It’s a long story.

We have continued our new tradition of having a faculty member speak at Holiday Breakfast, and this year we were honored to have veteran faculty member Randy Northrup share his wisdom and inspiration. He graciously allowed us to share excerpts of his remarks here—including a story he decided to omit in order to keep the program “not too long” for everyone!
Best wishes to all of you for love, joy, and peace. Speaking to you today is a special opportunity for me, a chance to celebrate with all of you at Holiday Breakfast. This wonderful tradition has been dear to my heart for many years. I am grateful to have the privilege of working at this wonderful school, an institution where, because of our independence, my judgment has been trusted for over thirty years to design and implement an educational program for my students.

And, today, I have been trusted to share some thoughts with you. I hope this trust was not misplaced.

I must begin by saying that I am a bit nervous. I am not used to speaking to a crowd of “big people.” Those who listen to me are generally shorter and younger. So, with your indulgence, I will feel more comfortable addressing the kids. But you should feel free to listen in.

Hi, Lower School Students! Kindergarteners, you did a great job! You really made so many of us happy with your song. Can you believe my own kids sang that same song at Holiday Breakfast, and they’re all grown up now? Our oldest, Kaitlin, arrived late last night from California and I know she remembers standing on the bench and the click, click, click. And our son Zachary is watching the live stream right now in Syracuse with his wife and our new little twin grandsons! When we were there the other day, I looked at his Christmas tree and saw a red and green and sparkly bow tied on a branch way up high. It was just like the ones you are wearing. He has kept it all these years.

You are all part of a long line of students who have gathered at Holiday Breakfast over the years to celebrate - to celebrate the things we have in common, and even to celebrate our differences, too. You are part of the history, the STORY of our school.

And speaking of stories, soon there will be another favorite part of the Holiday Breakfast program. The lifers will come up and share memories of their time here at AC. Just think, some years from now you may be up here. What stories do you think you will tell?

This is the time of year for stories. All across the Northern Hemisphere as the chill of winter sets in, as the sun seems to be dying, its weak rays do not warm us, and it is gone so soon in the afternoon. Darkness comes early, not like in the summer when we can play outside past bedtime. In this dark chill, for hundreds —even thousands—of years, families have pulled close together. It seems that many different people from many different lands with many different cultures and religions have used this time to gather and share stories with one another. These are the stories of their people, the stories of their families. There are stories that are remembered and passed on, and there are stories that are told just for fun.

**Stories are very important.**

One of the best parts of being a teacher is listening to your stories. You share with us the things that are important to you, and, as we set the stage to help you explore and discover and learn, we get to help you create your own unique story: the story of YOU. We get a chance to help you learn how to organize your ideas and to develop your skill at telling the world who you are.

Do your parents tell you stories? Maybe there are special storybooks that you like them to share. My fifth graders have just finished reading a book in which one of the characters liked to tell stories. Actually, she liked to tell scary stories, and all of the kids in the neighborhood loved to be scared. I asked my students if they knew anybody who was good at telling stories, and they all had at least one good answer. I will say that parents and grandparents were most often mentioned. I’ve been around long enough to know that kids love to hear stories about when their parents did naughty things when they were little. Right?

Young children like you seem to love to hear their parents’ stories, and parents love to hear their children’s stories. You see, when you were very little, your parents loved to hear everything you had to say. They thought you were geniuses and the funniest and most creative children who ever lived (either that or they were patient in listening as parents are supposed to be). When you were very young, your stories could go on and on and on, but they listened. They even listened to your jokes. (continues)
Yes, when you found out what a joke was, you created some real doozies. I hate to tell you, but your jokes were not that funny and usually didn’t make sense, but the grownups in your life listened and laughed. My grandson Max just arrived from California, and about a year ago when he was just four, he discovered knock-knock jokes. Don’t laugh; you did the same thing. “Knock knock,” “Who’s there?” “Chicken,” “Chicken who?” “Chicken in the road!” And he giggled hysterically. Do you think I liked to listen to his jokes? You bet I did.

When people really listen to you, and when they hear your story, it feels good. I think it would be a good thing for you to do the same for others, and not just now when you are young. When you are older, remember the good feeling you felt when your parents laughed at your jokes and listened to your stories, and make sure you do the same.

Even as our world moves faster, even as our world seems to grow smaller because we can communicate so quickly and easily, and maybe BECAUSE of these things, the ability to tell our stories and to listen effectively to the stories of others is very important.

Some of you know how much I love to tell stories, and this one also has another of my favorite topics: art. Most importantly, this story from Thailand is about an important theme today: Peace.

