



"I am not afraid of **STORMS**, for I am learning how to sail my ship!" – Louisa May Alcott

Good evening and welcome to a new school year! It is wonderful to see many familiar faces, along with those of our new families. For those of you I have not met, I am Mary Knott, and it is my privilege to be the director of our wonderful preschool at Redeemer. I am embarking on my 11<sup>th</sup> year here and 23<sup>rd</sup> as an educator. I love what I do and feel blessed to be a part of this vibrant community. As many of you know, it is also my great pleasure to be the mom of three sons, all of whom attended the Day School. Tonight I want to begin with a story.

Once upon a time, there were two little boys who were brothers. The older brother made the energizer bunny look like he was taking a nap. He never stopped moving and had an insatiable curiosity. As you can imagine his mother enjoyed him immensely but truth be told, he was sometimes just downright exhausting. The little brother, who was two years younger, was quite different. He was almost always content, slept when his mother needed him to, and as a toddler never left her side. He got along with everyone, ate his veggies and always seemed to take the safe route. As you can imagine, his easy-going and peaceful nature was a welcome change to his mother. Or so she thought!

Fast forward to the summer of 2018 when that little boy was 17. He was now a young man who towered over his mother, had a deep voice, and as hard as it was to believe, was in the midst of his college search. Walking across the campus of the University of Virginia on a beautiful summer evening, the young man and his mother came across a cicada. The young man stopped dead in his tracks, looked at his mother, and said, "Oh no – are those things coming back again? I used to be really afraid of them." Being afraid was an understatement. His mother reminisced back to the summer of 2004 when the boy was just 3.

2004 was the summer of the 17 year cicada, when Brood X cicadas tunneled *en masse* to the surface. Some of you may remember that summer. For three weeks, they covered everything! They would crunch underfoot, fly into hair, and the sound was so deafening, most folks were forced inside – except, of course, for people like the little boy's older brother who would scoop them up by the dozens and treat them like pets. As you can imagine, the little brother was the exact opposite. Whenever they would go outside, he would cling to his mother with a death grip and scream at the top of his lungs. For three weeks straight, his feet did not touch the ground. He hated those cicadas - the way they looked, smelled and sounded. He was terrified! But, unfortunately, his fears didn't end there.

He would shake on airplanes during take-off, grab his mom's legs in stores, ocean waves were like monsters and the first time his parents took him down a water slide, he screamed so loud they thought someone might call child protective services. Trick-or-



treating or dressing up for Halloween? Absolutely not! He even asked his mom to home school him in first grade because he was so terrified of the pool in his new school. Truth be told, that fear was likely exasperated by the fact that his older brother told him the teachers throw all of the kids in on the first day of school. And he never, ever, ever wanted to be left alone at a birthday party without his mother. Maybe this little boy wasn't so easy after all.

As his mom was recounting his fears from his early childhood, he looked at her and said, "Please tell me you left me at the parties."

And yes, as hard as it was for everyone, the little boy went to birthday parties on his own, his mom didn't home school him, and as soon as they splashed into the pool at the bottom of the water slide, they got right back in line to do it all over again. They didn't stop flying on airplanes or going to the beach. His mom even pretended that she liked cicadas.

With some patience and perseverance, and probably a little second guessing and a lot of guilt, they didn't avoid the things that made him afraid. In their imperfect parenting, they weren't always sure they were doing the right thing, but they hoped the little boy's confidence would grow and he would overcome his fears.

And he did.

At the age of 17, he didn't even remember that he had all those fears. He was not scarred from trying things or being put into situations that made him uncomfortable. Instead, he learned to be brave and developed the invaluable trait of resiliency. That little boy turned into one of the most determined people his mother knew. He became a confident young man who believed in himself, was independent, and not just comfortable with confronting challenge, but he sought it out.

We dropped that little boy off at UVA for his first year of college last week. When it was time to leave him, the only tears shed were mine.

Dr. Stephanie O'Leary, a clinical psychologist specializing in neuropsychology and the author of [Parenting in the Real World](#), writes that parents need to "Remember that one of the hardest but most important parts of parenting is to tolerate your child's temporary discomfort knowing that it's the only way to build the coping skills necessary to succeed in the real world." She is exactly right.

