



Closing Function Address – 22 September 2009 – Paul Cassar

Judge Musi, Mrs Munro, Dr Paine, Mr van Rensburg, honoured guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I'm always struck by the meticulous attention to detail at Closing Function and I'd like to thank all the teachers who make this such a prestige event. Mrs Kok, Mrs Marais, Mrs Reinecke, Mrs Grobler, Mrs Visser, Mrs Vosloo, Mrs Raven, Mrs Norval. I'm so sorry Mrs Colleen Steenkamp is not here this evening. It's not the same without her. Before we start I would also like to mention that it's not the same without my predecessor Mrs Joan Posthumus who passed away earlier this year.

Many years ago while walking up to Eunice House a pre-schooler had called out to me "Hello, Big Ears!" But just a few weeks ago a little pre-school girl, waiting for her sister watched as I posed with the headgirls for a series of professional photographs. Except for pint size Portia these girls tower over their principal. But the pre-schooler was mightily impressed by my importance. As I passed her she ventured "Are you the President?" No, I'm not the president, but I was mightily impressed by the story about President Nicolas Sarkozy of France who was in a spot of bother with the press. They discovered



that when he visits a factory or a hospital and the cameras are around, his staff have planned ahead and have organized that he is not met by anyone taller than Sarkozy. Now there is a good plan.

Closing Function is a curious name for a September prize giving but it's one that goes back many years and term does close tomorrow. **Tomorrow**. But for you in the front the end is truly close. I never set out to present an annual report. We have newsletters, Quid Novi, a magazine and a website for that. I prefer to highlight the year in brief and to concentrate on sharing a few insights into the modern issues facing our girls and their school.

I could speak for hours about our unmatched matric results and our national award in Mathematics and Physical Science; I could speak with pride about the international exploits of our two award winning teachers, Mrs Saretjie Musgrave and Mrs Rae Gagiano whose achievements have led Microsoft to invite us to join their Partners in Learning community of 30 of the world's most innovative schools; I could sing the praises of Mrs Marais' remarkably successful Christmas Market which turns 10 next month or her award winning Leader Project initiative which galvanizes a matric class with a practical lesson in community service; I could read long paragraphs about our new Astro, Dr van Niekerk's Theatre, Mrs Boucher's Tennis girls' season as Bloemfontein's best, our U/15s National tennis title, our National Girls' Schools' triumph in hockey and tennis and their reaching the finals in squash and chess and

netball and debating in a field of 23 schools, the new energy in Eunice Netball, in Mrs Neethling's chess, in Mrs Deysel's debating, in Mr van Wijk's all conquering under 18 As. The list is endless. I don't need to go into detail.

Our girls' achievements this evening will reflect our year. Rather, I have a school community here and I like to address critical issues which I hope help to define us as a school. Last year I spoke about Respect. The year before about Attitude. Today I'd like to touch on Leadership and Laughter. I've taken my theme from our schools unusual name, Eunice, which is derived from the Greek word Eunike meaning "Happy Victory". Victory implies a campaign, a triumph, success, achievement, effort and at the same time there's a sense of excitement, fun, spirit and laughter. Happy Victory. But we need to understand that nothing worth doing comes easily. With leadership comes disappointment and setbacks and even failure. And laughter is often the ability to see the bright side, to cope with stress, to face the daily struggle which life is with a smile. Leadership and Laughter.

I'm the one who is supposed to lead but I'm not always sure who's in charge so allow me to begin with a little laugh. The strangest thing I had to do this year was to take telephone calls from property developers all over the country because the matrics had put the school up for sale. They literally put an ad in the Volksblad. Now I suppose that's leadership and laughter but it got me thinking who would be interested in buying Eunice? Grey would want it, but free, probably as part of a land



restitution claim. More place to play on Fridays! Steve Hofmeyr may be keen to build a children's home next to his Alma Mater; Mrs Dale may buy it to use the whole property for spinach and, God forbid, pumpkins. We ain't moving. This school, ladies, is not for sale. The only thing moving out is our Matric Class. You are the weakest link, goodbye!

