



Closing Function Address – 14 October 2008 – Paul Cassar

Mr Klopper, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I always enjoy the challenge of capturing a school year and its issues but, after 22 years, it takes quite some doing to retain not only relevance and originality but the attention of the girls on my left whose minds are either miles away or just over the green fence. At least their ears are ipodless and their hands phoneless (or so I hope), so I have half a chance and half an hour to engage the millennium mind in a non-digital manner.

I search school speeches for something different but we principals tend to be rather boring people who list achievers and achievements to support claims about being the top and the best. I don't have to do that; you know we're the best!

I need a theme around which I can construct what I regard as a message which is critical to both our school and our community and, as so often happens in this school, I was inspired by one of our Grade 8 boarders whose project - a Dream Box filled with her key ambitions and a symbolic set of tools to achieve them – caught my interest. It was one of many outstanding projects, but it radiated such a strong combination of profound self respect and an earnest ,



appreciative and compassionate respect for family, friends, school and beyond. Tasha's project and Mrs Botha's illness and the world market crash and our country's political upheaval and the state of education brought home to me how precious and fragile life really is and how a simple, unresearched concept like respect can make a world of a difference to home, school, nation and beyond. Respect – that forgotten concept – is my theme this evening. It was Laurence Sterne who wrote: "Respect for ourselves guides our morals, Respect for others guides our manners."

I want to consider a simple question which underpins everything we do. What is a school? A building, a place, an employer, a set of rules.

No a school, especially a great school like Eunice with a long and strong tradition, with a current reputation for excellence, is a place where we share a common identity, a sense of belonging, a place where we experience living and working and doing our best together to follow our own personal dreams and for the common good of our community and country. We need to respect, that a school is a civilization, a place to learn how to live, and especially, how to live with others. There's no prospect of success in school, in life, in living without respect. There needs to be a respected place in this school for every girl, teacher, cleaner and, of course, principal. And how do we respect a principal? The story is told of a new boy at Prep school who asked his headmaster "Sir, are there any differences between a headmaster and God?" The headmaster replied, "Young man, there are several important differences, but for the next seven years they need not concern you."



The family is obviously the first building block of civilization and success, but modern families are under threat – and schools more and more play their part. If, as a parent, you were transferred today – to Johannesburg, to London or to Sydney – your choice of where in these cities you would live would be determined almost exclusively by where you could get a school like Eunice.

So now, I ask what's a school to you? If your answer is indifferent then, as an individual and as a community we are allowing world class standards to pass us by. I wonder whether our community realizes how critically urgent it is to fully back our school in all it undertakes. We invite you to engage us, critically and constructively and we're at your service but if you want world class standards then you need to back us 100% in the way you pay fees, in the way you support our standards, in the way you respect our rules and in the way you speak about Eunice in your home, and in your community. Respect for Eunice is non-negotiable. Without it we can't be world class. And you know there is no alternative. I am not being defeatist or desperate - just deadly serious. Eunice has shown its class in its record. It's time for its community to show theirs.

If you take an interest in your daughter's school, if you read my newsletters or should I say newsbooks, watch our shows, attend our functions or just listen to your daughter's friends, you'll know that we have something special here, something of value, something world class, something worth respecting and upholding.



I use those words 'world class' often. It's no cliché or marketing tool. It's what drives me; it's my self respect as a principal – to know that the best way to survive in a struggling national education context is to aspire to a global standard. It's about going the extra mile. I don't know another way. To me when 150 girls make up a Midmar team, when 200 girls do two hours of Maths every single Monday – when our whole matric class takes on 15 ambitious leader projects – when a school becomes a hotel in the holidays and funds a state of the art astro turf with its profits – when the Eunice Theatre stages four productions in a school year including two major musical ones – when a school wins 14 of the province's 16 trophies in 8 years – yes, we have a world class school that deserves the total respect and support of the Eunice community.

As a teacher, I have the greatest respect for the young, especially the very young whose simplicity is so often as humorous as it is true. Our staffroom comes to life when a teacher's child comes looking for Mom. I love the instant interest on our teachers' faces, the unconditional love and respect which is programmed into a teacher's DNA. After all, teaching is an act of hope. It is said that teaching is a noble art, but respect for it is a lost tradition.

