Head of School Tori Jueds Alumni Day Address

Good morning, Friends. It is truly wonderful to see you all. This is a very special weekend for me, for all of us, to meet and greet Alumni, to celebrate you, to be with you as you reconnect with each other, the school, and the campus.

Today I am honored to share with you a few reflections on Westtown in 2018. But first I have been assigned a very happy task, an announcement about school leadership. We are fortunate to have a dedicated, skilled, and mission-driven Board of Trustees, which takes very seriously its obligation to keep our school vitally connected to its founding traditions and values, while leading it boldly into a robust and healthy future. This year, contemplating the retirement from the Board of our excellent Clerk, Jon Evans, our trustees engaged in a thorough and thoughtful process to discern our next Clerk and Associate Clerk. Our Committee on Trustees, clerked by the marvelous Martha Bryans, convened a small leadership selection committee. And who should clerk this selection process? Of course, Ed Winslow. (I mean, I thought Ed did a really great job clerking his last selection process.) Under Ed’s able stewardship, the trustees carefully considered the characteristics and qualities that will be important for our next Board leaders, and made recommendations which were heartily endorsed. As a result of this careful discernment process, it gives me great pleasure to announce that:

- As of July 1, 2018 Davis Henderson will be the next Clerk of our Board of Trustees. A member of the class of 1962 and a birthright Quaker, Davis brings with him a thorough understanding of the essential nature of Westtown School. He also brings a keen intellect, a deep well of expertise, a strong and steady leadership style, and a fabulous sense of humor. I am delighted that Davis will be clerking our board, and I’m excited for you to read more about him as we approach July 1. But for now please join me in celebrating and thanking him.

- I am also thrilled and grateful to announce that Michelle Caughey will renew her service as Associate Clerk of the Board of Trustees. Like Davis, Michelle is a Quaker and an alumna, a member of the class of 1971. As Associate Clerk she has not only been devoted to our school, but also acutely and minutely perceptive about where we need to go. We have been and will be stronger for Michelle’s integrity and decisive, determined leadership. Please join me in thanking Michelle for her continued service, and wishing her and Davis godspeed with their leadership of our Board.

Friends, a few more words of appreciation are owed at this juncture. In keeping with the magnificent spirit of community that pervades Westtown, a great many people came together to prepare for your arrival this weekend, to make sure that you would be safe, nourished, inspired, and entertained. To name each individual who made this Alumni Weekend possible would, sadly, take too much time, but I’m sure you will understand how much is owed to our Friends in

- Facilities and Housekeeping
- Transportation and Security
For me, Friends, it is a great pleasure to be here with you for the first time as Head of School. I was here this time last year to join with Alumni in celebrating the wonderful fifteen-year tenure of my excellent predecessor, John Baird. And I was struck by the warmth and vitality of the Alumni community.

Most striking, and most comforting of all, was a momentary encounter as I stood on this very spot, with (I believe) last year’s 60th and 65th reunion-goers — or, as I have thought of them ever since, the peanut gallery. I had been talking about work program, and my perception that students engage in work program enthusiastically — and the snort of derision that went up from these seats right here was heard all the way down at the Cabin. When I say that I found that moment comforting I mean it. For me, to be gently and ever so lovingly heckled by Westtown Alumni made me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. I feel that to be able to laugh at ourselves and each other, to be taken down a peg with a smile, these things are marks of belonging.

And I love belonging to Westtown. I have felt like I belong at Westtown ever since I first arrived on campus, and that feeling of belonging has only grown.

The feeling of belonging to Westtown is a wonderful but mysterious thing. Where does it come from? In the most obvious sense, most of you belong to Westtown by dint of having earned your diploma here. But that’s not it. Many people here today attended Westtown but earned a diploma elsewhere, but that doesn’t mean that they belong any less; on the contrary. And furthermore, you all know you belong despite the fact that Westtown doesn’t look exactly the way you remember it. You might find yourself this weekend in a building that didn’t exist when you were here. You will find young people enrolled here today who identify with a broader and finer-grained spectrum of personal characteristics than will be familiar to you from your days as a student, young people who exhibit, understand, and experience personal identity in ways that
are new to you. You will see courses listed in the Upper School catalog that were not available to you — African American History, Latinx American History, Asian American History.

So how is it that you and they and I should feel that we belong at Westtown? How is it that a few weeks ago I found myself spontaneously talking about "our school" with none other than the great Mary Ann Wagner? She is here today to celebrate her 60th Reunion, and she undeniably belongs -- and yet I too belong to Westtown.