Ladies, you know very well that my idea of leadership includes each and every one of you. We have a leadership vacuum in our world. I am a great student and fan of Barack Obama. He leads a country which has both made and destroyed our world: his people are such a progressive and conservative mix, often arrogant, unsurprisingly insular and strangely ignorant. Just to have been elected speak volumes about a president who understands that modern leadership is not just extraordinary communication, motivation, self-control and teamwork but it's also about bringing fun and cool and joy and connectedness to leadership. You may not agree. But, I challenge you to show me great world leaders besides our 91 year old Madiba. There's a vacuum these days. It's the scarcest commodity in our country. It's often seen as an opportunity for maximizing privilege instead of selfless service, for the new car instead of the extra mile. Just to have a job in SA is an opportunity to lead, to serve, to add value. Sadly, it's often just another seat on the train. But, it's an International phenomenon. Confidence in Britain's politicians is at an all time low.

Ladies, my idea of leadership in a teenage environment is about learning to lead one's own life. No one can do it for you. She conquers who conquers herself. Sure, you need to dream, to have a long-term vision but you need to be able to lead yourself through the day, through tomorrow and through next week with drive, with discipline and with courage. You need to be able to make the right decisions many times each day. It's no easy task. And you know what? Girls do this much easier than boys. Boys take time to get this right. We're late developers. Believe me ladies, boys need you more than you need boys! Remember that; it's useful information.

What makes finding your own way difficult is that your friends' way, the 'in' way, the cool way often gets in the way.

Too often as teenagers we want to be like our friends too much and we often work it out too late that it's good to be different, it's good to have your own ideas about leading your life and about what will make you happy. Friends, I assure you, appreciate your difference. They admire it.

I want to stress that leadership is not for the few, the bright sparks, the talented. It's for us all and especially for those who find school difficult.

And to lead one's own life, you need to understand that failure, regular failure, is an essential element of success. Boys do this better than girls. Girls take failure



too seriously. We get depressed. We cry, we eat. Lighten up, ladies. There's a beautiful saying;

"When the going gets tough, the smart lighten up." Defuse that stress with a smile. Learn to laugh at yourselves.

Let me remind you of one of the great inspirational stories from modern sport. Tony Leon, former Opposition leader highlighted this story in a recent speech: Michael Jordan, the greatest basketball player ever had the following to say on failure as critical to achievement:

"I've missed more than 9 000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I have been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I failed over and over and over again in my life and that's why I succeed!"

Failure is an inevitable, hurtful reality, but you need to be able to bounce back, to examine yourself, to lean on true friends and to know that you can survive setbacks by being able to lead yourself through hardship, with perspective and with positive energy.

But the truth is, that in life, in business, in school and in trying to lead one's own matric campaign, leaders will have to be prepared to be lonely in executing difficult decisions. Loneliness is an integral part of successful study. It's rather hard. Boys don't do it too well.

It is striking how many successful entrepreneurs suffer from serious learning disabilities. Paul Orfalea, the founder of Kinko's failed two grades and was expelled from four schools; Virgin's Richard Branson dropped out of school at 15; John Chambers, who built Cisco into a \$ 100 billion corporation has trouble reading e-mail. They're all boys anyway.

Julie Logan, a business school professor found that 35 % of American small business owners identified themselves as dyslexic. Their difficulty with reading and writing caused them to develop superior oral communication, problem solving and delegating skills. These quality social skills gave them an enormous headstart at the workplace. All the same it's not true for all people with learning disabilities. The point is in the right environment, with strong commitment and with real determination, we can overcome.

I want to show you just how important it is to have skills to make the most of opportunity, to be ready for taking the chances that come your way. That brilliant cultural commentator, Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Outliers* shows that extraordinary achievement is less about talent than it is about opportunity. He studies the world's top achievers: Bill Gates, Tiger Woods, The Beatles, and he shows that success is not exceptional or mysterious. It's grounded in a web of advantages and inheritances, some deserved, some not, some earned, some just plain lucky: but critical to making them who they are. They are products of history and community, of opportunity and legacy. Success is actually a gift.



