

Chairman of the Board, Mr Peter Wallington, Mrs Janine Wallington, members of the Oakhill Board, ladies and gentlemen and most importantly students of Oakhill.

I have recently travelled to the United Kingdom to visit my brother-in-law, to broaden my mind and to rest. Between viewing van Gogh's sunflowers, and Monet's water lilies at the national gallery I took a walk to the Tower of London to view the spectacular sight of 888246 ceramic poppies, each representing a life lost in the Great War between 1914 and 1918. Each evening a bugler plays the last post and they read out a number of names of men who perished in WW1. The last poppy will be planted on the 11th November at 11:00 - on what is commonly known as Armistice Day. It is a magnificent yet sober display of the **futility** of war and reminds me that despite the fact that there are many things, **ideas and values which we should fight for**, that ultimately there are never any winners in the art of war.

The hardship and heartache suffered by so many families in WW1 is so far removed from our modern society that we are sometimes in danger of being flippant about the significance of its impact.

War is futile: it's pointless, ineffective and ultimately destructive and what struck me when I stood at the Tower of London, taking in the significance of this art installation, was the beauty of **our** lives as parents and teachers. Raising healthy teenagers and being involved in education is the complete antithesis of futility. It is filled with possibility, it is magical, Constructive, Effective, Purposeful, Worthwhile, and Significant. Being in education allows me to interact with the future and sometimes this is dangerous:

James Cooney challenged me to cross dress at Tyres and Takkies this year and I would like to publically apologise for the nightmares you may still be experiencing as a result of seeing me prancing around in a tutu – but this is some of the magic which happens here. Just like in war we have a responsibility as a school to fight for the right to be different. We need to protect the values and philosophy of our school....well that's my excuse for wearing a tutu.....

Oakhill is different to other schools – firstly, your kids enjoy their experiences here but, they are also:

**Self-aware not selfish:** I see this when the Houses move into the community and transform a crèche

They are, **Confident not arrogant:** I see this when Cara Eyre asks me for a dance at her Matric farewell

**Unique not entitled:** I see this when JP Ribeiro takes to the stage

**Disciplined but not regimented:** I see this in the genuine interaction with teachers and visitors to our campus. They are relaxed and real!

They are **Responsible not wild:** I know this because I am not phoned by community members to say that Oakhill kids are outrageously out of hand – it's your parents I worry about!

**Leaders not followers:** I see this in the decisiveness of Lauren Perkins's interaction with others.

And they are **independent thinkers** and perhaps Josh Carver is a good example of this.

We are currently challenging ourselves at Oakhill around a number of issues. One of these issues is challenging the modern, instant gratification culture **or** the blame culture we perpetuate when we don't take responsibility for our actions. I am constantly amazed how

Oakhill kids and staff continue to take responsibility for their behaviour, their effort and their mindset.

Carol Dweck is a psychology professor at Harvard University and she has written a book called Mindset. She describes two specific mindsets and encourages parents and schools to inculcate a mindset which will allow growth, development and excellence in our homes and schools. My generation was told that IQ – Intelligence quotient - was what you were born with. You were either lucky enough to be intelligent or talented at academic work or you were relegated to the ‘D’ set for Maths because you were a dunce. Dweck, in her research challenges this idea and suggests that as parents and teachers we should not be praising our childrens, so called talent, but rather we should be praising effort.

When I was in my last years of schooling I remember the gifted sportsmen. They clearly had great eye-hand coordination and fast-twitch muscle fibres. They just had talent, I was told, and our teachers loved these guys because they made them look good. They always scored runs or goals and they could run or swim the 100m in less time than most. The same happened in the classroom: some of my friends were clearly just gifted at Maths and I had no clue. Unbeknown to me at the time, my teachers were actually doing me a favour because it forced me to work harder, to develop great habits because when I failed, it strengthened my resolve to learn from the mistakes and try harder when I faced a setback.

Dweck calls these two mindsets the **fixed mindset** and the **growth mindset**. I clearly had the growth mindset but nobody bothered to notice. What Dweck ascertained is that as parents and teachers we might be doing our children and students a huge disservice by praising their intelligence. In fact she proves, it is detrimental to their long-term intellectual growth and development. Dweck found that students praised for intelligence, selected easier tasks when given a choice and they lied about their scores to look smart. Students who were praised for effort overwhelmingly chose more difficult tasks the next time around and they showed higher levels of engagement and achievement. Kids with a fixed mindset viewed effort as a reflection of low intelligence or talent. Effort was interpreted as a lack of ability! Those with a growth mindset saw effort as necessary for success, they tried harder when they faced a setback, they used effort to overcome difficulty and effort was interpreted as success.