I give a lot of thought to my predecessors in this role. Not only to John Baird, but also to Tom Kaesemeyer, who is here today; Tom Farquhar, who visited a few weeks ago to help us host the new president of Earlham College; Earl Harrison, in whose house I now live; Dan Test, after whom this very theater is named. A few weeks ago I was visiting with Westtown Alumni in California and had the privilege of meeting an alumnus from the class of 1970, Rob Lippincott. Rob shared with me some boyhood memories of his grandfather, the man known from 1924 to 1950 as Headmaster of Westtown, James Walker. Those of you celebrating your 70th, 75th, 80th reunions today will surely remember James, and I'd love to know what you remember, because Rob remembers a man of profound integrity, kindness, methodical precision, stately deliberation. In memorial tributes in the Winter 1979 issue of *The Westonian*, Dan Test wrote of James that he was “a gentleman in the truest sense”; Lou Flaccus attributed to him “firm and fair and far-sighted decisions”; Rachel Letchworth called him “our paragon of virtue.” I started to think: maybe as Head of School I could do no better than to ask myself, when there is a decision to be made, WWJWD — what would James Walker do?

And that is an inspiring thought. I am and will be a better head of school for the examples set by this great man, and others who have occupied the office in the Main Building where I now spend my days.

But my friends, it’s also very daunting to ask WWJWD — to think about walking in the shoes of a “true gentleman” and a “paragon of virtue,” when I have this sneaking suspicion that I am unlikely ever to be called either one. After a point, I can no more expect myself to be like James than any of you can expect the Westtown of today or tomorrow to look like the Westtown you remember. Nobody knew change better than James himself. In his farewell address to the Westtown Alumni Association in 1950, he wrote:

> In the past 26 years the School has undergone many changes. In 1924 there was no music taught and the school did not own a piano. Those admitted had to have at least one parent who was a member of the Society of Friends. Dramatics were first getting well under way. There was no… work program. Every time the school had an assembly, folding chairs had to be set up in the gymnasium, for we had no auditorium or Meeting House. The Lane School building, the South Room, the Treasure Room, the Greenwood… were all yet to come.
When I read that, I realized that I had been making the mistake of thinking that the Greenwood and the Meeting House were as old as time, that Work Program had always been an integral part of Westtown life. But in the not-too-distant past, they were among a series of huge changes at Westtown. And by the way, a quick trip through our Archives shows that those changes were hard-won and in some cases intensely disputed. But standing here in 2018, when I contemplate those changes, I feel only relief and gratitude — gratitude for those who went out on a limb to get us that first piano, and relief that they recognized what we now freely accept about the importance of music and the dramatic arts in the lives of young people. To quote something Pete Lane said only this morning: “I’m so glad Quakers got past that music thing.”

But most of all, I feel relief and gratitude that Westtown now has a deeper understanding and a broader experience of diversity than we once did. Eighty-five years ago, in 1933, the decision to open Westtown to non-Friends was I’m sure a heart-wrenching decision. But it paved the way for more young people to belong to this great school, it paved the way for a beautiful and critically important panoply of cultural and personal identities among our student body, not only a panoply of spiritual and religious traditions, but a panoply of color, ethnicity, race, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity — a panoply of selfhood.

Big changes indeed for James Walker, big changes since 1933, and surely Westtown will change again as much in the next 85 years. But what is is so heartening to me — so exciting — is that of all the communities of human beings I’ve ever seen, experienced, or heard of, Westonians open their hearts and minds to the future in a way that makes room for the future to be better than anything we could dream of, while staying true to our founding traditions and values. That openness is what makes Westtown a great school; that openness is the root of what we all experience as a sense of belonging.

I’d like to tell you a story that illustrates that heart- and mind-openness.

On Thursday, February 1, 2018, Upper School students and teachers gathered for Meeting for Worship as usual. But a few minutes into our time together, about three-quarters of those students staged a walkout from the Meeting House. I’ll tell you why in a minute — but not yet. Because first I want you to experience what we felt, the adults in the community, and at first, we didn’t know why either. All we knew was that a few minutes into Meeting for Worship, one of our Student Body Presidents rose to his feet. He stated that Meeting for Worship had, as such, failed the students. Then the lion’s share of the student body left the Meeting House, and reconvened for their own gathering in the South Room. There were so many of them that they spilled into Central and down the halls of the Main Building.

