manifestations, it is amazing to see where I ended at this point today.

I am not so much proud, as I am extremely grateful for the teachers that walked through these halls when I was a student!

Mrs. Osgood taught me French, and Mrs. Locke taught me Algebra (I am afraid that knowledge and talent is gone by this point!) and because Brooke Hill was such a proponent of all of the Arts and of a well prepared student – I even was able to take my piano lessons here from Mrs. Webb, and was able to go to the piano practice rooms in substitution for study hall! I thought then that I wanted to be Van Cliburn!

A quick recap of the last 48 adult years:

Westminster Choir College in Princeton, NJ, for my freshman year – watching Leonard Bernstein, and many others conduct the Symphonic Choir live on campus in rehearsal and in concert at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center among others with world famous orchestras.

And getting to attend the Memorial in Central Park that honored Martin Luther King after his assassination in the Spring of 1968 with the Westminster Symphonic Choir.

Next – Birmingham-Southern College (My Daddy wanted his baby back in the South!) But not to worry plenty of opportunity in Birmingham – I changed my major from Piano to Organ and also sang in Hugh Thomas’ Concert choir at BSC. (Side note - HT had come at Carolyn Lynch’s request to conduct the BHS Choir and The Indian Springs Choir in the Randall Thompson setting of 7 Robert Frost poems while I was at Brooke Hill!)

After graduation – I became Assistant to the Director of Music at Independent Presbyterian Church working for the incredible Joe Schreiber for 7 years – during which I discovered Tap Dancing! When I was working at IPC, I took tap lessons and got married to the most patient man on the planet! John Beard.

I had seen a show at Birmingham Festival Theatre entitled “The Decline and Fall of the Entire World as Seen through the Eyes of Cole Porter” – and vowed I would learn to Tap Dance, and put together an Andrews Sisters singing group.

I became pregnant with my first child – Graham – and had to stop working at the Church and become a full time Mother - Still singing in the IPC Choir (34 years total).

The Andrews Sisters continued for a few years – and I continued tap and taught a class for the Junior League Follies in 1979/80. Who would have known that the Tap Dancing Lessons would lead to a 29 year career teaching Adults to tap? And these dancers participated in a large Tap Revue every Spring on the stage at the famed Alabama Theatre? A dream for many who had seen The Mickey Mouse Club *live* on that stage when they were young.

Mrs. Gainey called me to buy tickets to the show one year (of course I comped her!) and after the Show was finished the next week she called to tell me how much she had laughed and enjoyed the show! I know she remembered that 10th grade girl who had sent marzipan flying all over the Speech room during the Demonstration assignment, and now had put 150 grown women and men on stage who were having fun and living their dream!

Another side note – one year, I had my age 50+ women dancers in white underwear over black tights and leotards dancing to the Thong Song (do y’all even know that one?) and it was in blacklight – only the bra and panties showed and then the dancers slipped off stage and took the white “over”wear off, and returned with huge headdresses ready to perform in Vegas! Fully costumed Show girls in full drag and light!

29 years into TIME STEP STUDIO, I knew I had to quit – age was taking a toll - and I needed to have my knee replaced – so April of 2009 was the last Time Step Studio Show at the Alabama. (The dancers now dance through the Alabama Ballet – who started its Tap program for them!)

I knew prior to the last year that I had to make a transition to another career that involved something I loved – and Producing just smacked me in the face!

So I put myself into that position and early on got connected to the Producers of A CHRISTMAS STORY, the MUSICAL, and from that came 3 Tony nominations – one for best New Musical – VERY rare for a seasonal Show.

But in November, 2013, I saw A GENTLEMAN’S GUIDE TO LOVE AND MURDER – joined an LLC (one of the members was Michael Filerman – Executive Producer of DALLAS, DYNASTY, KNOT’S LANDING, SISTERS, and FLAMINGO ROAD. Most of the student population will never have heard of him – but he was a big mover and shaker producer in

Hollywood and on Broadway in the 1970's-90's. Not to mention an idol of mine that I *never* thought I would get to meet – much less become a good friend!

Long story not so short – I started in one direction and ended up in another place – but can you connect the thread that got me through these paths?

Right!

Music and the Arts – is at the heart of almost everything I have chosen.

And who would have thought that the Pianist, Choral Singer, Wife, Mother, Tap Dancer Teacher and Performer from Birmingham, AL would end up on the Stage of Radio City Music Hall accepting a Tony Award last June, 2014 for being a producer of the Best New Musical?

I am still amazed at it all! And oh so grateful to everyone!

Why is my story important?

This story - *not* because it is my story - is the story of you all – an “Everyman” account of people who have found what they want to do and will do everything they can to make it happen.

You are all capable – but at Altamont – you are being given the tools and the education from this stellar institution to make your dreams come true.

Because you never know – keep your eyes, ears, minds and souls wide open!

Pay attention to opportunities, and go with your passion!

So - Go forth! Love your path and make it happen!