

# Oakhill Old Oaks

March 2013

## From the desk of Barbie Leibbrandt



*When we were small! First day of school for Grade 1 pupil Wandu Kondlo*

Dear Oaks of Old – past Students, Staff and Parents

What a start to a HAPPY BIRTHDAY YEAR! This promises to be a bumper issue, so settle down and enjoy the read – a BIRTHDAY BONANZA - that's what Birthdays are about!

It has been a jubilant, joyful term, culminating with a magnificent 21st Birthday Celebration 19 days ago. Ask anyone who attended any or all of the Birthday events and I am sure they will agree, it sparked with the essence of Oakhill, it struck chords in hearts and heads, as the various events gave way to reflection; there was a pride and a joy in being a part of a wonderful, happy and true learning environment. If I'm around for the next celebration of joyful learning, you bet I'll be there!

I think it is appropriate that I share with you a special birthday message received from André, Cathy, Lara and Andrea van Niekerk on the eve of our 21st Birthday. The van Niekerks are a Founder Family; André and Cathy were intimately involved in the roots of Oakhill and André was the Founding Chairman of the Board; an amazing family, who believed in the worth of an independent School in Knysna, and who,

together with Allan Graham, the Muirs, the Ruthvens, the Griffins, and with the help of Ernie Campbell, made the dream a reality.

*"I do so wish we could be there to share the excitement with you all and see all the wonderful people that we worked with to get Oakhill started. Cathy and I and Lara and Andrea send greetings to all of you from Australia.*

*I have one indelible memory that I want to share and that I hope is never forgotten as a piece of Oakhill's history:*

*When the school was just a few months old we ran out of money and the finance committee approached the teachers to tell them that we could not carry on. They went into a huddle and came back to say that they would take a voluntary pay cut for as long as was needed.*

*That, to my mind, is the spirit of Oakhill.*

*Allan Graham and the teachers who took the leap of faith set in motion an irresistible force that will continue as long as that kind of commitment exists.*

*I salute all of you.*

*Viva Oakhill, viva."*

*"Every individual matters. Every individual has a role to play. Every individual makes a difference."*

*- Jane Goodall*



*21<sup>st</sup> Birthday photo taken from a crane overlooking our beautiful campus and lagoon.*

And if I may just share a few lines as Shane did, taken from a letter to Guy Thesen, written by André: *"The magic is going to continue. I won't let us down. There will be happy times, sad times, achievements and disappointments, but one thing is certain, every child who is touched by the magic of Oakhill will be changed forever."*

So true dear Oaks. For those of you who have been touched by the magic of Oakhill, and there are many ... I think you would agree.

What a pleasure it was to have Allan and Dal Graham come "home" (Diana too) to share this momentous and meaningful occasion with us. We thank them for honouring us with their presence and there were moments, and moments again, when their delight became our delight too. It really was a "delight-filled" weekend. Allan was invited to address the special assemblies and I think it is appropriate to share some thoughts expressed by Allan at these gatherings in the College quad on Friday 1st March 2013. He spoke simply and sincerely to his purpose for Oakhill. He shared the following: "We aimed to produce students who: were happy and loved learning; had a healthy self-image; had confidence; if we were lucky, found their passion for life." This rings true to so many of you who have crossed Oakhill's threshold and then returned to share your tapestries of success, flecked with the joys and magic of Oakhill.



*Shane Kidwell with Allan and Dal Graham*

The best was yet to be, amidst laughter and cheers, and after hours of great deliberation, it was announced that Oakhill's new Squirrel Mascot was to be called ALLAN! All in honour of an amazing Founder Headmaster, with a purpose and a passion for education, a true gentleman. He and Dal were tickled pink!

I have scouted many old albums and documents during the course of the past few months and shared with Allan and Dal, something that I had discovered in my rummaging. According to Allan, this particular album was meticulously put together by Jane van Rooyen, André and Louis' Mom, who also now resides in Australia. The last 2 pages in this particular album include a copy of the Oakhill Echoes (NO. 4 – December 1994 – Official mouthpiece of Oakhill School – Tel: 23771) I wonder if Elna remembers when telephone numbers changed in SA, and it became necessary to punch in the area code! Anyway, back to the last page of the Oakhill Echoes – a photograph of and an article written by Allan about Richard Wang. I'm sure many of you remember the Manchurian who came to Knysna, who came to Oakhill. Towards the bottom of the page a block and in it is written:

**1994 – A YEAR TO REMEMBER – 1994**  
**Our First 18 Matriculants**  
**Great Independent Board Results**  
**New Junior Primary Classrooms**  
**Refurbished Hall**  
**Code of Conduct by Consensus**  
**Financial Stability**  
**Fine Sporting Achievements**  
**Cultural Impact**  
**Parental Goodwill**

And right at the bottom of the last page is the following in blocks too:

**TO LOVE TO TEACH TO CARE TO SHOW  
 TO LEARN TO GROW TO FULFIL, TO  
 SHARE TO BE**

Followed by:

Oakhill School strives, nationwide, to be the forerunner of a modern, creative, entrepreneurial approach to excellence in education. Oakhill adds to the spectrum of fine education in the Southern Cape and having guided its first Matriculants, looks forward to the future. It holds fast to its motto: The Joy of Learning.

