



THE PITTWATER HOUSE SCHOOLS FOUNDATION DAY 3 March 2009

BLESSED SHALT THOU BE

I suppose its quite an unusual thing to have the Founder of a school still able to appear at the forty-seventh anniversary of that Foundation. But here I am. And I am very honoured that the Principal has asked me to perform this duty today when we read such a long catalogue of distinguished preachers over the years. I always much enjoy the opportunity to be with you for this annual celebration.

I began thinking about the Foundation of this School more than fifty years ago when I was a young teacher who had worked in schools in Sydney and London with all ages of students male and female from subprimary level to adults.

I wanted to found a school which would exemplify the ethic of hard work hence our motto “semper diligens” which, as you know, means “always working hard”. I find myself constantly surprised by the number of people who regard hard work, or any work, as something they try to avoid in order to fritter away their time and their lives doing little or nothing which so often leads to boredom or ill health or crime or even early death as a result.

I wanted to found a school where the individual was important and central to its philosophy and practice; where children were not just numbers sitting in serried ranks, put together to be talked at or shouted at by often unqualified and uninspiring people who regarded teaching as no more than a relatively lucrative way of avoiding anything more difficult or visible.

One of the meanings of education is “drawing out” and I wanted to found a school based on the principle of drawing out of each pupil the best of his or her abilities and the recognition that every child has some kind of talent to be developed for the benefit of each individual, for their family and friends, for their community and even for their country or the world.

It is, of course, impossible for me to say much about a history of fifty years in a few minutes but I can tell you that even with the onset of the inevitable weaknesses of age I can remember a great deal of the

highlights and the lowlights of our School's history. And there are many occurrences and developments of which I am the only person alive who knows the details as I have been intimately involved since it all began by the day, by the hour, even by the minute.

All those years ago in the sixties the background against which I started Pittwater House was one where we were aware of many new things such as the Beatles; Barbie Dolls; transistor radios; Mary Poppins; dishwashing machines; Rolf Harris; the Concorde aeroplane; the Vietnam War; Hippies, the assassination of Kennedy and Martin Luther King; the first man on the moon; samurai ninja games; talkback radio and teabags.

We had no computers; no portable telephones; no ipods; no online anything; no coloured photographs; all those things which are simply taken for granted these days. And we didn't have the world financial markets being manipulated on a daily basis by a bunch of spivs.

I wanted in those early days, against this backdrop, to make a contribution to the education and the life of Australia through the younger generation making their own impact on society.

You have probably all heard the story of how I opened the School next to what was then the shire garbage dump in nearby Curl Curl in a church hall which no longer exists and then moved to another one in Narrabeen and finally, with a machete in my hand, cut my way through the virgin bushland of this hill where we are today in order to acquire, on behalf of the future non-profit company which has owned the School ever since, the first parcel of land which was actually mostly a swamp draining all the stormwater from what is today Collaroy Plateau and land which was considered at the time to be almost useless.

In the first year where only five little boys attended on the first day of this School I waited until we had a few more before I held a Foundation Day Ceremony, an event we continue to celebrate today and the arrangements for which have changed over the years as considerations of safety and other circumstances have imposed themselves on our lives. And what a wonderful Service of Worship this has become with the fabulous music and pageantry and participation in our praise of God.

The media took an early interest in this school. It was a curiosity since the last non government preparatory school to have been founded was nearly sixty years before in 1904. This is in stark contrast to today where

almost anyone can start a school and obtain massive government financial help (I had none) and these days can even expand to the point as some gentry did recently where a privately owned group of so-called schools can become bankrupt owing its bankers vast sums of money.

And in those days the media reported faithfully what one said when interviewed rather than pressing now often absurd and worthless opinions onto their readers and listeners. I used frequently to be called upon by newspapers, radio and television, to comment on educational topics in the national and international arena but I withdrew from all publicity in more recent years when the media degenerated into the abusive, dishonest farce which much of it is today.

