

Mrs Z de Wet 2015 CLOSING FUNCTION SPEECH

Good evening, Mr Dell, governors, honoured guests, staff, parents, learners and friends of Eunice.

It is a privilege to stand before you today and it is with pride and gratitude that I reflect on the most recent of 140 years of excellence at Eunice...a year in which our theme: Take flight on the wings of change...took form in many ways.

Ladies, tonight we celebrate your highest achievements for the year. Your successes represent everything that we stand for here at Eunice.

You are hard-working, articulate young ladies. You are a credit to our school and society and your achievements serve as an inspiration to us all. Optimising your talents and applying your gifts and your passion to come one step closer to what you envision for your life, form the core of your achievements.

To my staff: I salute you. Tonight we are also here to celebrate your commitment, your drive and the vision you have for these young ladies.

You are true futurist, exploring young minds and applying the art of possibilities as part of your daily routine – or should I rather say – your daily adventure. It is your well-directed intuition combined with your high expectations and grounded exploration of change Your ongoing research, analysis, mapping, modelling and goalsetting lead to your very definite investment in your learners. For that I thank you.

To every parent present: I do believe that we share the same sense of exhilaration every time your daughter accomplishes her most recent goal. Her future emerges from her Eunice experience and we are grateful for your commitment to her and your partnership with us as we embark on a daily journey towards excellence.

And what a journey 2015 has been!

I cannot but reflect on one very significant and symbolic day in my life. The 2nd of February 2015.

This day marked my first experience of Eunice. Every day since has proven to be that 2nd of February on my calendar; thus defining an indefinite and integral part of my present being.

On that day, I found myself driving to work as I had done for many days and years before, but nothing was the same. It was when I turned the corner of Sir George Grey and Jock Meiring Street that I relived my first visit to Eunice in 2010.

In that moment, I was overwhelmed by the realization of my family's commitment to our journey, and I prayed that God would bless that commitment and guide me to direct numerous flights to and from this destination of excellence. Therefore, please allow me the opportunity to thank my wonderful husband and children for being mine... as it is their unwavering support, unconditional love and their steady reminders of where our strength comes from, that enable me to focus on Eunice's map of present and future travels.

God's sense of humour and precision guidance soon came to the fore when an airport bell rang as cue for Mr Van Rensburg's word of welcome to me on flight EUN-ICE.

Thank you, Mr Van Rensburg, for those words and your wish for God's blessing on me on that day and all the days to follow.

Thank you, Mrs Marais, for deciding that the new head (mistress) should only make her mysterious first appearance later than the usual start of the Eunice school day. You are a wise woman, ma'am as I would have contemplated fleeing on the second day had I experienced the Eunice traffic dynamics on my very first...

The two of you are co-pilots of note and it is an absolute privilege to have you at my side.

Ladies: Your energetic welcome was unique. Comments such as “It’s so strange that you’re a woman, ma’am”, first caught me off guard, but I decided at the time, that blaming it on you - Mr Cassar - was easier than trying to unravel the thinking process that led to it in the first place.

The very first question asked by a Grade 10 learner: “Are you going to make us wear hats, ma’am?” also had me puzzled for a moment. Did the girls expect a rebirth of Renaissance fashion or were they maybe in pursuit of bringing back the panama worn by Eunice ladies in the early days?

Of all the things to wonder about – I did not expect it to be hats.

But, hats off to you, ladies, for the wonderfully mature conversations that followed in your classrooms, beside the fountain, in busses and whilst taking selfies with you. Even the ongoing confusion about whether to use Miss or Mrs of Ma’am when we converse, cannot take away the fact that you made me feel at home from the very first moment that I stepped into the Hall on that first day.

Thank you for questioning, reasoning and embracing the process of change.

Embracing change is one of the 9 eternally vital life skills needed in tomorrow’s world, and one that is not ordinarily taught in ordinary schools. (I guess that that in itself, is testament to the unique nature of our school.)

We cannot take flight, ladies, staff and parents – if we cannot adapt and deal with change, since adaptation is imperative to change as we strive to prepare ourselves for what awaits us in the future. Therefore keep asking questions, solving issues, tackling challenges, finding your passion. Keep growing towards independence and creating happiness in your authentic niche.

These skills teach you compassion and tolerance to deal with an ever-changing world – all of which are essential if you aim to take flight on life’s eagle wings as you strive to conquer the world and keep it Green.

Celebrating memorable moments and victories has proven to be a sustained practice at Eunice.

In December, all applause went to the ‘Eunice Choir: They stayed true to their name, which means ‘Eunice lives to sing’, and upheld their exceptional musical standard by achieving the highest result by any performer in the 9 years of the International Advent Choir Competition in Bratislava in 2014.

Not many schools can refer to their history of academic excellence as a tradition, but the class of 2014 continued Eunice’s custom of excellence by attaining a 100% pass rate for the 29th consecutive year, with 8 learners being in the top 15 in the Free State.

