



Shelford

GIRLS' GRAMMAR

PRESENTATION EVENING, 2007

This is an edited version of the Principal's Address at Presentation Evening, 2007:

Here's where I stand – applauding Dushy and the Class of 2007. At the pinnacle.

The *light inside all of you* is ablaze this evening.

Here's where I stand – many years along the continuum – proud and privileged to be part of the process and the partnerships of unlocking the power in you, of bringing to life *the light right here in your heart, your mind and your soul*.

*If you
listen with your heart you will understand.
We will understand.*

At the heart of our role as parents and teachers is the education of the heart. At the heart of our responsibilities as parents and teachers is the acceptance that our children are entrusted to us, not owned by us, that we are here to assist them to become *here's who I am*, to encourage them to move on with confidence, to set them on their way – although their way may not be ours - to assist them to *move out*.

Predictably, you as students, ask much of us: *Help me to move on, but please don't tell me how*. A paradox perhaps but a reminder to us as parents and teachers:

*Careful the things we say – children will listen
Careful the things we do – children will see and learn
Children may not obey - but children will listen*

As we assist you to move out and on we feel some tension: pride and relief, joy and sadness, enrichment and emptiness, excitement and deflation.

Being parents and teachers involves a succession of goodbyes. As you [students] energetically and confidently assert your autonomy, independence and identity and as you move out and on to take on the world, do not under-estimate the tests you presented us with along the way, or the part we dutifully and lovingly played in making you who you are, or how we feel as we say another goodbye.

Yes, we will always love you. Yes we will always be with you. Yes, you can count on us, we're with you, and *we'll make it through*. Yes, you are adults now, but you are also and always, our children. We are all enriched by knowing and sharing in the different gifts that you and others bring.

As I said to you at our final assembly, this is the end of the beginning of your formal education. This is also the start of a period in your life when you have more freedom and potential to influence and shape the world than you have had before, or are ever likely to have again. Don't hand this freedom over to fickle friends, don't throw it away or waste it on causes not worthy, honourable or just. You're *the movers and shakers*; you're *the names in tomorrow's papers*.

Now is your time. Wisdom will come later perhaps. Although we will not always understand you, and we will not always approve of some of your views and actions, we will never lose faith in *the light in your heart*.

We trust that you will have the courage and resilience to be strengthened and refined by the difficulties and tempests that life confronts you with from time to time. Tomorrow is always another new day, and as you greet it:

Use your eyes
Use your ears
Use your voice
But most of all use your heart

Our JDC students, innocently and wondrously cut through the fabricated complexities of our daily lives and took us to the central truth of things:

“Don't litter.”
“Don't be rude to other people.”
“Don't be too greedy.”
“Turn the tap off when you're done.”
“Don't poke your tongue out at people.”
“Be the nicest person you can possibly be.”

I have a voice to say what's right, what's wrong
I have a choice about the song I sing

They offer us simple solutions. They know they can contribute. You have a choice about the life you live.

As they grow older, students develop a different perspective:

Not a person seems to know
Not a person seems to care
There is no-one who believes a thing I say...

Not so, of course, but that is frequently their perception. The irresistible force of the peer group and the media dictate who they are, how they must look, what they must do and where they are to stand. A critical tension for many of our young people is that to be 'alone' equates with being lonely, which equates with being friendless, which equates with being a social failure. Our students at this age are so 'wired' that silence is intolerable, that stillness in a frenetic world is unimaginable, and the bliss of solitude is unknown.

To confront the “still point of a turning world”, to spend time in quiet contemplation, to spend time in revitalising reflection, to spend time regaining some balance and objectivity, to dream the impossible dream and to know, with absolute conviction, that *one small voice in the universe* can make a difference.

For some, such states of mind cease to be options.

For a few years this world of optimism and hope is foreign and closed to many of them. Our Middle Years students become pre-occupied with themselves –and understandably so. As a society, we pass this message to them constantly. We urge our young people to look

after their own interests with study and careers. This is as it should be. But, and a big but, is that the other half of our message is often lost in the static.

As George Carlin said:

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints. We spend more, but have less, we buy more, but enjoy less. We have bigger houses and smaller families, more conveniences, but less time. We have more degrees but less sense, more knowledge, but less judgment, more experts, yet more problems, more medicine, but less wellness. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We've been all the way to the moon and back, but we have trouble crossing the street to meet a new neighbour. We conquered outer space but not our inner space. We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul. We've conquered the atom, but not our prejudice. We plan more, but accomplish less. We've learned to rush, but not to wait.

We send messages endlessly by the sub-cultural language of SMS, but we can't, don't, indeed avoid, talking face to face, sharing our ideas, thinking, reflecting.

The Junior students remind us:

*I'm fairly certain
At one time or another
Great thinkers feel this way*

Alienated, dislocated, *alone in the universe.*

Alexander the Great is reputed to have asked the philosopher Diogenes if there was anything he could do for him. Diogenes' reply was: "Yes, stand a little less between me and the sun."

There is a sun shining in each of you. How thankful we are that you allow *the light in you to brighten* and shine on our lives.

Shelford students want the educational equivalent of the sun's warmth: we have seen tonight, as we see every day at School, a willingness on their part 'to put themselves out there', to put themselves under the spotlight and into the sun, to contribute to the team even if the activity is confronting or foreign to their nature.

Shelford students are not content with their material world. Yes, they want good academic results, yes they are encouraged constantly to aim *far beyond the sky*. And yes, also they contribute richly, generously and consistently to the whole life of the School and the broader community.

Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.

Once again, tonight you have taken our breath away.

Words in italics are quoted from:

Earth Matters: arr G. Mason

Alone in the Universe: S. Flaherty, arr G. Mason

The Light Inside of You: Alexandra Olijnyk

Our Time/Children will Listen: S. Sondheim, arr G. Mason

Always There: G. Loveland, arr G. Mason

Here's Where I Stand: M. Gore, arr G. Mason

George Carlin