Perhaps Allan knew then, what we believe in now.

To return to the present - we experienced a magnificent 21st Birthday Celebration at the beginning of March.

We were cheered and congratulated by existing families, but the special messages and wishes came from you, as we received sincere communications, enjoyed happy conversations and embraced the joy of learning at every opportunity. The Old Oaks who were able to return and who we had the privilege of interacting with emulated the true essence of Oakhill. I think of those happy, delighted students who returned – Theri Horn, Rhian Berning, Guy Jacobs, Marc Taylor, Wayne Craig, Tony Jardim, Diana Graham, Janine Kleu, Michelle Eray, Chloe Bunnnett, Danielle Pieters, Annelize Bain, Roberta De Grandis, Dotti Rakau, Jeremy Frost, Miles Robinson, Tim Leibbrandt, Robert Muir, Jannah Ruthven, Patrick Spilsbury ..... albeit with a presence, singing a song, sharing an address, playing sport, showing a film, exhibiting an art piece ... we just loved your company, we loved having you "home".

To past staff members who graced us with their presence – Allan and Dal Graham, Kim and Chris Storey, Guy Thesen, Barbara-Ann Hayward, Elna Brown and Founder Board Members, André and Cecelia Ruthven, Trish Griffin, Andy Muir and Founder Families – Hilda Hofmeyr, Rose Tressider, Sharon Meter, and Chairmen of the Board and their spouses (they were well represented ) Franco and Pola De Grandis, Leslie and Di Pieters, Marisa Murphy, Mike and Joan Maughan-Brown, Peter and Janine Wallington and finally to all the other Old Oaks who joined us at some point, whether on the campus or at the superb Dinner – Tom and Vivian Paremoer, Adele Saggerson, Debbie Patterson, Pat Buchan, Bossy and Lynn Monsen, Anthony and Tine Robinson, Trevor and Vanessa Cloete - to each and all who joined us in our celebrations of joy and in their joyful sharing, it was such a privilege to share in the wholesomeness of the weekend with you, to share your Oakhill stories – what a tribute to you and to Oakhill – the "playbacks" were immensely meaningful and memorable.

And the celebration did not end there. Last week we had the pleasure of hosting Alistair Pott (matriculated in 2000), who appears on one of our recent bus wraps and who addressed



*Jumping for 21 years of joy!*

the College students at their assembly. A rare and special occasion. Alistair gave Oakhill credit for where he is today – a school that taught him to embrace people, to think independently, to be determined, because as he said: “Life is when determination meets opportunity.” After assembly there were hugs and happy interactions with staff who had taught Al and then he was whisked off to view the new land in “his bus”, accompanied by Shane and the SRC.

The afternoon was yet young when my phone beeped – a message from Alistair: “Thanks very much for arranging my visit to Oakhill earlier today. I often think back on my school years so it was great to come back and see some of the old faces and places. The school has come on amazingly and it was great to see that. I enjoyed talking to the students and in particular connecting with some of the old staff. Thanks also for the lunch and gifts.”

There is nothing more special than connecting with an Oak of Old, so please remember, if ever you’re passing this way, make your way up Hospital Hill Street, follow the signs, take a stroll up the tree-lined pathway and that’s where you’ll find us.

Elna received this wonderful message from Bronwen Troskie (née Karow – Matric 1994) last week:

“My, how very strange to be ‘penning’ a note to you all at Oakhill! I have been

catching up on all the news on the website and am sad to have missed the 21st Celebration! Judging by the pictures it seems it was a huge success!

I refer to myself as a ‘past’ Oak and not an old Oak, because one may refer to me as old in age these days! I still cannot believe that next year we have been out of school for 20 years! What is even more astonishing is that some of us have children who are already attending junior school!

I have just read Jo-Ann Thesen’s letter and had to take a deep breath – I remember the days when she and Guy (am I allowed to call him Guy, or should I still refer to him as Mr T?) were expecting Leo – and he has now matriculated! I remember too when Marty Watson was pregnant with Thymon and he too is a young man now.

I look at photos of the campus and can barely recognise it. When we were there it was still so ‘Knysnaesque’ – very basic and served its purpose well!

Here are some facts that amuse me about the ‘good old days’:

- 1) Cell phones were yet to be released – and when they were, they were MASSIVE
- 2) No one used computers, laptops, tablets or smartphones
- 3) There were only 18 students in the matric class
- 4) We were still called pupils and not learners (still referred to as “pupils”, Bronwen)
- 5) The SRC, together with the governing body, drafted the original school constitution
- 6) Teachers used to leave their cars unlocked and, if parked on the ‘upper campus’ would often find their cars parked elsewhere – thanks to the downhill and good old fashioned handbrakes (not to mention the antics of some pupils whose names we shall not mention)
- 7) Sports were limited to netball, hockey and canoeing!
- 8) Jamie Fearon, Biology teacher, would bring roadkill to school so we could get up close and personal!
- 9) Allan Graham does not age – he looked exactly the same 21 years ago!