Achievers are those who have been given opportunities – and who have had the ability to lead their own lives, the strength and the purpose of mind to seize those opportunities. There is so much latent talent in our country, in so many very poor schools, in some mediocre schools, and sadly in too few schools like Eunice. But the point is, all this talent needs is a chance. That's what a Eunice girl or a Grey boy get – a chance. You're at a school which adds value, you have teachers who add value and you have opportunities galore.

And that's not all, Gladwell also shows that a high IQ is not the measure of success. You just need a reasonable one. Over a certain threshold, an ordinary threshold, success has nothing to do with IQ. It's more about hard work, sacrifice, drive, responsibility, self – confidence, thinking out the box, savvy, practicality and the example of your parents, your family culture and history.

The respected business author, Jim Collins, will add discipline as a key to success. Discipline is not simply rules and rigidity, it's rigour. Rigour means doing things thoroughly, accurately, precisely with firm and demanding standards. The signature of mediocrity, says Collins, is chronic inconsistency.

I'd like to go back to where we started: Eunice, the happy victory. There's no real point in achieving, in succeeding if it doesn't bring a little happiness, some satisfaction. Leading this school is a happy victory. I've



witnessed this school's spirit in action within this hall and beyond it and I always feel a sense of joy, a capability our girls have to feel good, to make our speakers feel good and to make school a 'feelgood' experience.

When I speak about leadership and laughter I aim to bring joy to leadership, to bring a smile and a laugh to life's daily struggle. Laughter, says Dr Annette Goodheart, is an innate and natural way of achieving connections, clarity, health, harmony and lightness by rebalancing the chemistry of tension, stress and pain and having fun doing it. Laughter is a problemsolver, it lessens confrontation, promotes conciliation, it helps people to bond, to feel comfortable with one another. It's a language we all understand and it's contagious. So much of school is serious business but, to achieve a happy victory school needs to be a happy place.

Ladies and Gentleman, this Eunice family, this school, this place where we learn to live and to lead and to enjoy the journey has a character all of its own. It's a character which over the years has learned to transcend language and its learning to transcend race.

Life needs to be lead. Nelson Mandela, an icon who led our country with character and example expresses this idea so powerfully in his *Long Walk to Freedom*:

"After climbing a great hill one only finds that there are many more hills to climb.... I can rest only for a moment, for with freedom comes responsibilities and I dare not linger for my long walk has not ended."



We all face a long walk of our own; daily – one step at a time. Life needs to be led wisely, with character. The trick is to fill the journey with joy.

Let's laugh a little with some of my memorable moments:

My favourite story of the year concerns the beautiful pot plant Dr Paine received as a gift from the teaching student who served a learner ship in his class last year. She was special, so the plant was also special. He watered it all holidays. Two weeks into the new year the Biology teacher with the PhD discovered the pot plant was plastic! The tender loving care was for the poppie not the plant. Dr Paine, it's that expertise, enthusiasm and eccentricity which makes for great teaching.

It's not the first time you've made an arse of yourself Dr Paine. In the days we shared Cedara with Pretoria Girls High on the Midmar Tour we slept in the bus because the driver refused to share his bungalow with us. Dr Paine and I were the only men around so we would use the gents at 5 in the morning and hand it over to the hundreds of girls. On one particular morning the Girls High girls ran in while we were still busy. Fortunately I was shaving. Don was showering and he panicked, dropped the soap and bent down to pick it up. But the shower curtain got caught up in that by biology backside and when he stood up down came the curtain. Oh for a pot plant!

I was at the photocopying machine in the office when an Afrikaans mommy from the Karoo (I won't mention her name) came to the reception window to see Mrs Wienand. She was surprised to see me at the window instead. Her daughter was horrified and feared the worst. I heard Cecile whisper, "Ma, moet asb. nie probeer Engels praat nie!"