I loved Mrs Harris's daughter Margo's story. She came home from school and announced that she was a 'following girl' and very proud of it! Even the Harris family could not work this out. A "following girl".

Until Margo explained that Mrs Dale, at assembly, had called up on stage and congratulated the "following girls"! The top ten. Well done Margo. But whether you are in the

top ten or the bottom ten – that’s all it takes at Eunice – you need to follow the school’s lead in providing and promoting world class opportunities and standards.

Nothing makes me happier than watching young people achieve. It’s the most rewarding aspect of any teacher’s life. And in this school we have so much to make us happy. I am a great believer in the concept that school has got to be a happy place. I respect nothing more than a smile – a simple, painless, sincere signal which says, “Hey, life is not just about me; it’s nice to see you”. Mutual respect. It’s what makes life and work and love worthwhile. When you work with young people, you work with spontaneity, with trust, with sincerity and with more than a little energy and volume. It’s what I love about school although the last one – volume – is a serious challenge to my big ears.

I also believe that schools have a responsibility to teach teenagers how to be happy, today at school, and tomorrow in a world which pursues happiness in all the wrong ways. I think respect is a key ingredient of happiness, because what makes most people happy more than any thing else according to Author Brooks in his book *Gross National Happiness* is having meaningful, honest and rewarding relationships with family and friends. And is respect not the basis of any relationship?

I love the opportunity I get to interact with our girls at rehearsal, on tour and even in the office. But I really cherish my time with old girls at reunions far and wide. This year I overheard a 40yr old asking her classmates, “Was Mr Cassar so short when we were at school?”. I felt like saying, “No

honey, the kids shrunk me!” At least I loom large in their memory. Come to think of it. I think I am reaching the age when hair colour should earn me a little extra respect otherwise I should colour it. Everyone else around here does. Every now and then a single mom will thank me for being a father figure to her daughter, but this year one of our Grade 8 mummies thanked me for being the grandfather her daughter never had. Now that’s respect taken a little too far.

I respect the contribution of our senior teachers. Among them Mrs Daleen Snyman, Mrs June Norval, Mrs Amanda Raven and Mrs Marthie de Wet who collectively have nearly a century of dedication to Eunice standards. Dankie, Tannies. You see, I’m respectful, too. Congratulations to Mrs Saretjie Musgave whose Innovation in Teaching award has her travelling to Hong Kong this month.

Our boarders, who make Eunice their home away from home, are the soul of our school. They understand respect in a way our daygirls just don’t get to experience. It is the foundation on which hostel life is built, the structure which enables Eunice green to transcend age, language, race and religion in a way which is as simple as it is exemplary.

Eunice’s diversity, its unique makeup of English, Afrikaans and African girls in almost equal numbers gives it a relevance which makes our school a microcosm of South African professional life in a way in which a White Afrikaans school or a Black township or suburban school could never be. We all need to value this diversity which must be based on mutual respect, on meaningful interaction and on a common pride in the blazer we wear and the flag we



cherish. We have 17 years of integrity behind us in multi-racial schooling. Not lip service or tokenism. Our local University's challenge is that its students have not had our girls' experience. They know only difference which is divisive, not diversity which is inclusive and enriching. Your daughters are open minded skilled citizens ready for a world which has changed forever.

At our Board Medal speeches on the first day of the year I am always struck by the respect, admiration and gratitude our medallists have for their teachers. They know they were in good hands. They witnessed that accountability, approachability and that extra mile first hand. I love that respect – it's the lifeblood of quality teaching. Monday night Maths and the Maths Camp are just two high profile examples of Eunice's academic benchmark. Eunice is saying to you : "That's where we're aiming, girls, Come on. It's called consistency, commitment and dedication. You can do it." I respect that approach and I wish I had had a Maths teacher like any one of Eunice's Maths teachers. They can be thankful that they didn't have me!

