

THE ROSE

This story was told by Dana Williams, the 12th Grade sponsor, to the new first grade at Highland Hall as part of the Rose Ceremony where the Senior Class welcomes the new first graders into the school by giving each a rose.

Once upon a time, long ago and far away, there was a young boy and a young girl, and they were brother and sister and they lived in the country. One of their favorite things to do was to play with all their friends in the large garden in front of their wooden house.

One day in the spring they took special notice of all the beautiful flowers that were blooming in the garden. They wondered at all the beautiful colors, smells and star-like forms. They noticed how some flowers reach up to the sun and open themselves to heaven and how some flowers hang down towards the earth.

At lunchtime they asked their mother where all the flowers came from and what made them bloom. Their mother told them that the flowers came from heaven, that while the green part of the plants came from the earth, the flower was awakened from the plant by the stars.

Then the children said "O mother, teach us about the stars: we want to learn about the heavens", and their mother told them that before they learned about the heavens that they should learn about the earth, because without the earth there would be no plants, and without the plants there would be no flowers.

Then their mother said that since they had so many questions, it was time for them to begin school.

So after summer, in the fall, which is this time of year, they began school. They went to school at the base of a great mountain. There they met their teacher and all their friends were there and they were very excited. They found their classroom and beside it they saw a path leading up the mountain and one or two buildings along the way, before it disappeared from sight.

Their teacher would sometimes teach them by taking them on long walks and telling them about what they saw and heard, and then they would go back to their room to review what they had learned. He would tell them about the rocks and stones, for example, and how some were harder than others, what their names were and how to recognize them by their colors and textures. They learned about the soil, that some was sandy and some like clay, and that different plants liked different kinds of soil.

Their teacher also taught them about the plants: that some have parts that are good to eat, and some are poisonous and to be avoided, that some can be used for healing and some trees, like the pine which is straight and strong, can be used for building.

They also learned to sit quietly in the woods of the forest and look and listen for the animals. They learned to watch how they moved and to listen to the sounds they made. They learned that some were fierce and some were timid and only came out at night. They learned to hear the joy in the birds' songs in the morning in spring and they learned about the seasons and how to tell the time by the sun.

Last but not least, they learned about the people on the mountain and how they lived and after some years they even learned about people far away in other parts of the world.

But of course they did not learn all of these things at once, and at the end of the first year they went home for summer vacation; when they came back next fall they met at the next classroom up the hill, which was the second grade room. And each year they moved farther up the mountain. After some years they noticed that things were quite different than before. There were more pine trees and fewer maple trees for example, and the habits of the people were different. Winter came sooner also. The air seemed thinner, the sun brighter, the sky a deeper blue, and as they were older and needed less sleep they were able to stay up later at night and they began to notice the stars again.

After 12 long years it came time for them to graduate and their teacher told them that now that they had learned a great deal about the earth it was time once again to turn their attention to heaven, and they remembered what their mother had told them - that the roots of the plants reach down into the earth because they love the soil, that the leaves of the plants reach into the air because they love the air, that the flowers imitate the forms of the stars because they love the stars, and then their mother had paused and drawn their attention to the apricot tree outside their window which was full of pink and white blossoms, and she reminded them that fruit trees always blossom before they bear fruit, and the birds would enjoy the fruit, and that some seeds would fall to the ground and become new trees in the future.

As they graduated, their teacher gave them each a bright red rose and told them that it was to remind them that each of them had their own individual star and that if they listened carefully to it, it would whisper to them in their dreams and help them decide what to do with their lives. He told them that the profession they would learn was like the flowering of their education, and that the work they would do in that profession to serve other people would be the fruit of their lives which would bear seeds for the future.

So when the twelfth grade gives each of you first graders a rose this morning, it is to remind you that you too will graduate in 12 years and it will remind you of that goal. And it is the wish and hope that you will be able to hear your star and find your destiny in a harmonious way.

Dana Williams