The first night on the Derby train is not really meant for sleeping. Even the principal struggles. There's responsibility, stress and 350 of your daughters brimful of plans and produce. By morning, I'm tired. After lunch I'm exhausted. And then I have to listen to a debate. You know how they bang the desk to say 2 minutes left, and then again and up goes a sign 1 minute left. Well this time there was another bang, a loud bang, and up went a sign, "Wake up, Sir!"

This year I heard the best excuse from a boarder pleading for a room change. This girl I definitely won't mention by name. Not, please Sir we don't get on, or she's untidy or loud. No. Please Sir I can't anymore. My roommate works too hard!

In making you our Guest of Honour, Mrs Munro, and in asking you to present our prizes we aim to highlight the distinctive place Eunice House enjoys as a corner stone of our school. Boarders understand the concept of leading their own lives some distance from their parents, developing independence, resilience and their own coping mechanisms. They learn valuable life skills which will give them a headstart at university. One

of the benefits of boarding school life is that sense of community. There's no TV to speak of, no Internet at hand to surf, no boyfriend to police, no real private space to flee from a seemingly hostile world, and not even a fridge to raid. Boarders have each other 24/7 and they learn to manage their lives, to deal with diversity, to make lifelong friends and to entertain themselves with life's simple pleasures – fun, food, sharing, laughter; in a word – camaraderie.

On behalf of our boarders I would like to salute you, Daisy, for the firm, fair, feminine, loving, refined and professional manner in which you deal with our girls, their parents and our staff. You are one of this school's many valuable human assets. Working with you is such a privilege and a pleasure and I'm sure this community joins me in saluting you. My thanks, too, to your wonderful team: Mrs Jacqui Truter, Mrs Lanelle Kleinhans, Ms Rozanne Marais, Ms Pamela Mayiyane and your students. Our kitchen is the engine room of Eunice House and we all salute our Catering manager Mr Carl Pritchitt and his staff: Mrs Koba Ebersohn, Mrs Rosemary Jones, Mrs Arista Steyn, Mr Louis Botha and all our friendly, loyal and hardworking cooks and cleaners.

I would like to single out Boarder Headgirl Annekie van Niekerk who had much to do with making Eunice House a joyful place this year. She made things happen. You have a real sense of service and of style, Annekie. You could start a Casino in Colesberg.



What a pleasure it was to see the Springboks lead from the front this year. Their secret, I believe, besides a smiling coach, is loads of leadership. Not just in the exemplary leadership of John Smit, but in players like Victor Matfield, Fourie du Preez and Jean de Villiers who lead and read their own game by backing their rugby instincts with initiative, drive and flair. They understand the concept of being captain and they bring these leadership skills to every game. Ladies and Gentlemen, our school has earned itself a reputation as a top school among top schools just like the Springboks and for the same reason. It has leadership in abundance, teachers who join me in scrumming for the tryline: Mrs Marais won't mind the rugby metaphor but she's all initiative, drive and flair and just as tough and menacing as a Bismarck or a Schalk. Mr van Rensburg is our flyhalf, directing operations with an eye for detail, one for consistency and another in the back of his head which not only sees everything but follows it up in slow motion like a TV umpire. Dr Paine steadies the front row with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the rules, the training of young talent and the staff development of the modern teacher. Propping the other side of the Eunice scrum is Mr Pat Uys whose passion for the team, compassion for our parents and positive energy and capacity for fun and laughter make him an indispensable team player. Every scrum needs an eighth man and ours is Mr van Wijk. A high impact player with a large fan base. Mrs Harris is our rolling maul expert she takes no nonsense and no prisoners and she prays for us before and after the game.