Our guest on stage today, Bea vd Vyver, is someone who has a great respect for Eunice and who is, in turn, respected by our girls who know her as Aunt Ella In Oklahoma, Mother Superior in Nunsense, Madamme Dubonnet in The Boy Friend or the Cabaret star of Showtime I and II. That's five major musicals and a few of our matrics have been in all five. Bea thrives on the Eunice appetite for opportunity, the commitment to world class standards and the chance to work with Niel van Niekerk – the city's most ambitious, most prolific and most difficult director. If you were brave enough to commit yourself to Showtime this year – and 300 of you



did – you not only had your five hundred twenty five thousand six hundred moments of Fame on stage or Worked it Out or rocked to Rocky Horror – you took what could have been a school concert to a professional standard. You tasted word class success. You know what it takes. Even the Volksblad described Eunice as an authoritative force in musical theatre in the province.

Tonight you will hear our year unfold before you in the detailed prizegiving to follow. To me the value of this school lies in the extras: the 153 Midmar Milers, the European Tour, the 15 Leader Projects, Entrepreneurship Day, Easter and Christmas Assemblies and that special Thanksgiving Service, Hostel Week, The Cradle of Mankind Tour, The Two Oceans, the four national tennis tournaments, Top Schools', St Mary's, the train derbies, the Maths camp, CAT weekend, the Physical Science early morning week, netball camp, Spring Breakfast, the guest speakers – Hein Wagner, Gary Player, Elsabé Aldrich, Rian Manser, Adrian van Vactor, the illusionist, Tracy Chemaly, Angela Deutschman; The Boy Friend, James and the Giant Peach, Woza Albert and Showitme. A host of world class extras that don't just happen. There are all made of that Eunice way of life: going the extra mile. Appreciate opportunity. Respect it. You will remember that at our school's birthday Anni Edem likened Eunice's opportunities to a revolving door. It's always there but you need to take the gap. I respect girls who take the gap.

The year also saw a few key developments such as new standards in the fields of debating, chess, netball and the re-appearance of our squash girls at the national top schools' tournament. Our thanks to Mrs Deysel, Mrs



Neethling, the Kleinhans / Badenhorst duo and Mr van Rensburg. These new standards are the result of planning, time, energy and decent teenage response.

Another two key developments are the construction of the Astro turf in the centre of our beautiful grounds and the installation of security cameras. The Astro is a world class facility par excellence, an investment in the future of the school and a competitive edge in promoting our hotel as our main source of big time fundraising.

In Mr Uys, Mr van Rensburg and I, Eunice has three genuine sports enthusiasts although supporting the Sharks makes one of us more eccentric than the others. There is a quality about our approach to coaches and facilities and opportunities which is all about detailed planning, careful budgeting and reliance on committed heads of sport. Mrs Louise Reinecke, Mrs Lanelle Kleinhans, Mr Leon van Rensburg, Mrs Emsie Bouwer and Mr Ferdi van Wijk are the drivers of the Eunice express. David Bullard wrote recently about Olympic administrators as Fat Men in Blazers; our heads of sport look good in tracksuits and you will find them at the pool, on the court and even the big, bald and loud one in the thick of the Two Oceans action. Our girls respond to that energy, enthusiasm and expertise with respect, with devotion and with their very best.

In effect, this school has a principal and 6 deputies. I respect Mr Leon van Rensburg's meticulous approach to organizing the school day, to daily discipline and to leading our sports express even though the lazy boy is a bit slow! Our teachers respect Dr Don Paine's instructional leadership, the way he interrogates the new curriculum and his dainty



steps on stage! All Eunice women respect Mrs Marais' sense of style in all she undertakes whether million dollar markets, projects which promote service or elaborate European excuses to taste Italian ice-cream. Mrs Daisy Munro is highly respected by our girls and parents as a leader who listens, a mother who understands and a sister who deals compassionately with those in pain and mercilessly with those who cause pain or who are pains. She's our pain killer. Thanks to all our house mothers and to Mr Carl Pritchitt and his staff at Eunice House.

Mr Uys this year is Mr Astro. He has championed the project, chaired the committee, searched for new fundraising business and kept his cool with a clean desk and an overriding passion for Eunice and for sport. It may not look like it but Mr Uys himself is a former Free State tennis champion and provincial cricketer. He exercises today by counting money, by jogging from Second Avenue to 7 on Kellner and by sending Evelyn to the tuckshop. Thanks Mr Dave Roberson for managing the construction process. Thanks Amal for a friendly tuckhop, thanks Dolly for Friday visits, thanks Miss van Arkel for debating dates. Thanks Mr Rory Hoareau, Mr Danie vd Merwe and Mr Tobie Wiese for a beautiful school. And thanks Mr Etzebeth and Mr Muller and Mr Paul Mohlakola for going the extra mile. Oom Jan retires this year. We will miss you, Sir, but you'll miss them more.

