



Closing Function Address
Thursday, 19 September 2013
Paul Cassar

A big thank you to every staff member responsible for this very stylish, traditional and comprehensive recognition of our girls achievements.

Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentleman.

Last month at my six monthly medical check-up, my physician, with great circumspection, suggested that every evening I have one glass of red wine. It's the best medical advice I've ever received. But, when I was having difficulty trying to decide on a topic for this evening, Mr van Rensburg urged me to try two glasses of red wine. That extra glass provides what the Greeks called 'entheos'. Christopher Hitchens described it as that "slight buzz of inspiration when writing". Please don't try it Matrics! And with that extra glass of Vergelegen Cabernet Sauvignon, couriered to me by one of our 1993 matrics – actually she'd seen our school on national TV news for the wrong reasons and thought its principal could do with a few of SA's best bottles – I decided that before the wine went to my head I should share with you a HEAD's VIEW of what that GREEN EUNICE BLAZER should mean to you.



When I explain the pride I feel in that green blazer, our school, its staff and girls, I'm not comparing or boasting; I'm referring rather to both the generations of green-clad matrics I've seen give value to that blazer and to the thousands of recognizable faces which my mind associates as belonging to a connected Eunice family and committed to values which are woven into the fabric of that blazer. I describe these school values in a document all our girls receive on starting high school. They refer to excellence, expectation, individuality, can-do femininity, opportunity, innovation, diversity, joy, questioning, service, style, camaraderie and respect. We don't have these values as a school because we write them in a document. It's the way we talk and promote; it's about what we do and why and how we do it and how often. It's who we are.

Usually when I take off my blazer and put on a gown I'm ready for bed. This colourful robe was given to Eunice by one of our parents, Mr Nick Venter, when his daughter, Sandra, matriculated in 2006. My daughter calls it my Superman costume. Mr Venter has run the University's graduation ceremonies for more than 30 years. Initially I was a little shy in attracting attention to myself, believe it or not, but in December, I changed my view when the University invited me to participate in this gown in the graduation on the day 11 Eunice girls qualified as medical doctors. Two of them had passed a supplementary exam that day and had to wait for the next ceremony. What an occasion for a school to take its place as a partner in taking pride in its product. I sat next to the guest speaker on stage that day. He impressed me enormously. He was 11 years old and he told the day-old doctors that his advice to them was to serve South African patients with all their hearts as he had done in inspiring Johannesburg schools to donate 10 tons of



mieliemeal to needy communities. I was so proud of those 11 girls on that particular day – as were all their teachers and their parents – but together we all shared a pride in that green blazer which had helped to turn potential into performance.

But it is not just high profile doctors who bring honour to the blazer; we strive to offer our girls the chance to prepare for lives of meaning, influence and significance in whichever way they lead or serve. It's often said that it's a man's world. I've had the opposite experience for the better part of 30 years. I've seen so many engineers, actuaries and accountants, corporate career women, therapists, teachers, doctors, hoteliers, architects and academics pass through this hall armed with the grounding, the confidence and the courage to go all the way. Last month at a gala dinner at Gallagher Estate, one of our past headgirls, Mrs Margaret Nienaber, was honoured as Africa's Most Influential Woman in the Financial Sector. At the same function Ashleigh Moolman Pasio, a cyclist, one of last year's 4 Eunice Olympians, was named The Most Influential Sports Woman in Africa. She is also a chemical engineer.

And if you think it's a man's world listen to this story. One night President Obama and his wife Michelle decided to do something out of routine and go for a casual dinner at a restaurant that wasn't too luxurious. When they were seated, the owner of the restaurant asked the President's secret service if he could please speak to the First Lady in private. They obliged and Michelle had a conversation with the owner. Following this conversation President Obama asked Michelle, " Why was he so interested in talking to you?" She mentioned that in her teenage years, he had been madly in love with her. President Obama then said, "So if



you had married him, you would now be the owner of this lovely restaurant", to which Michelle responded, "No, if I had married him, he would now be the President!"