I would mention Mrs Botha but she's been injured this season; but you look a million dollars Mrs B, back in training and delegating all that work for us to do. I would mention Mrs Dale but she's been yellow carded for vegetable poisoning. I suppose you're wondering where I fit in. I'm the line out jumper because I have so many strong team members to lift me when I need to go for the high ball. Our teachers, ladies and gentlemen, can last the full 80 minutes; they're our specialists and they can tackle a years work and take the crowd with them. They get our girls going. Crouch, hold, touch, engage. I haven't mentioned each and every teacher but I include them all. I'll concentrate on the backs next year.

My thanks to each and every member of the Eunice family from motherly Mrs Paine to gentle Paul the driver to smiling Reggie the traffic officer who contribute to our atmosphere of joyful service.

My thanks to Mr Dirk Klopper and our Governing Body for guidance with our school's direction, finances and development. Judge Musi, Judge President of the High Court, chaired two serious disciplinary hearing in his term at Eunice. What a blessing for a principal and for parents to have such expertise available and with willingness and insight and compassion.

I'd like to recognize the work done by our grounds committee, our new chairman, Mr Kotie van Tonder and our outgoing team of Mr Paul Azar and Mr Dave Roberson. A beautiful school contributes to a happy



school. My thanks, too Mr Roray Hoareau, Mr Danie van der Merwe and Mr Tobie Wiese for all their hard work.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of our Parents' Association especially our chairman Mr Marius Whitehead and our community's support for their initiatives. Thank you, too to Mrs Amal de Vries and Mrs Dolly Wedderburn.

As always, you will be impressed and inspired by the achievements of our girls as they walk across the stage and enjoy their tiny taste of triumph this evening. Our idea is not to make them compete for awards but rather to recognize achievements in a range of fields both at school and beyond. I would like to single out our school's elected leadership. To be elected is one thing; to serve requires a generosity of spirit which takes sincere effort way beyond the call of duty. Portia, you served with distinction and with example in abundance. The Volksblad have recognized you; and you made such an impact on our new rector Prof Jansen that he offered to arrange a full bursary for you and he has invited you to walk in with him at his inauguration next month and to sit at his side on stage. I see I'm no longer your hero, Portia. Lizé, like Portia you radiate a sparkling energy. You represent Eunice with honour in everything you do, and like the large majority of our girls, you market the Eunice brand wherever you lead and serve with the biggest smile in Africa. Under the extremely committed leadership of Mrs June Norval and Mr Leon van Rensburg, our RCL has set a standard of leadership which will not be easy to follow. June,



Leon – you have busy programmes. Thank you for going the extra mile.

I would like to thank those closest to my daily schedule who bare the brunt of my many weaknesses especially Mrs Myra Wienand in our busy front office, Mrs Liza-Anne Meyer, my personal secretary, whose efficient sparkle lights up every day and my wife, Moira, whose sacrifice these last 23 years, uncompromising values and loving support allow me to both jump for the high ball and to push for the tryline.

Let's put leadership and laughter together in one last story. One curious little Eunice girl approached mom and asked, " Mom, where do humans come from?" "Well" said Mom " Adam and Eve had children Cain and Abel had children, their children had children and so on. And that's where we come from." A little while later the little girl approached Dad, "Where do humans come from?" Dad explained how species changed over time – primates, chimpanzees, apes, homoerectus, homosapiens, humans. Being a good questioning Eunice girl back she went and said, " Mom, I'm confused. Dad said we come from the apes!" Mom replied triumphantly: "Well at least I know where my family comes from!"

Character is the difference between a good school and a great one. It's the value we strive to add so that our girls can learn everyday that inner strength – she conquers who conquers herself – is the foundation of character. The source of all leadership. We will help



you, encourage you, support you, we'll remind you and test you and stretch you. You have to conquer and you have to do that by believing in yourself, by believing in your ability to meet every challenge of life's grand adventure. So Matrics, as Jim Collins told me I tell you:

"Go out and make yourselves useful." You've been a great group. All five classes. You've been led. You've got character and you certainly have fun. Correction. You are the strongest link in the Eunice chain.

Tsamaya ka kghotso. My speech is ended, ladies. How do you feel?

Thank you.