

## **PRIZE GIVING SPEECH - Thank you Mr Barker.**

**Good morning ladies and gentleman, boys.** Today we honour those boys that in 2009, achieved academic excellence. Your diligence, perseverance and hard work have paid off and this function is a celebration of your achievements. You have demonstrated that you have the qualities required to achieve. There are however many boys that have displayed similar qualities that did not receive prizes today.

A few years ago the then Headmaster of Kingswood College announced that the finest result in matric that year was an F-symbol school leaving certificate, by a non-academic girl. The worst in his opinion was an A-aggregate for a very bright boy who obtained 2 A-s and 4 B'. The girl's result was a triumph of effort on her part and skill on the part of her teachers. The A-aggregate by the boy was disappointing considering he should have achieved 5 A's and a B. I wish to pay tribute to all boys that achieved their personal goals in 2009.

It is a **privilege** to have the opportunity to address you today; I asked my 12 year old daughter about the reason why she thought the Headmaster had bestowed this honour on me and she came up with two possibilities. She said that...

1. Either, everyone else that he had asked, said no thank you - or
2. Perhaps everyone expects you to make a fool of yourself; so don't disappoint them.

Well, the last thing that I want to do is to disappoint you. On the topic of what to talk about she was quite firm – don't lecture them – don't feed them spinach!

You see my life is ruled by **three females**, there's Mom, Megs and Mary Poppins the Yorkshire terrier. And their moods are never in

sync. According to **Einstein** – ‘Some men spend a lifetime in an attempt to understand the complexities of women - others preoccupy themselves with the simpler tasks such as understanding the **theory of relativity**.’

**So today**, I have decided to rather speak about **3 men**, that I admire, each one for different reasons. Each one chose to live his life in a unique way demonstrated special traits that are worthy of closer scrutiny. These traits that I admire most are: **Integrity, Passion, Humour and a responsibility to others and the earth.**

I read two fascinating **books** over the holidays. The first was written by Prof. Randolph Pauch entitled – ‘The Last Lecture’. Many of you probably saw “The last lecture “on You Tube or Oprah. It has become a common exercise on many college campuses for Professors to give talks entitled “The last lecture”. Professors are asked to consider their own demise and talk about what matters most to them. Basically, reflecting on their personal and professional journeys answering the question - What wisdom would I impart if I had limited time? Prof. Pauch agreed to give the lecture even though had recently been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and was terminally ill. After the initial diagnosis a further 10 tumours had subsequently been found on his liver and he had been given 3 months to live. He stated that with the last lecture he was trying to put himself in a bottle that would one day wash up on a beach for his 3 young children. He spoke about the joys of life and talked about integrity and gratitude. He provides a guideline of how he felt live should be lived. His attitude was to embrace every moment of his life stating that tomorrow may not be better than today.

How often do young people long to be grown up or to leave school. Remember, we have a finite amount of time, whether it is long or short is irrelevant. Life is there to be lived.

He gave new meaning to the idea of packing a whole lot of life into a short space of time. The person who has lived the most is not the one with the most number of years but the one with the richest experiences. Prof. Pauch died shortly after delivering the last lecture at the age of 47.

Prof. Pauch stated that one of the most important characteristics that one should strive for is that of integrity.

Integrity stands for **soundness of principle. Character. Uprightness. Honesty.** Integrity is also an **ideal**, a goal to strive for. Know that to "walk in integrity" requires constant **discipline and daily usage.** The word integrity is a **martial word** that comes from the ancient Roman army.

During the time of the twelve Caesars, the Roman army would conduct morning **inspections.** As the inspecting Centurion would come in front of each Legionnaire, the soldier would strike with his right fist the armour breastplate that covered his heart. The armour had to be strongest there in order to **protect the heart** from the sword thrusts and from arrow strikes. As the soldier **struck his armour,** he would shout "**INTEGRITAS**", which in Latin means material wholeness, completeness and entirety. The inspecting Centurion would **listen** closely for this affirmation and also for the ring that well-kept armour would give off. **Satisfied** that the armour was sound and that the soldier beneath it was protected, he would move on to the next man. "**INTEGRITAS**" did not only indicate that the **armour was sound,** but also indicated that the soldier wearing the armour was **sound of character.**

He was **complete** in his integrity. His **heart** was in the **right place.** His **standards and morals** were high.

Integrity allows you to **deal ethically with the challenges** of each day and to make **conscious decisions** about how you will approach every decision you have to make. It is **through** this **decision-making** process that we show those around us the **quality of our character**. The majority of the daily decisions we have to make may test your judgement not your integrity.

The **true test of character** comes when the stakes are high, when you know the decision you are about to make **may not be popular** ... but it must be made. That's when your true **character** is **exposed**.

All around our **society** you see **immoral behaviour** ... lying, cheating, stealing, drug and alcohol abuse, prejudice, and a lack of respect for human dignity and the law and the earth. We all, at some stage, will be **confronted** with situations where we will have **to deal** straight-up with issues such as these.

The **challenge** is – **will you DO** what you know is **right**? It takes **moral courage** to hold your ideals above yourself. It is the **DEFINING aspect** ... When the **test of your character** and moral courage **comes**; there will be a moment of **inner silence** in which you must **decide** what to do.

Your **character will be defined by your decision** ... and it is yours and yours alone to make. No one can take your integrity from you. You and only you can give it away.

