



ST JOHN'S

SCHOOL
LEATHERHEAD

SPEECH DAY 2009

Chairman, Distinguished Guest, Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to Prize Giving, a time when we recognise the many achievements of the boys and girls at St John's.

In one of the opening chapters of Khaled Hosseini's book "A Thousand Splendid Suns" he describes the central character, a little girl, Mariam, who "longed to place a ruler on a page and draw important looking lines." In the Korogocho district of Nairobi, Grandmother Beatrice's only wish, if she had money, would be to buy a paraffin lamp so the children could read at night, and in the southern part of Sri Lanka in a place called Weligama a small girl, Nimesha, sets out to walk to school at five o'clock in the morning. Why you ask, do I share these images with you? Because today, it gives me great pleasure to welcome Tony Matharu our Guest of Honour, who as Chairman of Indian Ocean Disaster Relief has provided the hope of education to young people where there was none. Some may also recognise him as the deliverer of lethal off spin when he captains the MCC side on their annual visit to St John's. He is a man who moves amongst the people, but with an influence that extends across continents and as Ghandi once wrote: "You must be the change you wish to see in the world", that indeed he is and I would maintain, so too are the boys and girls I stand before.

Before reflecting upon the year gone by, I wish to express our gratitude to a number of this community:

I am especially pleased to thank publicly the Chairman and the Governing Council for their leadership and whose deep affection for our School is so evident in their selfless work on behalf of staff, pupils and parents. Especially for their foresight to recognise that the future of a School requires a vision for fifteen or twenty years ahead, not just a series of short term quick fixes. Also to the Governor who abandoned his wife in a boarding house during the heavy snow of February, they go to any lengths to enjoy life at St John's.

My special thanks to our dedicated teaching staff. A year on and the Common Room football team are still bottom of the league, their athletics relay squad failed to score in the inter House competition and their mastery of electronic communication is indifferent; recently I received a text message from one of my colleagues, he thought, destined to his beloved partner, it read: "I love you, let's do something special tonight." I replied: "I love you too, any special requests by appointment with my secretary....". But you know, they inspire in so many ways and when the world appears not to care, they do, they care about each one of you and moreover, they still care about you, long after you have gone. They are without equal.

We say some farewells at the end of this term.

Clare Buckingham, our Marketing Director leaves to pursue her passion as an upholsterer. They say the only progress we ever make as individuals is when we strike out on our own. Clare, the architect of Quad-Cast and a reinvigorated Johnian magazine, has brought colour,

imagination and laughter to a dark corridor of the School. She will be much missed, as we wish her every success in following a path less trod.

Sonia Gonzalez and Marie Alem, our language assistants, custodians of our European identity have lightened each day, in particular Marie; there has been no trip or event too far. We wish them success as they journey home.

Colin Evans returned to Australia yesterday, where Vicki his wife takes up a senior post in her old school. Our very own Australian cultural attaché, sometime mathematician, he was king of a new activity, Aussie action, also the first person in the history of the School to correct the Chaplain on a point of detail mid-sermon and, charismatic coach of the girls hockey team. An original, yet complete Schoolmaster, he had it all, but also a love of heavy metal rock music: stardom beckoned with a performance of something called the "Rocking Racoons" in a Dublin pub, Colin Evans lead vocals, it is now consigned to Irish folklore. Much missed already, we wish him every success, back, down under.

James Lockwood is appointed as Deputy Headmaster of the Royal Hospital School, Ipswich. Is Suffolk ready for Yorkshire's finest, a passion for James Bond and Frank Sinatra? Yet, his arena, match pitch and the cricket square, like a scene from Gladiator, the mist clears to reveal a place of great deeds. Back at HQ or East House, the speed of large offensive arm movements and a quickening of pace across the quad indicate the level of crisis. Yet behind the formidable presence, someone who cares deeply about the boys and girls and of course most precious, the two women in his life, Sarah and Olivia; woe betide the first boy who turns up to take his daughter out on a date. There are many of us who will never achieve in a lifetime of teaching what he has in 10 years. I am only left to say thank you, we will miss them, but we wish them every success as they travel to the land of the Eastern wind.

Thank you to the Bursar and the Support staff for sustaining us. Down in the depths the School laundry churns, another consignment of boys undergarments, industrial fumes belch out across the quad, a boy wrote in the Ofsted questionnaire on boarding, "my mum could learn a thing or two from the school laundry". Green algae in the swimming pool, the decontamination squad are there in no time; there is a wolf on the quad, armed response unit, Russ, the caretaker is deployed, to find only a fox and all he requires is a trowel; there are no match teas ordered, there is major sandwich action in the kitchens whilst the ground staff attend to the erroneous request for flag poles instead of football goals; an outbreak of disease and there is an eruption of swabs and runny noses in the medical centre, it is all in a days work, nothing is too much, welcome to the engine room.