We recently read out a raft of Waterpolo results from tournaments played during the last holiday at assembly. The results were not great but the response has been overwhelmingly significant. Kids and teachers have said to me, we need to get fitter, stronger and spend more time in the pool. This is a growth mindset and although we might not see the results immediately there is no doubt that we have learnt from the process.

I have watched a young lady, in this audience toil away night and day to ensure that her grades were as good as she could deliver – she is matriculating this year and although she is not going to be the Dux scholar her effort continues to systematically drive her forward and I have no doubt that she will be a success at whatever she does in the future – if she is willing to keep growing and learning.

The lesson for us all is to realise that we are not born intelligent or unintelligent. Interestingly, **Churchill** repeated a grade at Prep school – he was placed in the lowest division of the lowest class

**Beethoven’s** teacher called him hopeless, yet he wrote 5 of his greatest symphonies while deaf

Tolstoy dropped out of University  
Walt Disney was told he lacked imagination  
Michael Jordan's coach said he was no more talented than any other  
Einstein's teacher said he was academically abnormal  
Bill Gates is Harvard's most successful dropout

Fixed mindset individuals set performance goals  
Growth mindset individuals create learning goals  
Fixed mindset individuals find that low marks mean that they are not smart  
Growth mindset individuals realise that scores and marks reflect how you are doing now and that they do not measure your future potential.

The point is that we as parents focus on results too often instead of focusing on learning and whilst I understand the pressures of the modern world we ultimately do our kids a huge disservice by approaching the world in this fixed mindset manner.

So, young men and women of Oakhill, as I said in the assembly earlier in the week: not every one of you will be receiving the top prize in your grade for academic achievement at this Celebration, but that is not the goal. The goal for you is learning and understanding that your potential is immense and that you can achieve anything you set your sights on. In other words keep trying – never give up, don't blame and keep learning.

(Cara, do you have your water bottle with you today – I need a sip!)

Back to my UK trip: I was driving, in the passenger seat, down a Norfolk country lane, when a car came towards us on a particularly narrow stretch of road at a breakneck speed and Andrew, my brother in law, said under his breath 'move over'. Before he could utter another word the side mirrors smashed into each other. We continued down the lane but this gentleman decided that he was not happy with our driving and sped around, followed us and cut us off. He jumped out of his car in a flash and started screaming expletives at us but suddenly realized there were two of us. We were confronted by an aggressive, and obnoxious and perhaps slightly intoxicated man. The scene was set for a fist fight and for the first time in my life I realized that this could go horribly wrong, quickly. Nevertheless, he thankfully realized the folly of his ways and carefully retreated to the safety of his car and went merrily on his way.

There are never any winners in the war of blame. John Wooden the legendary USA basketball coach says: **you aren't a failure until you start to blame. What he means is that you can still be part of the process of learning from your mistakes until you deny them.**

Once again Parents and students, it could be easy to leave here today without the prizes you thought were yours. Matrics you might be sitting here thinking that the results you received in prelims were unfair. Ultimately you have a choice: blame or learn and I am excited by the fact that I see lots of learning around our campus.

On my travels in the UK I also stumbled across a church built in 1240. I was overawed by the significance of the time which had passed since then. We seem to chase time in modern society and it's as futile as war. There is an urgency to all we do....and we give our kids the wrong message. As children we were given the choice between the talented but erratic hare

and the plodding or steady tortoise. The lesson was supposed to be that slow and steady wins the race. But really, did any of us want to be the tortoise? No, we wanted to be a less foolish hare. We wanted to be swift as the wind (those fast-twitch muscle fibres) and more strategic. The story of the hare and the tortoise gave *effort* a bad name. It reinforced the image that effort is for plodders and suggested that in rare instances, when talented people drop the ball, the plodder could sneak through. It said *effort* is for those without ability. People with the growth mindset believe something very different. For them geniuses also have to work hard. They admire effort, no matter what your ability is. EFFORT IS WHAT IGNITES ABILITY AND TURNS IT INTO ACCOMPLISHMENT.