I'm often asked why I became a teacher and a headmaster. It's quite a simple answer. I was drawn to teaching because I loved the vibe of a school. It's that liveliness, that vigour, that activity, that vibrancy and "busyness" which I often describe in my newsletters; and I became a principal because I wanted to encourage and to channel and to transform that vibe into what we call 'happy victory.' You can feel a Eunice vibe. How do you feel, Ladies? I'd like to thank each and every one of our girls for giving their school its personality.

Continuing my HEAD'S VIEW I share with you the strong well researched correlation between commitment to routine after-school activity and a balanced education conducive to helping teenagers succeed. Paul Tough, in his new book "How Children Succeed" explains how routine develops character and grit. Playing netball or hockey or chess for all 5 years of high school or committing to the choir or a musical instrument or a foreign language or a black belt is all about developing demanding standards, deadlines, learning from failing over and over again, self-discipline, consistency and healthy adrenalin, camaraderie and a sense of achievement. Monday night Maths does the trick, too.

I loved the connection between our Ann Frank matric leads, their professional standard on stage and their exam performance in March after two months of total commitment. Those diaries were full yet their academic performance soared. The 1963 Eunice Matrics were back at school this year for their 50th and they, too, did the Diary of Anne Frank



in their Matric year. We spend much of our time committing to a climate of rigour and challenge, adding value, giving character to every week, providing opportunity and making school a fun experience. Those of us who lead this school and those of you who take the lead will know that the green blazer blazes a trail which is, in effect, a school way of life.

The one unique aspect of being a girls' school is the natural connection to Bloemfontein's value-based and tradition-rich boys' schools and those distinctive blazers. That connection is through parents who have sons; and girls who have brothers and others. Both Grey and Saints had principals whose sisters were Eunice headmistresses: Miss Minnie Meiring, sister of Jock Meiring and Miss Gwen Storey, sister of Oubaas Storey. Eunice salutes Saints on its 150th celebrated in style last week especially with West Side Story which included 10 of our girls. Mr Chris Thomas is present this evening and is a tired man who deserves a holiday from tiresome old boys like Pat Uys and Colin Hickling. It's remarkable to see how much effort has gone into preserving the Saints' heritage with school gates which tell a story, statues, flags, a new school history and a heritage centre to come. It's what I mean by a sense of belonging, by a firm foundation grounded in values, in a standard which has been years in the making.

And there's a correlation, too, in South Africa between schools that are busy, dynamic places and schools that are academically successful. Fair Lady referred to Eunice this year as the Top FS School and the Best Value for Money School in South Africa. Grey College trumped us a little by being named the Best School in Africa by the African Economist, but, using African criteria they probably used the Big 5 wildlife index, or in Grey's case, maybe the Tight Five.



We made our mark on that index last year but not with the Big Five or the Tight Five but with 5 FM's Power of 5. Professor Jonathan Jansen was at Grey earlier this term and he told me that he told them that they were the best school in South Africa after Eunice. Clever man. Brave man. Mr Scheepers, gave his apologies earlier today. Welcome to Jock Meiring Street, Deon. From what we hear and see on this side of the green fence, there is no doubt that you are adding value to a great school.

In Bloemfontein when you think green you think Eunice. It is the only green thing about the Free State at the moment although today it looked rather Orange and droog. But, outside South Africa, this headmaster is always explaining what "Eunice" means and why it's pronounced "Eunice". It's "Eunike". It's from the Greek word 'nike' meaning 'victory'; 'eunike' meaning 'happy victory'. Nike was the goddess of victory. She's the inspiration behind Nike sportswear. She's also the silver lady or if you like the grey lady on the bonnet of the Rolls Royce. I like that. I especially like why Rolls Royce and Eunice have the same connection to the goddess of victory. They wanted a flying lady who would convey three things: firstly speed with silence - that's what I mean by Climate Change, ladies – secondly the harnessing of great energy and, thirdly, a beautiful living organism of superb grace. What a description. One that highlights what our blazer stands for – a girls' school – the harnessing of energy and a beautiful living organism of superb grace.

