

## Year 13 Graduation Speech June 2012

Seeing you doing your A levels recently and being with you for the Fase Especifica exams took me back to when I sat my own A levels. I passed them all but I never really achieved the marks that my family and my teachers kept telling me I was capable of.

You can hardly blame me as I grew up in exciting times when young people were making their voice heard, challenging traditional ideas and forcing politicians and parents to re-think their own values and beliefs. As school students we imitated what we saw on television in school as a means of rebellion. I can remember that when I was Year 11 age I arranged with my friends to go to school with bells and beads around our necks and flowers in our hair, trying to be some kind of San Francisco hippies in a cold, semi industrial British city. It was fun but we soon learned that the head teacher, close to retirement, and the teachers, some of whom were ex-soldiers, were not going to accept our new ideas on uniform.

However, no one could deny us our new music; the Beatles, Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones it was an explosion of creativity and innovation full of expressions of frustration – Mick Jagger couldn't get no satisfaction – full of hope for the future – Bob Dylan told us that the times were a'changing – and full of a belief in a better world – John Lennon told us to imagine all the people living in peace.

Fortunately, my A levels were good enough to get me into university where I really enjoyed my studies and my freedom. However, in my final examinations I didn't quite get the marks that everyone predicted for me. I didn't give it much thought until later on, near the end of my post graduate year of teacher training. We had to take

another final examination which I decided, once and for all, I would do to the very best of my ability. So, really for the first time in my life, I burned the midnight oil working for that test, making sure that I fully understood all the different educational theories, different aspects of child development, lesson planning, the curriculum and – with apologies to all the lawyers present - the most boring of all for me, educational legislation.

In the examination I had to write three essays. When I nervously read the questions .... yes! ..two were on my favourite topics so I wrote long, complete answers which I knew would get me lots of marks. However, the third was a problem. The question required me to assess the intentions and importance of a new law which was designed to give more power to governing bodies and parents and that some decisions should be made by committees, not individuals. Even worse, I had left myself little time to do it.

Now the film Star Wars hadn't been out long and, like most people, I loved it. So in one of those mad moments of genius I decided to let the Force be with me and I handed over my answer to my intuition, took out my light sabre pen and started writing.

Obviously, I was meant to say this law represented a great leap forward for democracy in education – which it was – and to sing its praises. However, when my pen hit the page, guided by the Force, it started writing 'This law reminds me of the saying that that a camel is a horse invented by a committee.' and I went on to argue that while I understood the reasoning behind the law, we must not forget that the greatest educational establishments, the most interesting innovations and the most creative solutions have come from inspired individuals and not committees and we must never suppress them.

I had no idea how my answer would be received but I left the examination with a feeling of complete satisfaction that I had done my best and been true to myself. As it turned out, I finally got the mark expected of me.

I have chosen this example today because I have drawn several conclusions from the incident. Firstly, I have never forgotten that two thirds of my examination success was the result of hard study. You won't achieve much in your university careers and your private or professional lives if you don't work hard. Even your relationships, to be successful, will need work.

I also realise that the Force which guided me in that examination, would never have existed if it weren't for The Rolling Stones, The Beatles, Bob Dylan or my school. That the youth culture which my school had tried to suppress had value and had shaped my ideas. Inspiration, creativity and innovation are not lights which mysteriously switch themselves on in others, they are something you all have in you. A completely new idea does not exist, what exists is your ability to make links and connections between the millions of thoughts and concepts which are buzzing around your brains in order to come up with a new creation formed from those thoughts. The more ideas that you think about and consider, the more open your mind is, the more creativity you will have.

In your lifetimes, your generation will have to solve a plethora of problems on local, national and international levels. Creativity and innovation will be needed and, let me assure you, you all have something to offer.

I am proud to have been your head teacher for the second half of your school careers and I look forward to hearing about your

progress in the future. My best advice to you today is, when you need to run, be a horse, when you need to cross a desert, be a camel and when you and others need inspiration, be yourselves and release the Force within you.