And accomplish we have! When I stood here last year, The Oakhill Sports Campus was in the making. Now we have played cricket, rugby, netball and hockey on the campus and our results this season have been stupendous. Without treading on Chris Marrow's toes, who is going to share what a magnificent year we have had on the sports field, I would particularly like to pay tribute to all the sport staff led by Dave Pryke. This is a magnificent team and you continue to make a significant difference in the lives of all our children – thank you, Chicco, Ian, Alistair and the captain Dave Pryke.

To accomplish these sports results on our new campus has taken loads of effort and I would like to pay **Paul Kotze**, the chairman of the planning committee, **Jon Salters** the Chairman of the finance committee and **Gordon Shutte** who has stepped in to strengthen our finance office, a huge gratitude of thanks. Not only have you led by example but you have transformed the lives of all the students at Oakhill by ensuring that this campus is now a reality.

I would also like to thank all the parents who have invested in the school either via a debenture or a donation. Your contribution will loom large in our history for generations to come.

Lastly I would like to make mention of our Board Chairman who continues to lead humbly and by example. His and Janine's three sons have passed through Oakhill and it is only because of his passion and dedication to Oakhill and particularly the students of Oakhill that he remains steadfast in his efforts to contribute to our cause. Peter, your willingness to lead, your deep love for this school and what it is achieving, is an example to the wider community. Thank you for your guidance and your wisdom. Thank you for listening when we are dealing with complex issues but most of all thank you for your support.

Peter you ensure we remain true to our course no matter what others say. You breathe and live Oakhill. Your integrity looms large and you have led us to this beautiful place.

The OSC is perhaps an embodiment of all we have achieved but the true joy is hearing the laughter of kids and the encouragement of parents from the side-lines, It's in seeing teams winning and losing, seeing determination, camaraderie and team-work, seeing the belief in the impossible, the courage and ultimately in seeing young men and women growing in stature, resilience and pride. This campus encompasses all you have dreamed of and it is now a reality.

Thank you for opening the OSC earlier in the year - the quote on the plaque, which you unveiled says: *whatever you can do, or dream you can do, do it! Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now!* Please accept this small gift as appreciation of all you do for Oakhill.

(Gift for Peter)

Our accomplishments this year have been outstanding and Chris, Olivia and Nicole will elaborate a little later but I cannot help wondering who will be the next: Caleb Bell on the hockey field? Jason Matter or Ishmael Myalato perhaps?

The next Chris Marrow? Lawrence Wiid or Todd Walker – by the way Todd the catch I took to dismiss you in the staff vs First XI match was easier than it looked.

Who is the next Cara Eyre? Kelly Dawkins, perhaps?

Olivia Gardy? Leila Turner

The next Rhys van den Handel in the Polo pool? Dimitre Paggis

Joshua Bennett? No you're irreplaceable Josh

Sam de Kock? Joscelin Fogle

Carmin Micic? Julia Opperman

Who can forget Tiffy in Broadway Blue? Or Kendra Underwood as a mouse or the one and only amazing James Cooney or Emma Stam as Alice in Wonderland.

Robyn, Carika, Leanna on behalf of our whole community thank you for Broadway Blue.

Please entertain us like this again!

(Luke, Josh and Rueben with item from Broadway Blue)

**Ilze Schoeman** joined us to head up the Science department from Koeberg power station where she was a nuclear physicist. She has made an unbelievable impact in a short space of time and for that we are truly grateful. One event she has introduced is the (SAICE) South African institute of civil engineering Bridgebuilding competition and this was a wonderful success. Joshua Bennett, Rhys van den Handel and Andrew Vedder were placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in SWD in the regional competition.

Finn Stevenson, Tristan McKechnie and Louis Maarsingh were placed 5<sup>th</sup>.

I am aware it has been a stressful time for you Ilze but please promise us that you will be a little more relaxed as we move into 2015!

The Allan Graham award was introduced in honour of our founder Headmaster and it is awarded to recognise those who have completed 12 years of schooling at Oakhill. They started at Oakhill Preparatory in 2002. In many ways this has been a pioneering group. They have seen immense change at Oakhill over the years and I would like to pay tribute to them as it is never easy being the ones to carve a new road. They are:

Robert Edwards

Cara Eyre

Christopher Marrow

Luke Stevenson

Fern Wolf

Caleb Bell

Hannah Laughton

### **Academic issues**

Our journey of adopting a growth mindset shows in all our results in the classroom context. We focus on learning and the performance takes care of itself.