May you wear your armour of integrity with pride, taking full measure of its weight and find comfort in its protection.

On a practical level Prof. Pauch indicated that he following worked for him. He said:

1. Dream big – putting a man on the moon may have cost billions that could have been spent on poverty relief, but it inspired us to achieve the maximum of human potential; which is how our greatest problems will eventually be solved.
2. Don't complain – work harder. Complaining does not work as a strategy; instead invest the energy into solving the problem rather than complaining about it.
3. Don't be obsessed over what people think of you – we spend too much time worrying about what others think of us. Look for the best in everyone for a man never discloses his own character so clearly as when he describes another's.
4. Earnest is better than hip. Don't be too concerned about what is fashionable or hip, and this brings me to the second person I have great admiration for; Prof Tinkie Heyns.

I admire Prof Heyns for his humour and unfailing and unselfish commitment to others. He felt that nothing was more important than gaining the love and respect of young people. Prof. Heyns was not fazed by trends or fashion and claimed that if you keep your clothes for long enough; it will eventually come back into fashion. He gave new meaning to the idea of having a low carbon footprint in Prof's case perhaps a 'tekkie footprint'.

Prof Heyns always saw the lighter side of life and was always ready with a joke. When I started teaching at Rondebosch over 20 years ago; Prof Heyns clearly saw me as a soft target. At lunch after my first morning of teaching - Professor Heyns, Dean of Education at UCT, took me aside for a serious talk.

Remember I had precisely 4 lessons under the belt and was being addressed by a Professor universally acknowledged as an expert in his field - in a very serious tone he said to me - "Meneer, your ratings have dropped alarmingly this morning – you will have to be better

prepared or you are going to get fired”. Startled, I enquired what on earth he was talking about. He explained that at RBHS, the pupils have a scorecard for every teacher, every period of the day, and that my performance that morning had not up been up to scratch. I believed him for a long time. I wondered whether I would last more than a week.

By the Friday he had me hunting for a white suit, because that is what officials had to be wear on Sports-day, meneer. We loved him and will always remember him.

He taught me that coaching sport was not about winning or even that much about how to play the game. But what was important is what could be learnt from playing sport – teamwork, sportsmanship, the value of hard work and the ability to deal with adversity.

He felt that it is important for young people to be able to judge themselves. That we should know our flaws. A former colleague, now Headmaster of Crawford College use to award 5 bonus-marks on each of his test and exam papers to students that could correctly predict their test results. He felt that it was just as important to know what you don’t know.

So much is made of building self esteem. Self esteem is not something that you can be given; it is something that you have to build yourself. Prof Heyns felt that you should give a student or player something that they cannot do – then allow them to find a way to perform that task – that builds self-esteem.

The second book I read over the holidays was the autobiography of Ranulph Fiennes, an English adventurer. He chose a life conquering different childhood fears including a fear of heights. His achievements are too numerous to mention here but the four that stood out for me included: climbing Everest and the North face of

Mount Eiger, crossing the Antarctic – man hauling a sledge weighing over 216 kg over a distance of 2016 km; that’s from Cape Town to Pretoria and back. Antarctic is bigger than China and India put together – but with no shops.

Having survived a heart attack and bypass operation at the age of 60 he nursed himself back to health and against the advice of his doctors he completed a challenge running 7 marathons in 7 days on 7 different continents. He started in Antarctica, moved on to Santiago, Sydney, Singapore, London, Cairo and finished in New York. Five of the 7 marathons were completed in less than 5 hours.

**Goals** according to Fiennes should be **definite, concrete and short term**. To him, to have good health in old age did not provide much motivation.

He states that the difference is in ones perception. Most people look at big challenges in whatever field or walk of life and start from a position of **‘I can’t’** He made a simple word substitution and said **‘Why can’t I’**.

So - I can’t run 7 marathons in 7 days on 7 continents - changed into **‘Why can’t I run 7 marathons in 7 days on 7 continents’**.

Once he had asked himself the question he felt obliged to find the answer. Fiennes sees **setbacks** as **brick walls** deliberately placed there for a reason. It gives you the opportunity to show how badly you want something. I admire him for his passion and single-mindedness once he had set himself a goal.

Ranulph Fiennes is also passionate about **environmental issues**. Fiennes ends his autobiography writing: “Never litter nor harm life in any form.” We all have a role to play here. If schools obtain wonderful matriculation results but fail to teach children to respond

positively and sensitively to the environment – ecologically, artistically and economically – those results are worth very little.

The failures of Copenhagen largely as a result of World leaders that could not or would not reach agreement, will certainly delay the implementation of measures to slow down greenhouse emissions.

It best illustrates that **Human rights are meaningless** and cannot be sustained if the Earth has no rights. The right to life is an empty slogan, as food and water can only be provided by the earth. **A leaf** will only flourish if it is part of a healthy plant, growing in fertile, well watered soil. So individual well-being can only be sustained by building healthy communities. Perhaps it is time that we abandon our arrogant belief system - claiming that our civilisation is unsinkable. Our focus is far too often to fight for the best deck chair on the Titanic when we should be looking at saving the ship, not the deckchair.

In conclusion ... Do not regard your childhood dreams as outdated or uncool. Find inspiration from people that you admire and recognise the qualities that set them apart. Respect others and the earth. Find a passion and don't forget to have fun.

**ALTUIS ET LATIUS**

DR NEIL TEUBES