We take pride in their Bachelor pass of 97,2% and celebrate being the Top Maths and Science school for the 12th time in 14 years since 2000. Being the top Accounting, as well as the top Consumer Studies school in the Free State made this accolade even greater.

The school also opened its state-of-the-art Digital Centre and welcomed the long awaited relaunch of the Library and newly-established digital book collection in January.

It soon became clear to me that these examples of excellence and innovation inspire our ladies to fly even higher.

Tonight we celebrate a long list of national and international top achievements of many a Eunice learner and / or team in their respective fields. These include, amongst others, the Eskom Science Expo, the Minquiz Physical Science Challenge, the National Afrikaans Olympiad, Science Convention Olympiad, SAICA and SAIPA Accounting Olympiads, Hockey, Squash, Swimming, Chess, Tennis, Badminton, Equestrian, Endurance Riding, Karate and Gymnastics.

2015 also marked Eunice's repeated inclusion in Fair Lady's list of the Top 25 Public Schools in South Africa. And being recognized as an Allan Gray Orbis Foundation Circle of Excellence School once again distinguished us together with St Andrews – from so many other schools in the Free State and in the country.

Mr Thomas and I had the privilege of spending a weekend with principals and headmistresses of the top 50 Circle of Excellence Schools where open space discussions and the sharing of best practices at leading schools in South Africa underlined the necessity of our schools being factories of hope happiness.

The wisdom of David Cooper, who advocates that the questions we ask create the world we live in, resonated in every presentation. It became perfectly clear to me that we are accountable for more than what is commonly expected of us as educators, parents, learners and leaders.

Infusing strong ethics and values in the execution of our different roles is at the core of effective change management in our schools and society.

Change should not scare us. It ignites purpose – an acronym that stands for

- Potential
- Unity
- Resilience
- Passion
- Opportunities
- Success and
- Excellence

Our girls' inspiring, young, entrepreneurial mind-sets blended with our educators' experience and futuristic intent, create an environment that maximises Eunice potential.

Ladies. Your potential and' innovative ways were clear during our celebration of amongst other Valentine's Day and Valentine's dance (I have never seen so many deliveries made to a school on the day before this day of hearts).

Also World Book Day, the Spring Breakfast, the Fun Day Danceathon and Hostel Week emphasised your creativity and ability to successfully execute wonderful ideas and dreams.

Your passion for lending a service to the community is clear through all your admirable requests to raise funds for specific institutions or causes and initiatives you launched to create awareness of others' needs. The most recent service projects being but the cherry on the proverbial cake that we would like to offer others.

2015 will definitely also be remembered for our elegant 140th celebrations that brought many an Old Girl back to the school to reminisce about days gone by and the impact Eunice ladies and staff members have had on each others' lives throughout the years.

I was privileged to attend reunions in the Western Cape and Port Elizabeth, where it was evident that there is no other school as dear as Eunice.

My cup overflows with these special moments this year.

Even my birthday turned out to be a wonderful and unexpected experience that germinated from your originality, ladies.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the RCL and so many other Eunice ladies and teams for their part in making the 1st of August yet another memorable 2nd of February in my life.

I found so many beautiful letters and hand-made cards in my inbox throughout the year. Thank you for that, ladies. (They will never land up in my outbox, for each one serves as a reminder to me of why I find myself feeling so at home every day... at no. 3 Jock Meiring Street.)

Forgive me - ladies and gentlemen - for singling out Mrs Mag Marais, Mr Leon van Rensburg and Mr Pat Uys, who head various aspects of Eunice's aerospace engineering department.

Your assist me on a daily basis to pilot our beautiful lady so that we can maintain a speed - in the words of Walt Whitman – “where there is space enough and air enough” to soar.

Also Mrs Maureen Dale, Mr Charles Dell and Governors, Mr Paul Cassar and Mrs Liza-Anne Meyer: Wilbur Write said that there is no sport equal to that which aviators enjoy while being carried through the air on great white wings.

Your loyalty to Eunice, your unwavering support and your guidance carry me and my team, and make it easier for us to manage our flights into the future. For that I am eternally thankful.

Where we are today, ladies and gentlemen, is the result of our founding ideals – ‘that our daughters may be as cornerstones – polished after the similitude of a palace’. And it is that shining palace that casts a gleaming light on the runway of your future successes.

In conclusion: Through experiencing so many 2nd of Februaries this year, I have learnt the important lesson that each and every day should be taken on as the start of a new and exciting voyage.

First days (or flights) are filled with anticipation, ideas, ambition and the challenge of accepting the necessary discomfort that 21st Century change brings.

Shakespeare said that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of by mere mortal men. We, however, know that we, however, know that extra-ordinary dreams lead to ground breaking realities which turn out to be our legacies.

Ladies and gentlemen - our daughters' dreams determine their flight statuses. Eunice is the carrier and YOU are the tailwinds that help us along. Assist us as educators and consensus-driven futurists – to guide them into the airstream that keeps them and Eunice high in the sky and beyond.

Take the lead, ladies. Ignite those dreams in the true belief that when you conquer, you conquer yourself!

Vincit qui si Vincit.

I thank you.