Once upon a time, a great king offered a prize to the artist who could paint the most perfect image of peace. Many artists sent their work to the grand palace. The king narrowed down the choices to his two favorites. The first was a perfect picture of a soft spring day beside a lake. The lake was calm and glassy. Soft white clouds floated on a gentle breeze, and warm sunlight cast faint shadows from the trees.

The second painting was quite different. Beautiful but rugged mountains stood close by, and dark clouds behind them hinted that a storm might be brewing. A mighty stream of water ran down the mountainside in angry rapids and powerful waterfalls. When the king looked very closely at this painting, however, he saw a small bush growing next to the waterfall. In the branches of the bush there was a bird’s nest, and on the nest was a mother bird gently watching over her sleeping babies. The king’s people were surprised when this was the painting he chose, but he explained his choice. “Peace does not really mean being in a place with no noise, trouble, or challenges. Peace means to be in the middle of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.”

While we live in the middle of this challenging world, peace can be at the center of our hearts. Even when we are challenged, maybe this peace can spread. We can’t contribute to peace on Earth if we don’t have peace inside us.

So, I guess stories can teach us. Stories can entertain us. Stories give us a chance to tell who we are. Friends, let’s continue to listen now to the stories told to us in music and by seniors who are lifers. Then go home and listen to stories carefully. And remember to tell your own story with power, truth, and imagination.

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Holiday Breakfast 2016

Holiday Breakfast continues to be a beloved tradition at Allendale Columbia School. On the final day of school in 2016, we gathered together to celebrate our diverse community, listen to stories, and reflect on the generational strength of the long-standing impact AC has on students and families.
STORIES ABOUT A STORYTELLER
ALUMS RECALL A UNIQUE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Jay Theuer ’97
Allowing students to create their own learning opportunities.

“Every year, Mr. Northrup made these incredible stars out of paper. I was fascinated how a two-dimensional piece of paper could be transformed into an incredible three dimensional object, and I couldn’t wait to be a fourth grader to make them in his class. Mr. Northrup’s creative approach to teaching and learning was a talent. He showed us how to use spatial reasoning and geometry through something that someone else might categorize as ‘arts and crafts.’ Through all of his projects, he used the process of self discovery and experiential learning to allow students to create their own learning opportunities.”

On the topic of the English language.

“I was a student in Mr. Northrup’s fourth grade classroom. One thing that I still remember to this day was Mr. Northrup’s insistence around using English language properly. When someone asked, “Can I go to the bathroom?” he would often say, “I don’t know, can you?” I have taken this with me to this day; I am always encouraging my employees to ask the question they mean to ask and to articulate their intention. He knew that during these formative years, as a young person, you just wanted and needed to be heard—and he listened.”

Molly (Naparsteck) Lackey ’03
For every single student, every single year.

“Mr. Northrup spent time creating a unique and very beautiful name tag for every single student in his class, and on the first day of school, I was excited to see my name tag taped to my desk! I’m not sure if this is something he does every year, but I remember it making me feel special that year. I was sad on the last day of school when we had to take them off and mine accidentally tore. I wanted to keep it!”

A teacher who can make learning fun.

“Over 20 years later, I still remember Mr. Northrup being the most connected with his students out of all my teachers. He had a way of commanding students’ attention while still being fun. I think I learned more in his classes because I was genuinely excited to be in his class every day. A teacher who can make learning fun is truly a gift to any student.”

Jennifer Westerfeld ’96
Fourth grade changed my life.

“Fourth grade completely, irrevocably, changed the course of my life, because it was in fourth grade that I learned about the power of storytelling and the way stories let us experience entirely new worlds. I may have learned to read in earlier grades, but it was Mr. Northrup who made me a reader.

“I have a lot of vivid memories from Mr. Northrup’s classroom: tactile memories, like the time we churned our own butter to learn about daily life in Colonial America; visual memories, like the Roman bust topped with a neon clown wig; taste memories, like the cookies in the shape of New York State that we decorated (and ate) in order to learn local geography. But what I remember most of all is the sound of Mr. Northrup’s voice as he read to us, every day of the school year.

“It’s been almost thirty years since I sat cross-legged on the floor in that fourth-grade classroom and listened to Mr. Northrup bring those books to life. I’m a historian now, and a writer, with students of my own. I often think about those fourth-grade lessons. And I think about Mr. Northrup, the man of a thousand voices, enormous heart, and boundless creativity, who can take a sheet of construction paper and turn it into a crown, a cookie and turn it into a map, a group of fidgety eight-year-olds and turn them into world explorers.”