To you, our parents, when in these days, there is a national obsession with a need to quantify and measure everything, another classification of us parents emerges. The Agent: 'represents his or her child at events'; The Banker: 'resigned to never seeing loans repaid'; The White Knight: 'appears at little to no notice to resolve awkward situations'; The Bodyguard: 'protects their child from a range of embarrassing social situations, doubling up as a chauffeur and personal assistant'; and the Black Hawk: 'willingness to go to any lengths - legal or illegal - to give their child a potential advantage over any competition'. But not here at St John's, thank you for your support and understanding and for just being there, remember those days, the way your child leans against you when they are tired and knows instinctively that you will be there to hold them, a little older, a little bigger, but nothing changes.

Today, we celebrate the achievements of the boys and girls, we look to the future, but what about those times when we got it wrong, times of disaster and broken dreams, times of tears and failure, but often it is in those times that our most noble and enduring qualities are born, our true character fashioned and defined.

As we look back over another year, some say, isn't it the same? I say, no, same place, but each person different, each boy and girl is "the change they wish to see in the world".

Warren Buffet, whose investment prowess is legendary, advises those with a high IQ of 150, to sell off 20 points, you need to be smart, but not a genius. We are all smart at St John's, but in

the last act of each term, we reward those whose learning has the hallmark of sheer perseverance and determination, name upon name, nervously struggle to their feet to take a bow in front of the School or, that knock on my door and the faltering words, "I have ten credits" or "I have a distinction". They open their books, words, diagrams cover the pages and before me the beginning of a life, a touch of genius perhaps, I wonder where this will lead, where will the journey end, is this the change they wish to see in the world.

Down in the learning factory, the wheels are in motion; Mr Rogers is the high-energy particle accelerator, the Large Hadron Collider or just "Big H" if you like. From Physics to Design Technology, Christian Dennis constructed the teenage dream, the lounge with fitted X box electronic suite, ergonomically designed to avoid bedsores and prepare the 400m County Sprint Champion without a drop of sweat. From all around this School, what was the change they wished to be, I can see it now: Johnny Nelson, a knighthood for services to medicine, Jonathan Hunt, a Nobel Prize for science, Sir Matthew Hilborn, a fellow of All Souls presented his paper on ethics, Dame Katherine English spoke at the United Nations about Global Warming, George Lenon joined the cabinet as Minister of State for Home Affairs, Thomas Payne recovered from his schoolboy performance as a very vulgar priest playing Chaucer to become Poet Laureate.

Beyond the classroom, there were biblical floods that awaited the Fourth Form in Hindleap Warren. It snowed and snowed some more, our own Shackleton, Sam Large, cycled the miles from Dorking into School, it was closed, so he cycled home again.

Recall again that scene from "Gladiator" we review the sporting arena, James Lockwood, standing there in armour, well, matching St John's tie and jacket combination, the mercurial running of George Gazzard, the legends, Johnson, O'Connell and now Gyngell and Freddie Woods challenged by Brian Habana the Springbok wing, beat him twice over twenty metres, you can see the headline tomorrow "McGeechan reflects on failure to include Woods for Lions opener." Ted Caplan parted another defence like Moses opening up the Red Sea, not just once but again and again, his father shrugged and said, "well you know where he gets that from...."Sir Alex Ferguson, confronted a silent dressing room after that final defeat against Barcelona and said, "I should have picked Savitt"....the first St John's boy to be capped for the England football team. Were you there when Hugh Shields, got the tap on the shoulder from hockey Olympian Brett Garrard - "on you go boy" and then put his stick on the winner against Caterham, he turned, that smile, which said this is "St John's". Our Surrey cricketers, Dyson and Howe join Pickering with contracts from the IPL, but the exclusive club breached, a Surrey cricketing girl, Amy Page. The coach asked for fire and desire, they delivered, no, not the cyclists from Beijing, but the St John's athletics team, Tom Parry, Welsh National Champion over the hurdles, they sang Cwm Rhondda and we didn't understand a word, days of old talked of Ovett and Coe now Brooks and Gilroy, our middle distance boys and Paula Radcliffe glanced behind to see English Schools Cross Country girl, Ella Benedict closing her down; then hockey or netball, it mattered not, that routine Charlotte Garbett to Emily Garbett back to Charlotte Garbett and any number to queue up to put it in the net. The boy from Atlantis, Ed Ventham swam, Andrew Grey swam after him, it was a year when the record books were torn up and the young pretenders arrived, they were the change you wish to see in the world.

