

Loose in the Foothills

by Bob Ring

Graduation Perspectives

I was in Boston last month listening to a speech in historic Faneuil Hall, the site of speeches since 1742, when orators like Samuel Adams spoke to huge throngs to encourage independence from Britain. But the speaker who held me spellbound was my 12-year old granddaughter, Laila, recalling her years in elementary school.

Have you traveled to far places this year for important family events?

The occasion for me was the Advent School's Sixth Grade Graduation, held annually in Faneuil Hall. The stately old meeting hall – nicely preserved between Boston's modern Government Center and the waterfront, on the edge of a huge marketplace, was filled with Advent School's entire student body, the teachers and staff, and of course the proud relatives and friends of the graduates. This is a BIG deal in Boston!

Five years ago, Pat and I attended my grandson Clinton's sixth grade graduation there, so we were family-bound to honor Laila too.

The celebration started with the traditional procession of graduating students – from the school to Faneuil Hall, a distance of at least a mile and a half I'd say. (Note: Bostonians walk everywhere and think nothing of such distances.) The students carried a banner that identified the school.

On arrival, the procession, led by a bagpiper, trooped triumphantly into Faneuil Hall and the graduation program began. Each of the 16 graduating students had prepared and delivered his (or her) own speech, carefully written and practiced I understand.

Interspersed between these speeches were songs sung onstage by each of the younger grades in the school. Also highlighted in the program were musical performances by each of the graduates. Laila played piano for one of her friends who sang a song.

Near the end of the program, the graduates were called individually to the podium to receive a diploma, presented with a nice personalized verbal summary of their accomplishments.

After taking a bunch of photos outside Faneuil Hall, we had a celebratory family lunch at a nearby fish house. There we watched (pencil thin) Laila devour an entire lobster plus clams and oysters on the side.

Thinking back on those 16 speeches: Many of the kids talked about how scared and uncertain they were when they started school and how much they had matured over the

years. They all recounted their favorite school subjects, projects, and field trips. They thanked their teachers and parents and recognized their special study buddies.

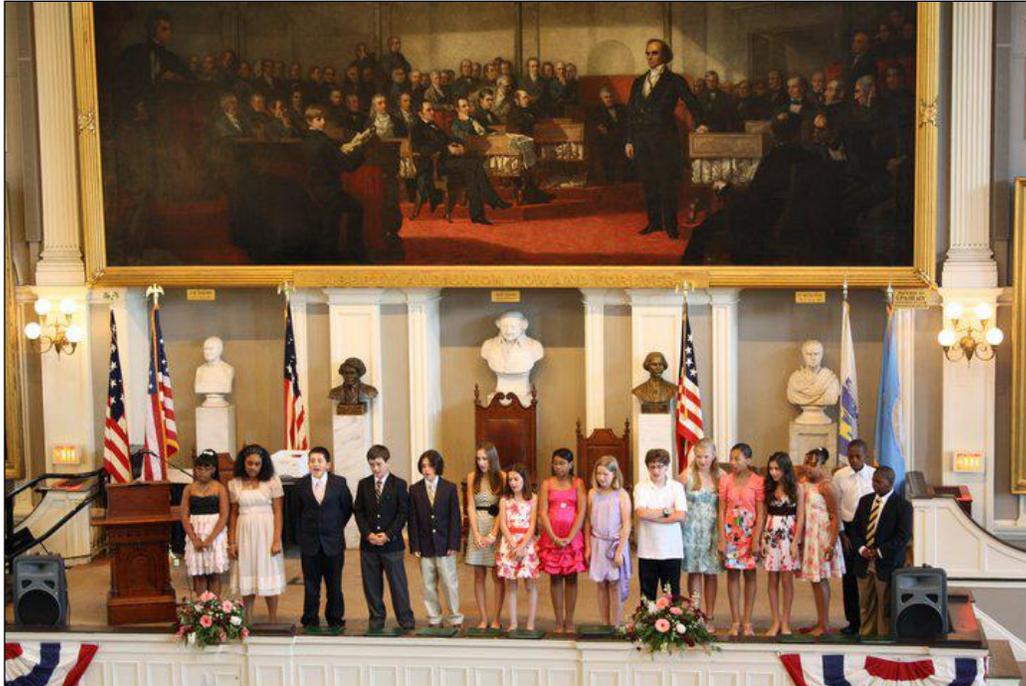
I was particularly struck by their references to making life-long friends – in elementary school. I guess it's all a matter of perspective, but how many of your elementary school classmates are you still in contact with and count as friends. Of course if you're as old as I am, that is harder and harder to do.

I'll close this by telling you the last two lines of Laila's speech, "Advent was the start of many adventures. That is why the word 'advent' is in adventures." You know, I think we may have a future author here!

Note: The complete story of retracing my great-grandfather Eugene Ring's 1850 trek across Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec is now available on my website to read and/or download.



Surrounded by historic artifacts, my granddaughter Laila gives her graduation speech at Boston's famous Faneuil Hall. (Courtesy of Bob Ring)



*The Advent graduating students gather on the stage in Faneuil Hall.
Laila is fourth from the right. (Courtesy of Cinta Burgos)*