When I think of the harnessing of great energy I think of you Mrs Munro and of Eunice House - that beautiful living organism which is the soul of our school. On behalf of all our parents I would like to pay tribute to our housemothers, Mrs Daisy Munro, Mrs Jacqui Truter, Mrs Lanelle Kleinhans and



Mrs Rozanne Botha as well as Mr Carl Prichitt, Mr Louis Botha, Mr Johannes Ntlokoa and Miss Wilmarie Liebenberg who create an environment which we all appreciate.

Having travelled around schools – and top schools at that – in other parts of the world one is struck by the X-Factor which simply makes South Africa’s top schools stand out – that’s simple, sincere respect. It’s standing up or standing back, it’s greeting and welcoming and offering; it’s not because we are behind the times or authoritarian or militaristic. It’s because tradition-rich, value driven schools are governed and managed and staffed by personalities who see teaching as a way of life. As a head my view is that nothing sets girls apart more than that classic quality: refinement. It makes stars shine and its absence is cruelly and commonly clear. School can only reinforce, drive and entrench refinement but it’s a home-based quality. In this day of instant messaging, updates, uploads and tweets, refinement is what distinguishes girls from the crowd and what gives character, excellence and leadership that winning style and sparkle.

Natalie, as Eunice’s headgirl, you have that refinement in abundance. I sincerely apologise for cropping you out of that Miss SA and Me photograph but, you see, you’re in a different class. Thank you, Natalie, for putting Eunice first from day one. Few know what leadership at 18 of schools like Eunice and Saints and Grey takes. You’ve been one of the best. Congratulations on your RCL’s successful HANDS theme in 2013. A high five hand to you, Natalie.

My Microsoft involvement keeps me up to date with how around the world governments realize that schools hold the key to global competitiveness in the 21st century “knowledge



economy". In the West we seem to be better at creativity, critical and independent thinking but in the East there's greater rigour and more intensity in the strategically important subjects like Mathematics, and Physical Science. Leading Eunice is a dynamic responsibility in terms of maintaining standards, compliance with legislation, and the Constitution, partnering with parents and trying to integrate 21st century skills and technologies; and schools and principals are often at the centre of so many local and national news stories, initiatives, interventions and innovations, but like my colleague Richard Harmon, Head of Uppingham in the UK, we need to remember that education is essentially a practical, down to earth practice about relationships, about getting day to day realities right, about nurturing the optimum climate in our school – that's what transforms lives.

Our Climate Change initiative is not about forcing conformity and silence in the school; its about giving teaching and learning that edge, that urgency and purpose, that vibrancy which teachers and girls invest in creating quality. Excellence, is something one feels in a school.

As a school we had a host of highlights this year. We started by winning the province's Top Mathematics and Physical Science Trophy for the 10th time while our matric results confirmed us at the top of the pile with a 100 % pass and the highest University pass rate in the province. Anyone who saw Dr Niel van Niekerk's The Diary of Anne Frank would have been struck by the sheer quality of the opportunity; we won all 3 age groups at Inter High as well as the Schools' Trophy at Midmar; our netball girls won the St Andrew's Festival; we won the most medals and the most gold medals'



trophies at the Science Expo; we won the provincial water project and the Bloemfontein Senior Debating league.

But it is our choir that tops the charts in 2013. They have driven themselves to an acclaimed national standard with a busy schedule of deadlines, an impressive repertoire and a professional polish. Rumour has it that they won't rest until they are the best. Congratulations on that national "cum laude" Mrs Retha Visser, Mrs Elza Vosloo and Mrs Mag Marais.

The Jean Webber Home for the Physically Disabled received a Eunice Matric Makeover in 2013 valued at over R 200 000 which revamped all its rooms, most with new floors, built in cupboards, new beds; which gave its gardens an aesthetic boost and created a digital library. Thanks Mr and Mrs Marais, matrics, generous parents and volunteer teachers.

