

## Prize Giving Speech - November 2020

### “Certainty in a time of uncertainty”

What do I mean by this? It is this, that as we face the most enormous challenge of our time in the shape of the COVID-19 pandemic, we at Farnborough Hill are held firm by our community, by our unity, by our certainty.

Our certainty is centred on our sense of purpose – our belief in what it is that we aim for and that quite simply is to educate the whole person, to lavish care attention, knowledge and development on each intrinsic part of the human story.

To foster progress in the academic, the athletic, the aesthetic, the interpersonal and the spiritual sphere.

If I give you the analogy of a journey perhaps this will become clearer.

When you set out on a trip you know where it is you are planning to arrive. You will probably have a route in mind, indeed you many even know the particular roads you will take and places you plan to stop.

So off you go, speeding away, enjoying the experience, appreciating the views, the changing landscape, perhaps even enjoying the company.

But what if there is a block, a jam, a problem?

Well, the choice is this, wait and see if the situation gets better, the problem resolves – or go off the path – travel around the hazard – your sense of purpose, your focus on the destination allows you to veer off the traditional or usual path, and still arrive at your destination.

And I say to you do not be shaken or rattled by travelling on a new route because if you focus on the end point there will be little worry.

By having this long-term view, you will be calmed and at peace with the new, and actually will possibly find some joy in the innovation, seeing new places, relishing new opportunities, growing in courage and wisdom.

Through purpose, you can overcome most eventualities and arrive at that chosen destination a little wiser, a little more empathetic and with plenty of stories to tell of the journey taken.

For me this has been the experience of the past seven months.

In the midst of huge turmoil and uncertainty we, at Farnborough Hill, have held steadfastly to our sense of purpose and have found new ways of travel to ensure that we still arrived at where we are going.

Indeed, this night very much sums up that successful landing. When we talk, listen and read of the achievements, growth and successes of our girls we can all relish in the knowledge of a job well done.

Because for us at Farnborough Hill our whole purpose is one of aiding the individual girls on their journey to adulthood, to becoming the best version of themselves, to discovering their gifts and talents and their zest for life.

I believe we can all see the fruits of our labour in all that we see and know of our young women.

However, in another sense we have not seen the full blossoming of the strong roots that are planted at Farnborough Hill.

An ancient Greek proverb seems rather apposite:

A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit.

For us at Farnborough Hill, we help nurture individuals, but the progress is never completed, and certainly not at 18 years of age – No, instead our Farnborough Hill alumnae continue to develop and enrich those around them as they grow and adopt, as they reflect and refocus – it takes a lifetime.

Our vocation is a pleasure and in the words of Louis Lafosse – we go about our work “joyfully and wholeheartedly”.

COVID has wreaked havoc in so many ways, but I am an optimist and I, while not dismissing the terrible difficulties caused by this virus, see too just how we as a community have flourished.

We have given certainty in a time of uncertainty.

Throughout lockdown we held together as a community.

And what is it that is meant by community. The answer comes simply from the root word and suffix. Common and unity. It means nurturing human connection, it is a “web of mutuality”, in the words of Martin Luther King.

A more detailed explanation is this:

In the Sufi tradition, it is taught that the primary purpose of life is to awaken the essence of who we are. Once we do this we are invited to lovingly embrace this realisation. The gifts of community is that it offers each of us the fire of affirmation and support to achieve this....even on those days when we feel no flame.

But at that time we can recall the words of Thich Nhat Hanh “I ask all of you to hold up your hands and tell me the truth. Do you believe, as I do, that someone in our village is keeping the fire alive?”

And to keep these embers alive, we have six basic universal needs.

These needs are the motives for all actions.

These six requirements of a fruitful and content life are:

Certainty  
Significance  
Variety/uncertainty  
Love and connection  
Growth  
Contribution

We can define four of these necessities as needs of the personality:

certainty, uncertainty, significance and love

While two are the needs of the spirit.

We will experience fulfilment when we grow and when we contribute beyond ourselves.

It strikes me that the reason for our success, the answer to why Farnborough Hill thrives is that our people thrive – we nourish our community.

So, although for each of us all six factors must be met, our individual tilt will vary. Nonetheless every single one of us in order to prosper does require to be fed in those ways – and I witness this happening each and every day at Farnborough Hill.

Let us look at each essential element:

- Certainty  
All of us want security, knowledge of the situation, a degree of continuity. Farnborough Hill with its heritage, legacy and ethos offers this in spades.
- Uncertainty  
In reality no one wants a totally known reality, we want variation, excitement and endeavour. In the safest of environments this is provided here as we challenge girls physically and mentally, we provide opportunities for girls to step up and out of their comfort zone.
- Significance  
Each of us wants to matter, to be known, to be valued. Farnborough Hill with its fundamental belief in the gifts and talents of each child is focused on recognising the importance of each individual person.
- Connection and love

I have always taken great delight in the fact that we are proud to talk of love. A school founded on fellowship and love cannot but succeed. We respect, value and love our counterparts in the community and recognise each day the special links between us.

- Growth  
To develop, to move forward, to learn, to create. This is the bedrock of our principles in being – Educate the whole person was the acclamation of the Sisters of the Religious of Christian Education.  
Each day all of us grow and have the opportunities to develop.
- Contribute beyond ourselves  
The wonderful aspect of being part of a community is simply the impact we can each have on another. The kindness, the inspiration, the encouragement that is fostered at Farnborough Hill is simply first-rate and therefore once all the elements ultimately needed for humanity to flourish are more than present in Farnborough Hill.

The drivers that motivate are fed and therefore we are providing our girls with every opportunity to be a life force.

Through this sound foundation comes resourcefulness. I would judge this to be vital for success in life. Indeed, it is resourcefulness and not merely resources that is at the centre of triumph.

And while we consider the potential damage that this time of uncertainty could have delivered in terms of a person panicking, being knocked down by setback, paralysed by fear of the unknown, I see our girls on a trajectory of success borne out of their resourcefulness.

Perhaps an important message to consider in this time of uncertainty in regard to the future is this; that we should take stock of where we are in the present. Life is to be lived in the here and now and we should thrive in this experience.

We might not be exactly where we want to be, and certainly in many ways we are not where we used to be. But back to that metaphor of the journey – let us enjoy the voyage and experience it fully, vibrantly and gratefully, and having been fortunate enough to prosper in this mutually beneficial community, are reminded of the words of Henrik Ibsen that a community is like a ship, everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm. Everyone must lean in and offer support to others.

It is in this manner that we will uncover freedom and joy and thereby grow.

Both certainty and uncertainty are vital to our life force. Farnborough Hill has provided, and will continue to ensure our girls have the scaffolding required to face any challenge.

“When a great ship is in harbour and moored, if is safe, there can be no doubt. But that is not what great ships are built for” - Clarissa Pinkola Estes.

We must aim to be courageous and confident regarding the future. We cannot, like King Canute learnt, we cannot control the tide, all we can control is our own attitude towards reality

And I offer you these wise words

“If uncertainty is unacceptable to you, it turns into fear. If it is perfectly acceptable, it turns into increased aliveness, alertness and creativity” - Eckhart Tolle.

Let me end now with the beautiful words of Morgan Harper Nichols as a salve to your soul and as a grateful acknowledgement to the value of Farnborough Hill.

Take heart

Take heart

Do not be afraid

The future may be uncertain

But there is no need to hide away

Every day is an opportunity

To courageously show up

Even when you do not feel equipped

Let grace surprise you

Setting fire to your bones

Strengthening your mind

In the wild of your unknowns