All of us in this room love preschoolers. They are a remarkable group of people. No other population feels quite as comfortable in their own skin or is so entirely authentic. They will sing at the top of their lungs – even if they are off-key and the words are all wrong, they will wear rain boots on the sunniest of days because you never know when you might run into a great puddle, and they wear their ever-changing emotions on their



sleeves because they want to be sure that all the world knows exactly how they are feeling. While they like to please, they are not trying to impress. They are really happy being themselves, and they are so precious that it can be downright painful to watch them struggle. But struggle they must.

Their preschool years are an incredibly important time in their development, and as their parents and teachers, we have been given great responsibility. In our ever-changing, unpredictable world, adversity is inevitable, and it is our obligation to empower our little ones. To do this, we need to let them, as Dr. O'Leary so wisely says, experience discomfort. We need our children to know that challenges can be hard, and they may not find success in everything. And that is ok. We need them to know that they are unique, but also quite ordinary. And that is ok. We need them to know that life can be both hard and sad. And that is ok. We need to let them solve problems independently, take healthy risks, and embrace the power of mistakes and failure.

If we can allow ourselves to do that, they will develop a positive outlook and sense of humor. They will become strong and confident, resourceful and independent. They will learn how to be flexible and adaptable, and most importantly, they will be able to connect with others. These children will understand that a life of perfection and ease is nothing more than a myth. And because of this, they will succeed.

As I was preparing my talk for tonight, the phrase from the Berenstain Bears, "Inside, Outside, Upside Down" kept coming to me. As parents, teachers and role models it is our job to ensure our students are strong in character on the inside, have positive influences on the outside – but of equal importance –that they know they will survive when life turns things upside down.

The number one reason why each and every one of us is here tonight is because of our students. A great deal of their growth in these early years is dependent on the parent school partnership, and we look forward to working with you to ensure a positive and productive beginning to their educational journey.

This summer I ran into a former Redeemer student. When the little boy's mother asked him if he remembered me. He looked at me and said, "Of course. But you used to be a lot taller." Perspective can be everything! It is important to remember that with this age group things can be lost in translation. When something might not sound just right, it probably isn't, and your children's teachers are always available to clarify the details. Please know that if you have questions or concerns, all of our doors are always open.

Teachers are amazing people, and we are lucky to have the best of the best at Redeemer.



**Church of the Redeemer**  
**PARISH DAY SCHOOL**

Collectively these women have 291 years of experience in the field of education with an average of 13 years in the classroom. Their skills, interests and passions are as diverse as they are. They play tennis and paddle; they needlepoint and sew. They are avid readers and runners. They can sail boats and have parachuted out of planes. They are musicians, artists, and synchronized swimmers. They can cook, decorate, write poetry, shop 'til they drop, repair things, drive tractors and practice yoga. They are mothers, friends, grandmothers, sisters, nieces and aunts, and of great importance, they are educators who bring a vast amount of talent to Redeemer.

As a faculty we put in countless hours and unlimited passion to ensure the success of our program. We work hard to build our student's confidence, resilience and independence. We try to make boo boos better and ensure your children feel safe. We will listen to them, laugh with them and help them learn from their mistakes. Please know that at the heart of everything we do, we always have the well-being and best interest of your children in mind, even if on occasion we have difficult news to share, because fortunately, no one is perfect. Thank you, to our Redeemer teachers, for all that you do!

We begin this year with freshly painted hallways and new carpeting, three new Interactive Whiteboards, and 125 students who represent 21 different zip codes. We also begin this year with a foundation and educational philosophy built 68 years ago that is rooted in the values of the Episcopal Church. We are excited about welcoming our new students and families and those who have been here before. Whether this is your first year - or your last or somewhere in between, embrace the experience, get to know those around you and enjoy this time with your children.

Thank you for coming tonight. We can all look forward to a wonderful year. Welcome to the 2019-2020 school year!

Mary Knott  
8/2019