

Speech Graduation June 2014

I wish to continue with the theme of the power of the mind and tell you about something that happened to me not long ago.

I come to work by the same train every morning and arrive at Córdoba station just a couple of minutes before my bus to school departs from the stop nearby. It means that I am usually the first person to leave the train and I make sure that I leave from the carriage which stops right next to the escalator. As a result, I have rarely missed my bus to school.

The morning in question the train ran as usual and, as always I was waiting by the carriage door as it pulled into the station. Nothing seemed unusual or different because all you can see from the carriage door is the floor of the platform moving past you. Therefore, as usual I jumped off the train, made my way quickly through the passengers waiting to get on the train and jumped onto the escalator.

If you know the station you'll know that the escalator up from the platforms nearest the 'Trés Culturas' end of the station are in reality moving ramps and that they are static unless someone walks onto them. In the mornings, I almost inevitably activate the 'up' escalator. This particular morning, I had not realized that the train had pulled into platform 2 instead of the usual platform 4. That shouldn't have mattered except there is a crucial difference. The 'up' escalator is on the left on platform 4 but on the right on platform 2. As a consequence, I started to walk up the down ramp.

I was advanced on my way up, thinking that the motor of the ramp was not working, when it suddenly leapt into life, moving in the wrong direction. It wanted to take me back down! What I didn't realize at first was that meant someone had got onto the ramp at the top. You might know me well enough to know that once I'm set on something I don't like to go back and start again. Therefore, having kept my balance I took one of those instant, press-on decisions and carried on. This meant I went into a kind of slow motion running gait which, if filmed, could have been used to show a desperate man clawing his way towards the pearly gates just before they were about to close forever. The higher I got up the escalator, the more difficult it became. My legs started to weaken and I started to worry about the Head Teacher of the British school of Córdoba being seen making a complete fool of himself. I also passed a man – the one who had activated the ramp from the top – as he came down. We bumped past each other and, from his expression, I realised that he thought I was perhaps a kamikaze pedestrian, a mad infantile 'guiri' or maybe a bald geriatric delinquent.

However, at no point did I think of just going down and I kept going until I finally managed to stumble off the moving ramp.

I was relieved, thinking I was going to catch my bus until I was faced with the next consequence of having gone up the down escalator. The ticket collector! The up escalator just releases you into the station, the down one delivers you into the hands of authority. He was young but clearly sufficiently experienced to have seen passengers commit all kinds of stupidities. He gave me a long 'what on earth are

you doing?' look and then just stepped back to let me pass. As I did I saw him exchange glances and raised eyebrows with another official seated in the ticket office.

At least I caught my bus to work.

So why relive that particular memory tonight? Well, what happens if you have no control over your circumstances and you find yourself being taken in a direction you do not want to go but which you cannot avoid? That is when you have to use all your mental and spiritual strength to fight against the current and the situation. In life you'll find yourself thrown onto a down escalator and will need to fight to get back up. However much you try to control everything at some point your train will arrive at an unexpected platform and you'll find yourself in a place you don't want to be.

When that happens, believe in yourselves and know that you can overcome your difficulty. You can do it if you have faith that you can. Nor will you have to look far to find others who have already fought their own battles. They can be inspiring. As Mr Calway has said, the mind is a very powerful instrument and I will be happy if the school has helped give you the ability to use it successfully for your own good and the good of others. May the force be with you and may you reach the top whatever you do.