Our guest of honour this evening is Miss Norine van Arkel who came to Eunice as a pupil in Grade 9 in 1947, spent her whole teaching life at Eunice before she retired 20 years ago. She was the acting headmistress when I came to Eunice and showed loyalty, dedication and great patience in serving as my deputy for seven years. The scariest moment of my career was when the matrics locked Miss van Arkel and me in my office. She pioneered Eunice's love for Theatre, was a brilliant English teacher and until last month she co-ordinated the SACEE Debating League since its inception. Norine, I'm sure you loom large in the consciousness of many an old girl. You invested a lifetime in developing the character of that blazer.

If I had more time to capture 2013 I'd focus on images like the fun, spirit and imagination of the Murray/ Brebner Walk-in



with its larger than life visitors from the nearby zoo who turned out to be you know who; the Dad and Daughter dinner and the Gran, Mom and Me Tea were strong on substance, sincerity and style; that striking tree planting ceremony for Fahzlan Khan; the WhatsApp daily reporting from the Eurotour, the freshness and impact of the ATKV Tienertoneel and the way our Grade 8s have included Leandra with welcoming smiles and warm greetings which radiate stronger than any medication. Who deserves mention more than Leandra Grobler who insists on coming to school during the toughest time of her life. What an example she is of 'she conquers who conquers herself.' When we start our awards, this evening, Leandra, we have a special one for you.

I have depended wholeheartedly on my big five. Firstly our two deputies: Mr Leon van Rensburg who is in effect the schoolday's principal. His rigorous consistency, meticulous organization, demanding standards and his experience and versatility in academics, sport and school discipline make him a rare shark in our green sea. Mrs Mag Marais is a Superwoman who makes things happen fearlessly, creatively, stylishly and regularly. Her 12th Christmas Market had a turnover of nearly R 4 million and even if her uniform shop, leader projects and Eurotour dominate her contribution to our school she is a teacher to her fingertips. Mrs June Norval has a sense of Eunice responsibility which puts our girls first, which gives our terms their character, our Parent Dinners and Teas, our Valentine, Spring and Matric Dances and special assemblies their vibe, their detail and sincerity. Mrs Daisy Munro leads a Eunice House Staff with Mr Carl Pritchitt which provides standards of service, care and discipline which are so conducive to quality. The last of the Big Five is Mr Pat Uys who leads a skilled team and who



brings so much experience and positive decision-making to each of our business units. I rely heavily on his strategic insight and passion for our school. I would like to thank the other members of our management team: Mrs Karin Kok, Mrs Lanelle Kleinhans, Mr Ferdi van Wijk, Mrs Lizette Neethling and Dr Don Paine.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment, dedication and trust of all our staff this last year. Eunice is recognized as a top performing academic school because our teachers drive that standard. The world's foremost educationists, Hargreaves and Fullan, articulate what all thinking people know – “ that of all the factors inside the school that affect children's learning and achievement, the most important is the teacher – not standards, not assessment, resources or even the school's leadership, but the quality of the teacher”. This school is blessed with some of the country's best and I say so with proud recognition and sincere appreciation.

Thank you to our many support staff members, whether you clean or cook or count or care and counsel. You contribute enormously to the way we serve a grateful community. Mrs Dale thank you and your staff for turning those tiny tot blazers into teenagers who have much to contribute at high school.

I'd like to thank our Governing Body for their willingness, their professional input and their guidance. To you, Mr Dale Adam, I say thank you for your unfailing interest and enthusiasm, your trust and your tireless travelling. Thanks to all our parents for buying in to making Eunice a busy and demanding school. I would like to thank Mrs Ammi Steyn, our headgirl's mother, for the major impact she has had on giving 2013 added depth and character.



My wife teaches pre-primary so she knows her alphabet and she tells me I'm ABCDEFGHIJK. When I say what does that mean she says I'm A-Attractive, B-Brilliant, C- Charming, D-Dynamic, E-Enthusiastic, F-Fantastic, G-Gorgeous. Thanks my love. You too. And HIJK? Ha ha, I'm just kidding!

I often quote this key verse from the school song:

“The future will not fright her
She fears nor change nor strife
For the headmaster of Eunice
Has a lovely wife”

I must hurry. I have another Big Five pages to go. Ha ha, I'm just kidding!

Wear that green blazer with pride, Ladies.