The 2013 Matric group ended their year magnificently. There was some sadness, as one of our Matric pupils Grand Parents were murdered during the examination period. Despite this tragedy, this young man completed his career with a University Exemption. It also needs to be noted that we accepted 4 students into this Matric class at late notice and I would personally like to thank Sharon Brown and all the teachers who ensured that these young men and women succeeded. The IEB matriculation results achieved were impressive and all our Matrics and their teachers deserve commendation on this excellent achievement.

We continue our 100% pass rate and a total of 70 subject distinctions were achieved out of a class of 40 pupils. This ratio of 1.75 distinctions per candidate is outstanding. Niklas Martin achieved seven distinctions and received an average of 85%. He was closely followed by Penelope Ceillier with an average of 82%.

Our subject averages compared favourably with the IEB national averages. I would also like to make specific mention of the fact that our Mathematics marks continue their upward trend. **Our average for Mathematics last year was higher than the IEB national average (66.7% vs 64.7%).** Peter Vieyra has been instrumental in ensuring this turn-around and Andrew Browne, our new Mathematics HOD inherits a far more balanced and rigorous department. The Visual Art results are, once again, exceptional and Amy Nuttal needs to be congratulated for that. (6 of her 11 candidates received an 'A' symbol). Our Geography and IT results continue to impress (4 'A' symbols from 10 candidates), and congratulations to Diana Barnard and Sharon Brown on their efforts. Our Drama results are also commendable, (3 'A' symbols from 10 candidates) well done Leanna! Hannalie Viljoen needs to be singled out for the outstanding Mathematical Literacy results. (10 'A' symbols from 21 candidates).

## Staffing

Growth mindsets mean that we always need to provide opportunities for growth within our staffroom and we continue to build a rigorous staff development programme under the leadership of Caroline Payton.

Despite this, schools are also seasonal and it is with both excitement and disappointment that I announce that **Riaan and Joanie van Straten** will be leaving us to return to their beloved stomping ground: the Kalahari. They are unfortunately not with us today. As you are aware, Joanie is pregnant with their second child and unfortunately this little one has been diagnosed with a serious congenital heart defect. They are currently in Cape Town undergoing tests. Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers in the months ahead.

Riaan will always be known as 'the Odyssey man' and although his skills were vast, he implemented this magnificent event from scratch. He is the ultimate professional and his passion and skill will be missed when our Grade 10's depart on their journey next year. To honour his involvement and the fact that he set up this entire facilitation, I would like to announce that we will be renaming Group 1 the van Straten Group. So if you are lucky enough to be chosen for this group next year, spare a thought for Riaan while he's coaching rugby for Griquas.

**Colin Wylie** will be replacing Riaan as the Odyssey coordinator. Colin has participated in the Odyssey as a leader and is currently in charge of all logistics for the Epic Cycle Race. He has immense experience and although he has big shoes to fill, I have no doubt that he is the right man for the job.

**Zachry Viljoen** will also be leaving us at the end of this year to return to Cape Town to further his studies in applied mathematics – we wish him well.

**Sue Carver** is a master teacher and it is with real sadness that we bid her farewell after a number of years in the English department. Sue has some urgent family matters to deal with and I am hoping we will be able to retain her to at least teach the Matric English class next year.

**Suzanne Griffin**, our senior bookkeeper will also be departing for Dubai and as we speak she is celebrating her marriage to her partner Roger. We thank her for all she has done over the years and wish her well on this new adventure.

I am excited to announce that we have acquired the services of an Educational Psychologist who will be joining our staff from the beginning of 2015. **Julia Warren** has extensive experience in counselling in the school context and will add a huge amount of expertise and passion to the team. She will be teaching Life Orientation in the College Phase but will be the counsellor to the whole school. She is innovative and passionate about helping kids, community orientated and wise and I am excited to be able to work along-side her from the beginning of next year. Not only will she help kids and parents navigate through the difficult waters of times of crisis but she will help set up programmes which will enable staff and pupils to grow and be proactive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context.

After being involved at Oakhill for 6 years, I am truly humbled by the quality of the professionals we have assembled on our team here. I am constantly amazed by their humility when dealing with complex challenges. I am motivated by their commitment to your children and of late I am overwhelmed by their effort and talent. I am confused about how it has come about that I happen to be part of the leadership of this cohesive, happy and rigorous group of staff. In a nutshell – you make me look good – THANK YOU!