It is fascinating to recall that in those earliest years we had our first School bus, which I used to drive; we taught eight-year-old pupils Euclidian geometry and Latin; we had a boy who became an English earl; I developed a rapid reading and word recognition scheme; we had a fulltime sergeant-major who dealt with daily parades of all the pupils, raised the flag and rang the period bells by hand.

Over the years, as a result of pressure from the School Family and from the community, I founded the Grammar School and the Girls College and Junior College and later the Foundation Studies programme thus completing the whole educational spectrum on this campus.

From the earliest days we used to invite distinguished visitors to the School so that pupils, as they do today, had the opportunity to meet leaders of business and the arts, heroes, politicians who control our destiny, sportsmen and women, and even royalty.

And hand in hand with the emphasis on tradition and time honoured practices of the kind which have shaped and guided our civilisation for thousands of years providing us with the heritage we have today, we have also led the field in many innovations. "In the Forefront of Education" was one of my early publicity mantras: we were indeed in the forefront of education: the first to experiment with throwaway desks made of cardboard; we led the field in the special diet for hyperactive children; we re-introduced holding a debutantes ball for schoolgirls; we developed the highly successful twin school concept; we were the first in Australia to allow girls to join cadets subsequently to be adopted by the government; we established the unique Country Life Scheme at Bathurst; we were among the first to accept foreign students as a normal part of life in our multicultural country.

And all this has borne the fruit that I originally hoped would become manifest in the School. You are now the beneficiaries of the hard work of many people who have gone before you.

But I am supposed to be preaching in this Service am I not and so let me finish my remarks with a biblical text as is to be expected.

In that weird book of the Old Testament bible called Deuteronomy where Moses bangs on so, we read in the 28th chapter at the 6th verse:

“Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.”

I’m sure your parents thought you were blessed when you came into this school and I’m sure the teachers and administrators did too and we made every effort to see that what you were given, what you were taught, what you were nurtured in, would retain that state of blessedness.

And as you look back over your school life whether you have been here for many years or are just beginning on that remarkable road of exploration I’m sure you will find many things to be grateful for, many things which have helped to bring you to the realisation that hard work is the most rewarding state of human endeavour and will bear its fruits to your benefit and that of your family and the community, just as I had the vision for you fifty years ago.

And so you will indeed go out blessed as you came in.

So what does looking back over fifty years of history and effort and heartache and joy really mean? Does it mean anything?

I means, I believe, that every one of us has a duty to continue what is good and wholesome about the School and our lives; to resist steadfastly the shallow and the evil influences which you know, and I know, abound around us, constantly seeking to divert our attention from what is worthwhile and valuable.

Let us then, all of us, go forward with compassion for our fellows; with love for our families; with respect for our teachers and our elders and betters; with enjoyment of fun and satisfaction of happiness; with confidence in the future: indeed, challenging

the panic merchants who are currently trying to persuade us on a daily basis into thinking disaster is just around the corner so that they, like classic con artists, can then claim the credit when things turn out better than they pretend.

Let us, rather, be joyful; let us be blessed as we go out with a clear conscience, filled with the inspiration and grace which God will give us if we but ask for it.

Yes, let us not be afraid of the power of prayer, my brothers and sisters, for without it in my own humble life, we should not be in this place together this day.

So on our Foundation Day, in our forty-eighth School year, as we look forward shortly to the celebration of our Golden Jubilee, our fiftieth anniversary in 2010, I salute you all for the discipleship you have shown for the values of the School and the objectives of your Founder and the support you and your families continue to give this now great institution.

And as we make our way ahead with confidence against all disaster, thinking of and praying for those victims of world terrorism and the current Australian bushfires, and with the constancy of the pilgrim, I wish you peace and joy and yes, even prosperity, in the coming months and years and I pray that the blessing of Almighty God will be upon us all and specially upon you pupils and your Principal and his staff today and for ever.

REX MORGAN, AM MBE
FOUNDER
THE PITTWATER HOUSE SCHOOLS