I look back at Oakhill with very fond memories. For me, school was always a

pleasure. Oakhill opened its doors to me after a somewhat questionable departure from a boarding school in Port Elizabeth, and afforded me the opportunity to become me! It laid the foundation for me to build character, integrity and self-confidence.

If I look at the class of 94, I can say we have done pretty well. I am in contact with a few of the past pupils and of those, everyone has found their place!

Thank you to Allan Graham for his vision and to his great staff compliment who encouraged us to think freely and to be the masters of our own destinations!

May the future of Oakhill’s success be deeply guided by the foundation on which it was founded. In a digital world that is so fast paced, may the foundations be solid enough to bring good grounding!

Looking forward to seeing you all next year for the Class of ‘94 20 year reunion!

Lots of love  
Bronwen

What a wonderful reflection, Bronwen. Thank you so much.

I wish I could include all the messages that poured in during our Birthday Week and the thanks that followed in the week thereafter – too many to mention, but perhaps just to share a few more meaningful moments:

from Gary Norton, past Headmaster (1997/1998)

Dear Oakhill Family  
I wish you all a very special 21st birthday. Always remember your roots and purpose in life You have a special school set in a beautiful environment - look after it and treasure it.  
Expect the unexpected and tread gently on the earth.  
God Bless  
Regards  
Gary

From Chris and Kim Storey (Kim being a



*Birthday Bash celebrations on Theseen Island which lasted until the small hours - a joyful party of note!*



*Our new land - moving earth with a shovel and a spade and then the big machines rolled in - down to serious business!*



*Old Oak Alistair Pott comes "home". Alistair treated us to a wonderful assembly and then we treated him with a visit to the new land, accompanied by Mr Kidwell and the SRC... on his branded bus!*



*Oakhill's 21<sup>st</sup> Birthday Assembly*



*Oakhill's mascot, 'Allan'.*



THE JOY OF LEARNING

**Oakhill School**  
Uitsig Street  
Heuwelkruin  
Knysna, 6571  
South Africa

**Phone:**  
+27 44 382-6506

**Barbie Leibbrandt Mobile :**  
082 687 1974

**Fax:**  
+27 44 382-5753

**Old Oaks E-mail:**  
b.leibbrandt@oakhillschool.co.za  
[www.oakhillschool.co.za](http://www.oakhillschool.co.za)

Founder Staff member and Chris following shortly thereafter):

Thank you so much for all your hard work last weekend. Chris and I loved being back - Oakhill is indeed a very special school. Thank you also for all the goodies in the goody bag - what a treat! We have enjoyed reading through the magazine and listening to the CD. The calendar is on our desk and the champagne waiting for a special moment!

From Theri Rossouw (néé Horn)  
THANK YOU for giving me such an amazing opportunity to speak on Saturday – it was such an honour and pleasure and I am so glad so many people enjoyed my speech!

I can't believe how much Oakhill has changed – it really looks so stunning and so inviting and such a beautiful place for kids to go to school! WELL DONE guys!

Last, but by no means least, a letter received from an existing Oakhill Family:

On behalf of Liesel and myself, a HUGE thank you to everyone involved in organising & hosting the amazing party to celebrate Oakhill's 21st Birthday this past Saturday. Both of us were amazed at the wonderful venue and decor as well as the entertainment, service and food. We really enjoyed our evening, as did everyone else we spoke to at the function.

More than this, however, the event really made us realise anew that we are a part of a very special family at Oakhill -

*Dear Old Oaks – Please browse our website and Facebook pages for the full photo galleries of our 21<sup>st</sup> birthday celebrations – look for faces familiar!*

as you know, Cole & Holly both started from Grade 000 and have a history of 13 wonderfully exciting, interactive and joyful years at Oakhill between them already. To hear Allan talk on Saturday about the start of the Oakhill journey and then for Shane to talk about how that road continues today and into the future, made us both very proud and excited about the coming years for our children at this wonderful school.

Please pass our thanks and appreciation on to everyone involved and to Shane and the Board as well.

Best regards,  
Clive and Liesel

These messages of meaning and care speak to the heart of our amazing School, where learning is a constant joy, where nurturing is real, where striving for excellence and caring and sharing are a part of the daily package.

Please keep filtering your stories through to us and encourage your year group classmates to do the same.

Yours in the spirit of the Joy of Learning,  
**Barbie**



*Please forward your news, snippets and images to  
[b.leibbrandt@oakhillschool.co.za](mailto:b.leibbrandt@oakhillschool.co.za)*