



August 25, 2020

# Smoke Signals

Enter to learn. Leave to serve.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Day Assemblies

Seniors will come down to the commons after announcements, Sophomores to start 2nd Period after checking in w/ 2nd period teacher, Freshmen to start 3rd Period after checking in w/ 3rd period teacher and Juniors to start 8th Period after checking in w/ 8nd period teacher. Study Hall students will go to the Commons during these four periods on Tuesday.

## Attention Study Hall Students

1st, 2nd, 3rd and 8th Period Study Hall Students please report to the Media Center.

## Interested In Being A Student Council Member?

Those students interested in being on Student Council for this year should sign up in the office by this Wednesday at 3:00 p.m. Voting will take place this Thursday. Student Council will meet for the first time on Friday during lunch.

## Limited Capacity At Sporting Events

Due to Governmental Orders, we are only allowed 15% capacity at sporting events. As a result, we will unfortunately not have students at Fall Contests at this time. Hopefully, this order is changed in the near future but for now, this is the case. Also, it has been rumored that students plan to stand outside of the fence for football games. This also is not allowed and is against compliance as well. Sorry, I wish I had better news on this front.

## This is Water (Part 1)

“Greetings parents and congratulations to Kenyon’s graduating class of 2005. There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes “What the he-l is water?”

This is a standard requirement of US commencement speeches, the deployment of didactic little parable-ish stories. The story thing turns out to be one of the better, less bullsh--y conventions of the genre, but if you’re worried that I plan to present myself here as the wise, older fish explaining what water is to you younger fish, please don’t be. I am not the wise old fish. The point of the fish story is merely that the most obvious, important realities are often the ones that are hardest to see and talk about. Stated as an English sentence, of course, this is just a banal platitude, but the fact is that in the day to day trenches of adult existence, banal platitudes can have a life or death importance, or so I wish to suggest to you on this dry and lovely morning.

Of course the main requirement of speeches like this is that I’m supposed to talk about your liberal arts education’s meaning, to try to explain why the degree you are about to receive has actual human value instead of just a material payoff. So let’s talk about the single most pervasive cliché in the *(Cont. Top Right)*

*(cont.)* the commencement speech genre, which is that a liberal arts education is not so much about filling you up with knowledge as it is about “teaching you how to think.” If you’re like me as a student, you’ve never liked hearing this, and you tend to feel a bit insulted by the claim that you needed anybody to teach you how to think, since the fact that you even got admitted to a college this good seems like proof that you already know how to think. But I’m going to posit to you that the liberal arts cliché turns out not to be insulting at all, because the really significant education in thinking that we’re supposed to get in a place like this isn’t really about the capacity to think, but rather about the choice of what to think about. If your total freedom of choice regarding what to think about seems too obvious to waste time discussing, I’d ask you to think about fish and water, and to bracket for just a few minutes your skepticism about the value of the totally obvious.

Here’s another didactic little story. There are these two guys sitting together in a bar in the remote Alaskan wilderness. One of the guys is religious, the other is an atheist, and the two are arguing about the existence of God with that special intensity that comes after about the fourth beer. And the atheist says: “Look, it’s not like I don’t have actual reasons for not believing in God. It’s not like I haven’t ever experimented with the whole God and prayer thing. Just last month I got caught away from the camp in that terrible blizzard, and I was totally lost and I couldn’t see a thing, and it was 50 below, and so I tried it: I fell to my knees in the snow and cried out ‘Oh, God, if there is a God, I’m lost in this blizzard, and I’m gonna die if you don’t help me.’” And now, in the bar, the religious guy looks at the atheist all puzzled. “Well then you must believe now,” he says, “After all, here you are, alive.” The atheist just rolls his eyes. “No, man, all that was was a couple Eskimos happened to come wandering by and showed me the way back to camp.” *(Cont. on back).*

## HS Birthdays This Week

- (08/24) – Lauren Brunswick
- (08/25) –
- (08/26) – Josue Tinoco, Ali Brunswick
- (08/27) – Jacob Imel, Maria Gallegos
- (08/28) – Mrs. Huelsman
- (08/29) – Dominic Otting
- (08/30) – Caleb Wendel



Happy 16<sup>th</sup>!

### Today’s Menu

- Hamburger Sandwich
- Baked Chips
- Baked Beans
- Fruit
- Milk
- Alt – Deli Sandwich

### J.O.D

Hey Deb,

What did the tree say to the mountain?

Stop peaking at me!