Carreras, Domingo and Pavarotti were the three tenors until the arrival of Mutono, Kent and Baxter, the Mass of St Cecilia, but two virtuosos also, Rhyanne and Ella. The St John's Clerkes took the stage at Reigate by storm, every mother looked and thought "if only my daughter would bring a St John's boy home," then silence and emotion that only perfect music can evoke. Jonathan Chan, the last post, for the last time, for some the memory of the battlefield or an empty chamber in Auschwitz, now just ghosts to haunt our conscience.

Barney Banks, best actor at the Leatherhead Drama Festival for his portrayal of Zanni, his line, "the customer is always right" and then something about the custard which was not particularly polite and as he accepted the award, Sir Michael Caine exclaimed "Crikey, you're tall!" We were led from the rooftops with Bert and the Chimney Sweeps to the majesty of the Lion King, the dirty little habits of Pumba and Timon, Chicago, brilliance from the girls, boys speechless; Ellie Wilson switched on the stage lights to illuminate the dark recesses of

Durrenmatt's "the Visit" Ashley Crane as Claire Zachanassian compelled every married man to sleep with one eye open. A love struck Romeo and beautiful Juliet's, maybe not but the Fourth Form did Shakespeare.

At our Service of Evening Prayer, like the Reverend Eli Jenkins from the tale of Under Milkwood, the Chaplain spoke – "the day is almost over, and the evening has come; let us pray with one heart and one mind," and I knew, that quietly, he asked the good Lord again that he might move the crane so that his Sky television reception would not be interrupted anymore. Meanwhile, his congregation turned to our new window, a symbol of contemplation and reflection, the eagle, our eagle, the St John's eagle, which soars and urges us to "Seek those things which are above." The dedication of the window, the last notes of Zadoc the Priest lost on the wind and a parent enquired of one of our boys, now tell me is it St John, the Evangelist or St John, the Baptist, "No, he replied, St John, Leatherhead," perhaps this really was where that epic story began and if not for a great biblical character, then for many of you who took comfort in those moments in chapel before you stepped into the unknown to be that change...

Stephen Venables mountaineer took us with him to the Himalayas "the prolonged meditation, the peaceful communion with a silent landscape" or was that just a painting in our Art exhibition. Rob Gauntlett, the youngest man to summit Everest, who spoke as one of you, to die just a few weeks later doing what he loved, some of you have taken up his mantra "Impossible is Nothing." You took that with you to the Peak District and tried to flambé Mr Gregory with a Trangia. Sultan Bin Wiseman took his nomadic camel train and a few geographers to the High Atlas of Morocco, they offered 20 goats for Mr Kidd, tempting, but he is still with us. The sailors went in search of the North West passage, we journeyed north to the Highlands of Scotland, wild winds battered the tents, we ate soya mince and there was wild wind in the tents. Veterinary action in the Shamwari Game Reserve, Peter Goodyer, now darts anyone late for registration; we shot Death Valley the movie, Richard Allan, now a box office hit in the "Geomorphologist Strikes Back".

Peter Woolf, serial criminal and convict, you heard him, "There are no such things as bad people just bad decisions". Garth Hewitt, old boy, who inspired a hundred thousand to march in support of the Palestinians, but spoke to us of his Physics teacher who inspired him to read Trevor Huddleston's book, "Nought for your Comfort" and the quiet revolutionary was born, he is the change he wishes to see in the world.

Sir Alan Sugar said to Sophie Grant devise a lost property system, she did, "You are hired", boys and girls reunited with files and shoes, except the one boy who reunited with his French book complained that he had deliberately lost it....and this was the second time that week it had found him.

House Charity evenings for Country Holidays for Inner City Kids, the auction, a hand rises, sold to the gentleman on Table 2....but, later this month a small boy steps off a bus in Devon, behind him a life of abuse, before him trees which sway in the breeze and for the first time in his life, the sea and someone who cares, that's what you did, that's what so many of you did, thank you. Lauren Garrett asked for nothing, but the happiness of an autistic child and Josh "Ran for Reuben" his autistic brother and we ran every step of the way with him, Charlie Gale was Pitstop, the place of the homeless, he cared and hundreds more of you followed.

In closing, as we scatter the remnants of another year, our thoughts are with the School Prefects, the Upper Sixth and all those who leave St John's today, what lies before you is not above your strength, the challenges set, not beyond you, believe in yourself, persevere and fulfilment in this life will be yours, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world."

Mr NJR Haddock
Headmaster