

Gaudy speech

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen...

On my last day at Teddies, I thought that I might begin with my first!

I was probably more anxious than most to fit in when I first came to teddies and I simply wasn't sure what to expect. Maybe this was due to the fact that I was coming from, what was then, a slightly old fashioned all girls prep school where I'd worn a cloak in the winter and a boater in the summer – no sign of that here! The lead up to my first day was an anxious time; I had discovered we would be having a swimming test and swimming (more specifically diving) had never been my forte. My dad and I consequently spend several painful afternoons in the local swimming pool where I attempted to dive over and over and over again so that I didn't belly flop in front of everyone. I will also admit that I went shopping a few days before coming to teddies with the sole purpose of buying an outfit to wear to breakfast on my first day. I had been warned that people wore 'trackies' and jumpers to breakfast so my mum was tasked to buy just that. When I finally made it to my long awaited first breakfast, I was utterly devastated to see that the majority of people seemed to be wearing uniform. You can imagine my further disappointment when I went to my swimming test and was not asked to dive – in fact even being told I was forbidden to dive as the pool was too shallow and it was... 'against health and safety'.

Indeed there were many more things over my first few weeks at teddies that were not as I had expected; having heard that the school had a relatively relaxed approach, I was very much taken aback when I was castigated in the link for coming in at 9.17pm rather than 9.15pm and being made to stand at the back of the class in chemistry for taking my blazer off without permission. I also was the proud owner of a very handy rucksack for carrying my books. Unfortunately it only survived the first day when I discovered it was considered definitely not cool to have any type of bag let alone a backpack. What I quickly came to realise was that there was a lot about my new school that I hadn't expected and not just on the surface...

I had still not quite grasped what was in store for me over the next 5 years but I had realised that despite its quirks, I was already part of something special – and the sense of belonging, quirks and all, was real!

Over the next few years though, it became obvious to me that this was not something that could easily be conveyed to others - be it siblings, parents or friends. The reality is that whatever your perceptions of this school are, as a pupil here, you are an integral part of a community and it is hard to explain the incredibly strong and invisible bonds which link all parts and aspects of the school. Now, having been through the school, I stand here incredibly proud to have been a part of it. It's no exaggeration to say that you have to experience it to fully understand what it means.

So I wonder if any of the following everyday events shared by the whole school community might help me to get my point across; in my opinion the following could be said by anybody in the school - boy or girl, shell or upper sixth:

1. At our school you are not allowed to walk on grass... although if you are daring enough and think there is enough sun, you could take a step onto upper 1 on your way back to house and then turn around and be guaranteed to see all members of the field houses following.
2. If you want to see the whole school all together don't come to assembly or chapel but turn up to the Radley match at the end of the rugby season...
3. If you don't want to be the centre of attention with everyone clapping and straining to see who it is, do not drop your tray in the dining room – or fall off your chair (as I discovered!)
4. And if you never want to pay a visit to Mr Rowley's office for not doing your best make sure you stay out of the 'comfortable middle'.

But it isn't just the everyday highs and lows of school life that have shaped our community; the past 5 years have also been marked by some significant events none more so than recently and today it's hard to

deal with the fact that someone so special to me isn't here to share this day (and I know I am not alone in this feeling.) In the years to come when I look back on the past few months I know I will remember a tragedy which changed us all but I'll also remember the hope, the kindness and the generosity which accompanied the sadness and the grief. In the aftermath of such a shock I wasn't prepared, although perhaps I should have been, for the strength and unity which has dominated the upper sixth year and indeed the whole school over the last few months. As a school, but particularly as a year group, we have had to share something which none of us could ever have foreseen. We will all always carry it with us and it has forged an even stronger bond amongst us as friends.

Grace was someone who absolutely loved school and thrived in this community. I can now understand why she loved it so much when I think about her passion for life and I see more clearly how this school suited her so well.

I know for many of the upper sixth it will be hard to leave behind the comfort of our world here but as I look back I have realised that this is something I think the school have been preparing us for from the beginning.... I'd like to think that if I was starting school again (and just to be clear I'm very happy I'm not!) I would not be so eager to drag my dad down to the swimming pool or buy a new outfit specifically for a 15 minute trip to breakfast. I'm happy with the person that I've become and I am hugely grateful to all the people who make this school the place that it is. I also hope that I've given you a sense of what it's like to be involved in this incredible and unique community (despite effectively telling you it can't be done unless you are actually here!).

It now just remains for me to say thank you to all the staff who have been, and are, so incredibly supportive in every respect - and the driving force behind this wonderful school. And last but not least thank you and good luck to all the upper sixth - an amazing group of people who deserve in the future, too, all the happiness and success that they have achieved here.