A headgirl's journey is a lonely one, one which requires the high road, a sense of occasion and a willingness to lead, to encourage and to serve. Estine Cronje is headgirl of Eunice and of Grey College. She does the role justice. Her name should actually be Eunice Cronje because to her school is a happy victory and our headgirl is a winner when it comes to



happiness – a smile machine. Thank you Estine. You brightened up our year.

We are fortunate to have a young and honourable Governing Body Chairman – a past school captain from next door, a CA and a director of one of Bloemfontein's big brands – Mr Dirk Klopper, is a regular presence in our office. His interest in school affairs, his ability to see the big picture and his experience in business are invaluable to Eunice.

I would like to single out Mr Andries Bester who has served two terms, both on our board and as chairman of our PA. He has always championed the interests of Eunice House. He drives in for every meeting from Lesotho but it is worth every metre as he gets to see his precious Zita.

I would like to thank Mrs Frances Coetzee, whose ill health is causing her to retire this year. In stronger days she served Eunice House as its House Mother for 10 years. A generation of old girls respect your decade of dedication, Frances. Mrs Sheena Usher, our vibrant, energetic and talented Art specialist is following her Saints boy Down Under. Thank you, Sheena. My thanks, too, to Mrs Carol Grobbelaar who has rendered sterling service as a volunteer in our library for the last 9 years. We will miss her attention to detail, especially in the organizing of this Closing Function.

My secretary these last seven years, Sharon Nelson, is off to Brisbane next month. She lights up our office block even on the most stressful of days. I'll miss my PA whom I have known since she was in Standard 8 here at Eunice. She is a computer wiz with a practical outlook, an artistic flair and a people's person to her fingertips. Dr van Niekerk will miss his



secretary too! You may remember me telling you about the day I visited my wife Moira's class, the Grade 00s, when Sharon's daughter Kayla was in her first year at Mom's school. As soon as Kayla saw me she announced to the class "He works for my mom". Out of the mouths of babes.... Go well. Thanks, too, to Mrs Myra Wienand, Mrs Mary Paine, Mrs Anita Smith, Mrs Nelia Niemann, Miss Pamela Mayiyane and Mrs Elmarie Oosthuizen.

I have only mentioned Mrs Maureen Botha in passing. She has been my right hand since day one. Our thoughts and prayers are with her. Thank you, Mrs June Norval for filling those big shoes with such willingness and commitment. Thanks also to Dr George Dennill, Mrs Louise Reinecke and Mrs Charlotte Grobler for taking over the Eunice magazine.

In our family when someone want my attention, they say "Eunice". I'm ashamed to admit it's true. My thanks to my family especially to my wife, Moira for understanding, for unconditional support and for crystal clear values which make her my perfect partner.

I started with Tasha's Dream Box which included tools like a key to unlock her dreams, a chocolate bar to make someone feel special, a red rose to remind her that love is just a hug away, a cracked shell to show her that no one is perfect but everyone is unique and a bouncy ball to relieve daily stress. Tasha has that basic respect for life, for living, for sharing and, at Eunice she has all the opportunities she needs to develop that respect into resounding success.

I would like to conclude by quoting the last page of Tasha's dream book because it reaffirms my message that Eunice,



your school, each and every one of you, is one of your keys to successful living and to making the dreams in your box come true.

Life is an opportunity, benefit from it.

Life is a beauty, admire it.

Life is bliss, taste it.

Life is a dream, realize it.

Life is a challenge, meet it.

Life is a duty, complete it.

Life is a game. Play it.

Life is a promise, fulfill it

Life is sorrow, overcome it.

Life is a song, sing it.

Life is a struggle, accept it.

Life is a tragedy, confront it.

Life is an adventure, bear it.

Life is luck, make it.

Life is too precious, do not destroy it.

Life is life, respect it.