In the immediate aftermath, teachers and administrators experienced not a small degree of shock. All we knew, initially, is that this seemed like an affront to the institution of Meeting for Worship. It was a real WWJWD moment. We felt anxiety, confusion, even pain on behalf of this beloved Quaker tradition, this revered and fundamental pillar of Friends education at Westtown
School since 1799. That anxiety was a good sign. It is incredibly important that we bear allegiance to our central traditions — and nothing is more central than Meeting for Worship.

But if our reaction as a community had stopped there — if, in our alarm, we had dug in our heels and refused to engage with the students who walked out, we would have done a great disservice to those young people and to our traditions. Fortunately, Westonians know better than that. In a matter of hours, teachers and staff members turned their shock into a determination to understand. And what they learned was this: Many students who identify as minorities do not always feel that wonderful sense of belonging. On the contrary, many of our students had been feeling unseen and silenced. Worse, unseen and silenced on account of who they are — on account of their race and gender identity and other characteristics. And worse still, they felt unable to express themselves fully in Meeting for Worship. When the still, small, voice of truth inspired them to speak to them about the experience of being a racial minority, or the experience of being genderqueer or transgender, they felt that their messages were not welcome. So what else could they do but walk out? I was and am inordinately proud of of them for doing so.

And I am inordinately proud of the teachers and administrators who pushed through their anxiety about the walkout, and came together in service of our students’ needs. Teacher Karen Gallagher said it best. During a called meeting of the faculty, she gave voice to the collective feeling that we must not be reactionary in such moments, but that we must meet the students where they are, that they are the future, and their right to feel that they belong must be front of mind for all of us.

I cannot overstate how fantastic it is that Westonians are characterized by such openness. I don’t know if any of you are familiar with the work of Arnold Mindell. (I’m going to get a little geeky here, stay with me.) Mindell is a psychologist who pioneered the social-political concept of Deep Democracy, which provides a framework for thinking about growth in both individuals and institutions. Mindell proposed a model of the self, of the individual psyche, as the experience of being in a circle of fixed radius. That radius defines the boundaries of my experience, my persona, my character. Beyond the edge of the circle, so far as I know, there be dragons. So when we approach the outer limits of who we understand ourselves to be, there is anxiety, there is fear, there is agitation. But what Mindell observed, and what the model of Deep Democracy shows, is that if one can inhabit that edge, play with that edge, there are no dragons. Rather, the edge recedes, the circle expands, the comfort zone of the self becomes bigger than it was before.

The same holds true for communities and organizations. And on February 1, 2018, Westtown grew as a community. It’s not that we have it all figured out now. But that day, our understanding of what Westtown is, of who our students are, became more expansive and more inclusive. Even Meeting for Worship grew stronger — more expansive and more inclusive. I can tell that you know what I’m talking about. James Walker knew what I’m talking about. That
openness, that energy of expansion, that capacity for growth at Westtown is what allows us all to feel that we belong.

Let me close with this thought. What’s really exciting for me to think about is who might belong to Westtown in the future. We’ve made a lot of room for belonging since our founding: today, we draw students from 20 states and 20 countries, and 27% of Upper School students are students of color. But what kind of reach might we have in the future? Imagine that someday soon, Westtown could be as diverse as this country is diverse. Today this country includes 39% people of color, a percentage which will top 50% in a couple of decades. Wouldn’t it be great if that’s what our student body looked like? And imagine that in the future, admission to Westtown school might be need-blind. Wouldn’t it be great to make a Westtown education accessible to anyone who wants to belong? Today, like the vast majority of independent schools, we are essentially tuition-driven; today, it would take an additional $166 million in our endowment to fund non-remission financial aid and ease the pressure on tuition in that regard. Yes I know that sounds like a huge goal — but this is an institution worthy of that goal! And with what I know of Westonians, that goal is within reach, it is there waiting for us, in our future.

Friends, I am so privileged to be standing here with you. So privileged that the open embrace of Westtown has made me feel like I belong, has allowed me to be standing here with you.

I wish you joy this weekend. As you go about the campus, as you reconnect with your memories and with each other, I hope that you will treasure, that you will revel in the feeling of belonging to Westtown. At the same time, look around you for the joyful sights and signs of the new generation that belongs here too. Your younger cousins. And then, take a moment to think about who will belong to Westtown in the future. It’s an exciting thought.

Thank you. Happy Alumni Weekend!