

Head girl speech

PHC – summer 2010

Good afternoon Carry, Mrs Duncan, Governors, staff, parents and girls.

Firstly, I would like to thank Carry for her thought provoking, lively and amusing speech. You challenged us all to reach for the stars whilst keeping our feet firmly on the ground. Your message is significant both for those of us who leave the school to embark on our next adventure, and for those still striving to attain goals at PHC. I'm sure we shall not easily forget Bill Cashmore's letter of introduction either. By the way, nice hair, Carry!

The first speech day I ever attended at PHC was in the summer of 2001. At just nine years old, I remember being inspired, captivated and mesmerised. Was it because of the scintillating speeches, the drama of the occasion and the sense of rich tradition? Or, was it because I was reading *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*? Certainly, had I known that I would be addressing all of you nine years later, I might have paid more attention.

In preparing for today I have enjoyed the support of numerous members of staff. Mr Miller charitably reminded me of previous head girls who shook, turned blotchy, and squeaked out their words. Dr T constructively chipped in, recommending a sense of originality. You know the sort of thing: firstly, recall my time as a tiny year seven in a brand new uniform; secondly, thank lots and lots of people; and top off the occasion by sobbing uncontrollably while I pay homage to my parents for sending me to PHC. The classic Oscar acceptance speech routine! Well, to be historically accurate, I arrived on induction day as a chubby year seven wearing a hideous tie

dye top and school tracksuit bottoms which failed to reach my ankles. I like to think that was in my Clark Kent / *Very Hungry Caterpillar* stage.

However, things did change for me over the years

One of my formative PHC experiences occurred early in year seven. I played the part of Kassim, Ali Baba's brother, in the school production of 'Arabian Nights'. After the performance, Mrs Wilson told me 'Rachel, you are definitely a PHC girl'. Hearing those words was like crossing a threshold.

So for this final speech I would like to reflect on what being a PHC girl means to me and then I would like to thank the people who have supported me on my journey.

I think what Mrs Wilson meant is that a PHC girl is brave, one who seizes opportunities without inhibition. Being such a small school gives us the advantage that these opportunities come thick and fast. The choice is ours to make the most of them.

Of course this doesn't guarantee success – but occasionally, it's about feeling the fear and doing it anyway. My sailing lessons in year nine lasted for six weeks. During that time I capsized twenty five times. I like to consider that a school record, although I have yet to receive my Windsor house colours to mark the achievement!

Four years later, my sporting prowess has, well shall we say, more matured than developed. In the sixth form, girls can take golf lessons. Miss Hammond's terse comment in my PE Record card sums up the progress made: "had difficulty hitting a stationary ball".

Another challenge I am glad I took up – not least today - is representing PHC at public speaking. In year eight I joined a team at the last moment to fill in for another girl. The rotary club competition became an annual hurdle and an outlet for me to show people who I am. Uncomfortable at first, it was also a brilliant confidence builder. So girls, if Dr. Hooper taps you on the shoulder about public speaking, take a deep breath and go with it. Not least, there is the unexpected bonus of seeing another side of Dr H's character. He systematically rubbishes every other team's performance, scribbling abuse in the programme. It's a treat to behold.

The challenge to move beyond what is comfortable has been eloquently expressed in literature. In "A" level English, I had the pleasure of encountering T. S. Eliot's poetry. It touched me because Eliot addresses our fears about change and making decisions, at a time when I had to start anticipating leaving my safety net and venturing into university life. In *the love song of J Alfred Prufrock*, the protagonist declares, "Do I dare disturb the universe? In a minute there is time for decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse". The message I would like to give you today is this: "Dare to disturb the universe".

With the weight of history on my shoulders, it seems fitting now not to disappoint Dr. T. So I intend to nod in the general direction of tradition by thanking a few people before closing.

First, I would like to thank all of the members of staff. Though I only studied three subjects this year, I have felt supported by all of you: whether you were making fun of me for listening to Suzanne Vega, Dr T; discussing the relative merits of Paul Newman and Jude Law, Miss Warren; or being mocked about my height, Mrs Temperley. Thank you, all. Mrs Bot, thank you

for looking out for me and for being my agony aunt during the past year. Dr Buchanan, I have greatly appreciated your kindness to me. Your cards and words of support re-enthused me when I was flagging.

I should like to acknowledge all the help given to me by Mrs Wilson this year. Her encouragement was liberating. In particular, it enabled me to discover the type of head girl I wanted to be.

Mrs Duncan, thank you for your belief in me. You have challenged and supported me both as head girl and academically. But above all, I should like to put on public record my heartfelt thanks for the generous lies forwarded to UCAS on my behalf.

There are a number of girls who have made this year exceptionally rewarding for me. Year Twelve, I have had so much fun with all of you it should be a criminal offence. Your enthusiasm and kindness has been extraordinary. I should like to thank my year group both for their work as my prefect team, and for being crazy enough to make me laugh every day. I am really grateful for the friendships we have developed.

Now on to my partner in crime – Issie. When thinking of famous duos, the names that spring to mind are Batman and Robin, Holmes and Watson, Jeeves and Wooster, Cameron and Cleggwell maybe not. But you can see the pattern – the dashing leader amply blessed with style and intelligence, the sidekick merely a foil to highlight the leader's qualities. But as fate would have it my deputy head turns out to be the coolest, most stylish and easy going girl in the school. And to top it all off I can't even seethe quietly about it because she is also the kindest. Issie,

you have been a huge support for me this year. Your thoughtfulness and silliness have been equally treasured.

The final people that I need to thank are my family. Since, however, I am fearful of reaching the point of no return, a la Gwyneth Paltrow at the Oscars; I shall save these thanks for later.

In conclusion, it is fitting that I should sign off from PHC where I began on my very first speech day. If I could go back in time and speak to that chubby nine year old transported by JK Rowling to Hogwarts, what would I say? "Don't worry Rachel- Harry lives!" More seriously, I would say, "Put your fantasy novel down, Rachel, something really exciting is just beginning".

Thank you for listening.