

Speech Day – June 21, 2024

Address by Head of School, David Robertson

Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Staff and Students of Queen Margaret's School. As we were fine tuning the schedule for today's events, I noticed that Mr. Monroe had allocated me 20 minutes for this address which was either very kind and considerate of him or just an indication that he knows me too well. If I take that full-time allocation or anything very close to it, I will state right now that I will buy everyone here an ice cream today. Ah! I can feel the vibe already coming through – “take your time, DBR, relax, hakuna matata, no rush at all!” but the clock is already running.

A school like any other institution is just a collection of buildings and natural features until we the people give it life, until our actions and interactions create experiences and feelings. Your QMS is what you are making it every day, it's a blank canvas waiting to be drawn or painted, it's a musical score waiting to be written or played, a script waiting to be delivered or a game ready to unfold. But it's also a conversation waiting to happen and a positive interaction waiting to be felt. You can see where I'm going with this line of thinking – we're the authors of our own fate, the creators of our own culture and one of the huge strengths of this school this year again has been our collective commitment to create something fundamentally good, maybe even at times, I would contend, great.

Quite a few years ago, I was at a conference in Washington DC and at one of the workshops the speaker was an African American Baptist Minister who had a very special way of capturing and holding our attention. Among the many valid and memorable points she made, the one that I want to recall today was the need to create tangible reminders for ourselves especially when it comes to values and virtues that we hold dear. She told a compelling story about courage and how all else really flows from it.

Then at the end of this highly effective and entertaining talk she pointed to a tray of stones by the door and instructed us to take one on the way out, but, the deal was that we had to pick up our chosen stone, pause, close our eyes and think of all the examples of courage that we had just been hearing about and also think of someone who embodied courage for us. That stone was then imbued with that quality and, of course, for each of us it became our 'Courage Stone'.

I actually just gave mine away recently to a former student who needed it, but it does work, I guarantee you and I recommend it.





What the stones did was to give us constant reminders of that quality every time we picked them up and I like many others found myself picking it up frequently and squeezing it to help me focus on what would be needed, dare I say it, particularly before a potentially challenging meeting or phone call.

My other stone is my 'Wisdom One' – that's one that someone gave me and I have it here. That quality of wisdom is arguably more important than it has ever been. At a time when millions of people allow themselves to be misled by petulant, posturing, principle-less politicians and leaders who are an insult to the very concept of democracy, like many I find myself asking when did people stop thinking? Education in many sectors of western society has given up on its fundamental responsibility which is to create wise people who can make solid, sensible, compassionate decisions. Wisdom is about what you do with the knowledge you acquire, how you find the right ways to help as many people as possible. I'll stop my rant there, but, here at QMS we have again shown in every area of the school that we refuse to give up on the noble pursuit of developing thoroughly good people. The despots, the autocrats, the dictators and the bullies will never understand that. As Gandhi said, "Prejudice is often just the natural development of ignorance" Discrimination, tribalism and polarization are sadly on the rise again, just when we thought that we'd be building bridges, too many walls. It does all come down to education or the lack of it. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, "Never have so many understood so little about so much!"

On a much more uplifting note, we at QMS are all about education inside and outside of the classroom and I want to take a minute to applaud the huge commitment of our teachers and coaches again this year and indeed all the staff of QMS dispersed throughout the audience and the grounds.

We couldn't achieve the quality of the experiences we have without the quality of the various staff teams that we have. They all share a common approach of always being prepared to go the extra mile. This is their moment in the sun, as it were, so please join me in recognizing their amazing efforts now (Applause).

Graduating Class of QMS, the biggest grad class ever I may add, to go back to those two qualities I talked about earlier, we hope that you are leaving us wiser and more courageous than you were when you started here. When you've given hundreds of speeches as I have over the years there is a very real danger that you will again wax lyrical, with an excessive amount of positively indispensable advice. But, because I started the way I did and I was after all Scottish before I was a Canadian, the mental calculation of the cost of all that ice-cream has not escaped me!





As I close, remember that is relative statement, I do want to leave you with some thoughts that will change your lives if you remember them and implement them. Like most of the important things in life they're really quite simple – we've heard versions of them since we were in Elementary School.

Treat other people the same way as you like to be treated. Treat every challenge or disappointment as an opportunity. Treat failure or defeat as a necessary step on the way to success. Don't expect certainty all the time as a quote I use a lot says, "We feel most comfortable when things are certain, but we feel most alive when things are not" Treat every interaction as an opportunity to inspire those around you through thoughts, words and deeds.

Treat every new day as a gift, that's why it's called the present.

And finally, give people the gift of your smile and, do what I'm about to do, but do it a lot- say 'thank you'! Thank you, all, for the outstanding year that you again created! Thank you!