I have made some good decisions in my life and one of the best was appointing a Cape-Spanish Deputy Head – (the matrices will understand). Dawie has brought a sense of joy and madness to this school yet he is the ultimate professional. Robin Williams, one of my favourite actors said: you're only given a little spark of madness, don't lose it. Well Dawie, you've never lost your spark and it is a privilege to work along-side you here.

I have also for some years been trying to persuade a certain Andrew Browne to join our team in Knysna. When I first met Andrew I got a sense that he had a place here and I have absolutely no regrets about that decision. Andrew has brought stability, consistency, compassion and organisation to our pastoral team as well as the Maths Department.

The reason I mention these two gentlemen is because they will be changing their roles slightly in 2015. As we come to terms with the fact, that for the first time in our history we will have a library or learning commons as it will be known – we will need somebody to lead our innovation and research and ultimately develop a culture of critical thinking and zany madness. Who better to do this but Dawie Botha. Dawie was an academic director before he joined Oakhill and his experience and wisdom in this area will certainly allow us to change the culture of learning and thinking as we develop this in our school

Pastoral care is all about building relationships intervening when families are in need and holding people accountable and it makes sense to consolidate the role of discipline into this area as we progress into the future. Andrew will be working along-side our new Psychologist to develop facilitations which will speak to self-discipline and taking responsibility for your actions and I have no doubt that this will impact positively on the lives of your children.

I have left this to last because it leaves a huge hole in our staff compliment. I am sure many of you are aware of **Phil Stewart's** illness. Phil has been our Estate manager for my entire tenure. Phil is responsible for transforming the natural environment which your son's and daughter's call school. Every garden bed on this campus and the OSC has the touches of his fingerprints. Phil has been diagnosed with a carcinoma on his lungs and has been given a short period to live. This has certainly come as a huge shock to our community and we obviously remember him and his family at this difficult time. It is important to take note of his huge contribution during a significant time of our growth.

On a happier note: **Ian Melliar**, who has made a significant difference to our Water-Polo results, represented South Africa at the Water-Polo world Cup as an international umpire and we are proud of his achievements.

**Dave Pryke**, who has played County and Provincial cricket in his time was also invited to do the - level 3 cricket coaching course and **Tiemke Rijpstra** has been awarded her FINA accreditation to officiate as an open water official around the country. We are proud of their achievements.

### **Good bye to the class of 2014**

**Fern Wolf** has been our SRC president this year and has led graciously with patience and humility. Leading, is never easy but Fern has a keen sense of what Oakhill stands for and in my opinion represents all that is admirable about this institution.

She has led by example at all times, quietly, with grace and determination and her gentleness speaks for itself. She certainly has a growth mindset in every sense and I will miss her calm yet confident demeanour next year.

Individuality definitely stands out in this Matric group. There are strong voices amongst you and there is a strong sense that you demand freedom but *freedom is useless if we don't exercise it as characters making choices and sometimes we have to accept that we make the wrong choices but says Daniel Taylor we are free to change the stories by which we live. Because we are genuine characters, and not mere puppets, we can choose our defining stories. We can do so because we actively participate in the creation of our stories. We are co-authors as well as characters. Few things are as encouraging as the realisation that things can be different and that we have a role in making them so.*

Matrics you exit one phase of your life today and enter another but the truth is they are all one and the lessons you have learned and the lessons you still need to learn are what's important.

I recently took an integrity test and one of the questions asked was: should you respect your elders even if you don't like them? This question really made me think! I am of the opinion that we have started to bastardize the word respect because there is a distinct difference between respect and like. I don't have to like you but I should respect you as a human being. This is a very African principle: **Ubuntu** roughly translating to "human kindness." It is



an idea which literally means "human-ness," and is often translated as "humanity toward others," but is often used in a more philosophical sense to mean "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity".

So as you depart Matrics, remember be kind, there is no harm in this. Remember, you have the choice to be different and to do things differently. You are in control of your destiny now - write your stories in the stars!

And so ladies and gentlemen, that's our story – it's a good one and we will wake up in 2015 to new art and Drama facilities, new classrooms and an exciting new learning area which will encourage your children to collaborate and put in the effort which ensures success. Thank you for your support! Love and encourage your kids, particularly today and thank you for the privilege of being able to serve you at this great school!

Ends