(Cont. From Front) It's easy to run this story through kind of a standard liberal arts analysis: the exact same experience can mean two totally different things to two different people, given those people's two different belief templates and two different ways of constructing meaning from experience. Because we prize tolerance and diversity of belief, nowhere in our liberal arts analysis do we want to claim that one guy's interpretation is true and the other guy's is false or bad. Which is fine, except we also never end up talking about just where these individual templates and beliefs come from. Meaning, where they come from INSIDE the two guys. As if a person's most basic orientation toward the world, and the meaning of his experience were somehow just hard-wired, like height or shoe-size; or automatically absorbed from the culture, like language. As if how we construct meaning were not actually a matter of personal, intentional choice. Plus, there's the whole matter of arrogance. The nonreligious guy is so totally certain in his dismissal of the possibility that the passing Eskimos had anything to do with his prayer for help. True, there are plenty of religious people who seem arrogant and certain of their own interpretations, too. They're probably even more repulsive than atheists, at least to most of us. But religious dogmatists' problem is exactly the same as the story's unbeliever: blind certainty, a close-mindedness that amounts to an imprisonment so total that the prisoner doesn't even know he's locked up.

The point here is that I think this is one part of what teaching me how to think is really supposed to mean. To be just a little less arrogant. To have just a little critical awareness about myself and my certainties. Because a huge percentage of the stuff that I tend to be automatically certain of is, it turns out, totally wrong and deluded. I have learned this the hard way, as I predict you graduates will, too.

Here is just one example of the total wrongness of something I tend to be automatically sure of: everything in my own immediate experience supports my deep belief that I am the absolute centre of the universe; the realest, most vivid and important person in existence. We rarely think about this sort of natural, basic self-centredness because it's so socially repulsive. But it's pretty much the same for all of us. It is our default setting, hard-wired into our boards at birth. Think about it: there is no experience you have had that you are not the absolute centre of. The world as you experience it is there in front of YOU or behind YOU, to the left or right of YOU, on YOUR TV or YOUR monitor. And so on. Other people's thoughts and feelings have to be communicated to you somehow, but your own are so immediate, urgent, real.

Please don't worry that I'm getting ready to lecture you about compassion or other-directedness or all the so-called virtues. This is not a matter of virtue. It's a matter of my choosing to do the work of somehow altering or getting free of my natural, hard-wired default setting which is to be deeply and literally self-centered and to see and interpret everything through this lens of self. People who can adjust their natural default setting this way are often described as being "well-adjusted", which I suggest to you is not an accidental term.

Given the triumphant academic setting here, an obvious question is how much of this work of adjusting our default setting involves actual knowledge or intellect. This question gets very tricky. Probably the most dangerous thing about an academic education—least in my own case—is that it enables my tendency to over-intellectualize stuff, to get lost in abstract argument inside my head, instead of simply paying attention to what is going on right in front of me, paying attention to what is going on inside me.

## The Week Ahead

### (08/25) Tuesday –

- Student's 1<sup>st</sup> Day
- Cross Country Home County Meet @5:30pm
- JV / Varsity Volleyball at Eaton @5:30pm

### (08/26) Wednesday –

- Tri-Star's 1st Day of School
- Girls Golf vs Lincolnview @4:00pm

### (08/27) Thursday –

- Girls Golf vs Versailles @4:00pm
- Boys Golf at Versailles @4:30pm
- Freshman Volleyball at Versailles @5:00pm
- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Volleyball at Versailles after freshman

### (08/28) Friday –

- Varsity Football at Coldwater @7:00pm

### (08/29) Saturday –

- Freshman Volleyball vs Fort Recovery @9:00am
- Cross Country at Celina @9:00am
- JV Football vs Coldwater @10:00am

### (08/30) Sunday –

As I'm sure you guys know by now, it is extremely difficult to stay alert and attentive, instead of getting hypnotized by the constant monologue inside your own head (may be happening right now). Twenty years after my own graduation, I have come gradually to understand that the liberal arts cliché about teaching you how to think is actually shorthand for a much deeper, more serious idea: learning how to think really means learning how to exercise some control over how and what you think. It means being conscious and aware enough to choose what you pay attention to and to choose how you construct meaning from experience. Because if you cannot exercise this kind of choice in adult life, you will be totally hosed. Think of the old cliché about "the mind being an excellent servant but a terrible master."

This, like many clichés, so lame and unexciting on the surface, actually expresses a great and terrible truth. It is not the least bit coincidental that adults who commit suicide with firearms almost always shoot themselves in: the head. They shoot the terrible master. And the truth is that most of these suicides are actually dead long before they pull the trigger.

And I submit that this is what the real, no bulls--t value of your liberal arts education is supposed to be about: how to keep from going through your comfortable, prosperous, respectable adult life dead, unconscious, a slave to your head and to your natural default setting of being uniquely, completely, imperially alone day in and day out. That may sound like hyperbole, or abstract nonsense. Let's get concrete. The plain fact is that you graduating seniors do not yet have any clue what "day in day out" really means. There happen to be whole, large parts of adult American life that nobody talks about in commencement speeches. One such part involves boredom, routine and petty frustration. The parents and older folks here will know all too well what I'm talking about. (Part 2 Tomorrow)

