

## Where our Hearts Learned to Settle

Sweat. Cardboard boxes. Trolleys and trucks—all stationed outside my bedroom window. I had just turned seven, and the world as I knew it already seemed to be slipping away. I watched as movers—broad-shouldered and brusque—indiscriminately grabbed my beloved teddy bears and Lego sets, shoving them into boxes marked for another day. I saw a once-cozy home dissolve into a hollow shell, room by room, box by box. And I looked back, uneasy, as I, too, stepped out of our home in Leawood, Kansas, heading off on a one-way flight to Massachusetts.

The idea of moving out didn't sit right in my seven-year-old heart. It felt disquieting, unnatural, and full of uncertainty that kindergarten had never prepared me for. Not even eye-watering pictures of Dunkin' Donuts could ease the quiet dread of leaving behind the only home I had known.

As our final days at RL drew near, I couldn't help but find those same feelings resurfacing. No, there were no teddy bears or Lego sets—but there certainly was that all-too-familiar feeling of departure. Many years later, I was moving out again. And with that realization came another, though all too often clichéd, revelation: that RL has truly become a home for all of us.

I recognize that likening RL to a home—a word brimming with connotations of comfort, rest, and relaxation—might not immediately resonate with my classmates. In fact, if you had posed the question to me just a few years ago, I might have instead characterized RL as an odyssey of sorts: a long, winding journey through tests and problem sets and practices and rehearsals, as we'd frequently count down to the weekend, summer vacation, or even graduation itself. But, with the benefit of hindsight and distance from those darker, most demanding days, I would wholeheartedly contend that it's precisely those very struggles, the values imparted along the way, and the community of people who have walked beside us that make RL a home, in its truest sense. It feels only fitting, then, to look back on what RL has meant as a home in our lives and how it will stay with us long after this day of departure.

I'd be remiss, considering the great language school that is Roxbury Latin, if I didn't begin with the word itself. "Home" comes most recently from the Old English *hām*, meaning a gathering place of souls. Even earlier, its Indo-European root, *teki*, meant "to settle" or "to dwell." So together, the etymology suggests that a home simply refers to a place where our hearts and souls settle.

If that's what home really means, what better illustration than a busy day at RL?

A 7:30 AM arrival in the Science Lecture Room for early-morning rounds of Certamen in Classics Club. Next, a school day filled with small victories (like Ms. Salas's munchkins after a tough Learning Experience), only to be balanced by unexpected setbacks (as Mr. Cervas pulled out his thin slips of paper for yet another pop reading quiz). And after making the trek up to Rappaport for practice, Coaches Dunn and Heaton draw up a brutal workout, leaving us exhausted and sore on the ride home. But it doesn't stop there. For even after coming home, it seemed that RL had not yet said its goodbyes, as we'd look down at a pile of unfinished Latin translations and look up at our English essay, still untitled and untouched.

Our shared experiences at RL, of course, extended far beyond the daily routine. On the athletic fields, we celebrated countless victories, whether as members of the winning effort or onlookers cheering from the stands. In our extracurricular pursuits, we achieved international acclaim in Debate, Robotics, and Model UN; delivered showstopping performances in the Smith Theater and in this very hall; and, most recently, served as leaders of these organizations, passing on what we have learned to the next generation of RL students. Through community service initiatives, we have extended our impact beyond the campus, helping dozens of senior citizens stay up-to-date with technology, cooking hundreds of meals at the Haley House Soup Kitchen, and packaging hundreds more at Community Servings. And just last year, we came together as a class to organize what I believe was one of the most memorable May Days in recent years—executed nearly flawlessly, from our comically crafted team introduction video to outstanding leadership by captains and volunteers alike.

But perhaps what unified us most were not these triumphs but the challenges we endured together. After the COVID pandemic cut short our sixie year and pushed much of our fifthie year behind Zoom windows and masks, we made the best of virtual IPS labs and exams on Google Forms. Just months later, 15 freshmen joined our already tight-knit class of 44. What could have disrupted our treasured class dynamic, however, only served to strengthen it, thanks to a collective effort. We organized scavenger hunts, mini-golf outings, and numerous other classwide events, transforming a fragmented group of boys into a cohesive band of brothers.

Still, RL's role as home lies not just in our memories but through the values we carry with us. By this point, we've all been indoctrinated in the fundamental standards: honesty is expected in all dealings, diligent use of one's talents, and so on. But while not explicitly inked in the handbook, I have come to cherish most of all RL's quiet culture of support, sacrifice, and kindness.

For example, I'll never forget the mix of comfort and mild terror in the faces of nearly half a dozen sixies at Beaverbrook this year as Strojny lifted them, one by one, through a tire hanging in the air to complete the infamous tire challenge. From that moment on, he was no longer a towering, intimidating figure in the hallways but an older boy whom they could trust to have their

backs—literally, in this case. On other occasions, it's as simple as enduring an awkward pause—and maybe even a few spots in the lunch line—to hold the refectory door open for a desperate freshman who's clearly forgotten his key card. Or perhaps the heroic deed of filling a tour guide vacancy, even when we had a bio quiz to cram for. It's these small moments that define the culture of our home and have, naturally, become a part of us.

But in the end, what gives these values life are the people who embody them, so it feels right to end here, with them.

To the Class of 2025: Reflecting back stirs many emotions, but none more strongly than deep admiration. The breadth and depth of talent packed into this class of 56 boys are nothing short of remarkable. Few can score a hat trick quite like Christo, sing a melody with Brendan's clarity and charisma, craft an intricate math proof as elegantly as Nathan, dominate in the post like Jack Hynes, or smash a forehand winner like Cole. I could go on and on, of course, and still only scratch the surface of this class's remarkable talent.

But while those achievements leave me in awe, it's our unique idiosyncrasies that I'll remember most fondly. Darian's patented Patagonia sweater and jeans combo. The indecipherable noises that echo from Taylor and Noah down the hallway. Caleb Meredith's uncanny ability to look completely serious while teetering on the edge of hysterical laughter at the same time. To say these quirks were merely minor footnotes would overlook their real importance, for they have defined the rhythm of our days and the closeness we built together.

To our teachers: the mentors who have taught, coached, advised, and believed in us, we offer our deepest gratitude. Your lessons and teachings have always extended far beyond the syllabus. M. Diop didn't just teach us how to form the subjunctive, but he sparked fierce philosophical debates that ended long after the bell rang. Mr. Randall seamlessly intertwined our Latin readings with literature, art, and life, rendering the ancient language timeless. Mr. Bettendorf taught us more than how to evaluate an integral; he conveyed the beauty and elegance of mathematics itself. You have truly kept this home running and full of life.

To our families: thank you for your support, your guidance, and your love. Thank you for all the miles you drove, the late nights you stayed up, and the tirades you endured as you quietly absorbed our stress without complaint. And, most of all, we thank you for making the decision those years ago to send us here, to Roxbury Latin.

So here we are, standing on the threshold, boxes packed, and the door to this home slowly closing behind us. Will we ever again be in a place where we know everyone's name, their quirks, and their stories? Probably not. And that's what made it so special. But as I came to

realize, years after what I thought was a final departure from Kansas, we never really walk away for good. The joy of brotherly friendship, the grit forged through our struggle, the curiosity to understand and examine our world, the everlasting commitment to service—they are the gifts of RL that have found a home in us just as much as we have found a home in RL. And though we may scatter to different cities and corners of the world, part of us will always remain here, in these red brick buildings, where our hearts first learned to settle.