

OLIVERIAN

A school as unique as its students.

News from Oliverian

Monkey Branch

By Will Laughlin, Head of School

Will shares a few words of wisdom for three of our most recent Oliverian graduates during their high school graduation:

Welcome Oliverian faculty and friends and family of Allie, Ro Pil Myung, and Josh. This small Oliverian gathering celebrates a very big event—the graduation of these three beloved students.

And that makes me think of monkeys.

I was once bitten by a monkey in a Philippine jungle, near the village of Laguna on the Island of Luzon. In Argentina, a monkey made a lewd gesture at me with his private parts. And in Havana, Cuba, a monkey stole a twenty-dollar bill from my wife's pocket, ran up a tree, and ate it while staring at us. He would chew on it a little, look over to make sure we were watching, and then chew some more.

Despite all these offenses, I love monkeys. In eastern tradition, monkeys sometimes get a bad rap. They call it monkey mind when your brain goes all over the place. But I actually think monkeys are amazingly present. They are so present, in fact, that they can sail high in the air from branch to branch in the jungle effortlessly, fearlessly, and joyfully.

One moment their hand grips a branch, secure and safe, and the next they are airborne. Are they falling or are they flying? Both, I think.

Until their hand lands on another branch and grasps it securely, but just long enough to let go again. They are masters of transition. Security-flight-security-flight. They know that they must let go to move forward. They know that they must fall to fly and fly to get where they're going. If you've ever watched a monkey do this, it's unclear whether it even knows what branch it will grab next. It seems to just hurl itself through the air on faith, letting go without a destination; letting go to find out where it's going, and somehow enjoying the falling and flying that happens in between.

I want to be like that. I want to be a monkey.

Many years ago, after I'd spent a bunch of time running other people's companies, I had a powerful urge to start my own. But I had a great job. So I stayed where I was, trading my dream for security, clinging to the familiar branch. Nothing changed for a while, except that I felt more and more miserable. Safe but stuck.

Finally, I thought of monkeys.

With monkeys on my mind, I picked a name, created a logo, filed a corporation, and quit my job with no idea what I would do next. I just let go of my branch and hurled myself into space. I had a company, but no business. Was I falling or flying? Both, it seemed, depending upon whether, in a given moment, I felt afraid or exhilarated.

For obvious reasons, I named my company Monkey Branch. Here is my logo:



Becoming a monkey has been a very good thing for me. It's forced me be present enough to enjoy every branch and every flight and, yes, even my painful falls. It's taught me to embrace transitions and know when to let go of the branch I'm holding so I can move forward even when I'm not sure where I'm going. You three are about to

become monkeys. In fact, you already are monkeys. You all had to let go of the familiar to come to Oliverian in the first place. And now you're doing it again, but from a much higher branch this time. Ro Pil is on his way to City University of New York. Allie is taking a gap semester before attending Mitchell College. Josh has been accepted to Marist College and is taking a gap semester to work, volunteer, and see what other college acceptances he receives.

In about fifteen minutes, you'll have officially let go of this branch called Oliverian and you'll be airborne.

Psychologists call this act of letting go "relinquishment." Primatologists call it "brachiating." Sociologists call it "launching." I call it scary. Especially at first. And when it involves letting go of a branch that's really comfortable in a tree full of other monkeys you love and who love you, it can also feel sad.

But it's the only way to master the art of flying while falling, which is the only way to get where you're going.

I know I speak for your entire Oli family when I say I'm very proud of each of you, my little monkeys. Like you, we're a little scared and a little sad. But mostly proud. All this talk of monkeys is just my way of saying that it's normal to feel a dizzying combination of sadness and fear and exhilaration during this time. To feel like you're flying one moment and falling the next. You'll probably also feel the pain of hitting the ground a time or two. I sure have. We all do. But that's okay. Practice is practice. You'll brush yourself off and climb back up the tree and grab a branch and do it all over again. And eventually, you'll learn how to fly more than you fall. That's when it starts to get fun.

Congratulations Ro-Pil, Allie, and Josh! You are officially high school graduates and Oliverian Alums.

We miss you already. But we can't wait to see you take flight and grab that next branch.

World Cultures Class Turns to South Africa for Inspiration

By Mike Leonard, Humanities Teacher

Like much of the rest of the country, the Oliverian community has been asking many questions in the wake of the inauguration. Some of these have been overtly political while others have been of a more existential variety, asking ourselves what it means to be citizens of the world and how to be better.



One course at Oliverian where these questions seem particularly relevant is our 9th/10th grade humanities class called World Cultures.

In this class, we regularly ask our students to inquire about the world, what brings us into conflict with each other, how we have made inroads to peace, and how we might expand them in the future. Recently, World Cultures has been studying the continent of Africa and directing these same questions to a region that has historically been riddled with strife.

South Africa, in particular, is a country with a tumultuous recent history and one to which we've turned our anthropological gaze. Despite South Africa's insidious racialized past, most notably enforced through a policy of forced segregation known as apartheid, there are icons of hope that we can turn to in our quest to be better citizens of the world. World Cultures has recently been studying South Africa's former president, Nelson Mandela, as a figure of hope and a man whose legacy continues to inspire peace throughout the world.

As we continue to ask ourselves big questions - about the future of our country and of the world at large, World Cultures looks to inspiring leaders like Nelson Mandela, studying their words and actions, in order to gain inspiration.

Notes from NATSAP

By Aaron Rumsey, Director of Student Support

Barclay and I recently travelled to Arizona to connect with other professionals and share with them how Oliverian helps young people find their place in the world. The NATSAP



Conference (Nation Association of Therapeutic Schools and Programs) also gave me the chance to have some pretty intriguing conversations with therapists and educational consultants.

Much of the magic that happens at Oliverian comes from our relational support and how we create a community where kids feel they are safe here and most importantly they feel loved by faculty. New students at Oliverian quickly find they have more autonomy here and therefore become more open to trusting the adults that work with them. Some therapists get uneasy as I speak about our students taking chances here and making mistakes in real time surrounded by faculty that love them. We coach our students through these obstacles in life and teach them how to recover from setbacks and to move forward. We view taking chances and making mistakes helps our students prepare for life after Oliverian.

Teacher John Doyle Nominated for Hollins University Teaching Award

We all know what a fantastic teacher John Doyle, aka 'FJ', is, but what an honor to be recognized by the 2017 Hollins University Teaching Award! Nominated by Kate McNamee '13, the award intends to honor educators who have devoted their lives to preparing students to excel in a higher education setting.



Kate thought of FJ for this award because, "he changed my view on everything and due to this I honestly believe he changed my future. Without him I don't think I would have chosen Hollins, or made it through my first semester, or if I would have even gone to college. His advising and teaching gave me the confidence to allow myself to figure out who I am and for that I am forever grateful." Congrats to FJ for his "evidence of extraordinary teaching skills that lives in Kate and all the fortunate students whose lives he has touched!"

There is no other school like Oliverian in the world.

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