

**AN ADDRESS TO ST MARY'S COLLEGE SENIOR SCHOOL
PRIZE GIVING BY
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WIFE OF THE GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
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Good Evening everyone. I am delighted to be with you tonight. For many of you, this will be your last speech night before you continue on the next stage of your life's journey. My last St Mary's College speech night was in the City Hall in March 1965. I sat where you are now, exams done and dusted, results in, chafing at the bit for speeches to finish so I could get out to join the real world they say you prepare for in school. Well, I've now been in that real world for 46 years and when I was asked to speak to you tonight I wondered what wisdom I would now have, for my 17 year old self.

In 1963, I changed schools suddenly, over the course of a weekend, when my mother realised, in my third year of high school, that the new compulsory science component needed to matriculate was not taught at the school where I was, because most students left at the end of year 10. So, one Friday, I collected my books, my mother dyed my blue uniform green, and on Monday morning I took my seat in Mother Delores's chemistry class, feeling bewildered and overwhelmed with embarrassment. Struggling with chemistry, a totally foreign language to me, was the least of my worries. The blue uniform had proved fairly resistant to the green dye, resulting in a somewhat mottled effect. The blue was particularly tenacious down the seams and insisted on shining, like neon strip lighting, through the green,

from top to bottom. I knew that as the new girl, all eyes would be on me and people would laugh at me. I hadn't had time to say goodbye to my friends and I thought that they would think it was my idea to leave them, and never speak to me again. I knew I would never fit in, never find a friend let alone a boyfriend and things would be even worse when they found out that I was shy and basically not good enough. Good enough for what, I wasn't quite sure. I felt deeply lonely.

How did I know, with such certainty, that I would never find a friend, never fit in? Because my thinking led me to imagine the worst. In short, *I told myself*. But, of course, neither of these things happened. St Mary's was good for me. My transition was made easy by two girls in my class. In year 11, I became a prefect, got my matric in one year, won the prize for English Literature and a Scholarship to go to university. No one was more amazed than I was. So I have a great deal to thank the nuns and staff of St Mary's for, but perhaps most of all for taking me seriously, treating me as an individual and for their daily modelling of the gentle art of courtesy and good manners.

But that account of how I felt at school is a clear demonstration of the significance of what I might call self-talk. Self-talk comes from our private thoughts and imagination and is one of the most powerful tools human beings have to shape their lives and beliefs. Self-talk is what we say to ourselves, when no one else is listening. Negative self-talk can stop you from doing things; taking risks; having a go, because it gives the power to other people to make decisions about you. Conversely, positive self-talk

keeps the power for decision making in your hands, and can give you wings to fly to amazing places.

When it came to music I had no trouble telling myself, “yes I can.” I had an aptitude for and excelled at music. By 16 I had my A Mus A and a list of prizes and was performing on ABC radio and Television. I imagined a future in music and told myself I could achieve anything I wanted to. And I did. My passion was such that I wanted to learn more about music, to share it and to inspire others, so, from quite a young age, performing and teaching music was my way, of giving community service.

I referred to leaving school and going into the real world but of course the real world is here and now for all of us; you and me both, isn't it? Life is not something that you can put on hold while you prepare for it at school. School is life. That is why I love the St Mary's by line: *A good place to Grow*. The day to day immediacy of relationships both real and cyber, inclusion, exclusion, success, failure and their associated anxieties, ensure that *school is the real world*. These social and emotional interactions with others are just as important as the acquisition of knowledge, for how we handle these interactions, shapes the person we are. It is people who have the greatest impact on you, either positively or negatively. Being taken seriously by others and treated as an individual is essential to developing the strong inner core of self-worth and sense of identity, your anchor in times of turbulence.

Already, each of you has talents to share; those talents, combined with your personal attributes, create a unique mix, that gives you *your* identity, and makes *you* the unique individual that you are. There is no one else in the whole world who is exactly the same as you and there never has been in the history in the universe. That is truly amazing and certainly something worth valuing! You may have a talent for friendship; you may have a skill at maths; maybe a talent for sport; or a skill for organisation. Whatever your skill is Use it! Share it! Offer to mentor a younger child, or help out in the playground. Helping *others* shows that you take *them* seriously, and value *them* as individuals. It nourishes *their* sense of identity and self-worth. Helping others engages both *your* mind and *your* heart, and makes *you* feel connected and useful, and gives you a sense of purpose, self-worth and well-being. So, both you and those you help, flourish.

In sharing my passion for music I developed a passion for teaching, so I trained as a primary teacher when I was 30, after having three children, and immediately on qualifying was offered a job at the Friends' Junior School. Within 18 months I was asked to be Acting Head. From then in quick succession, and after the birth of my fourth child, I went from early childhood and music teacher to Co-Head, then Head of Friends Junior School, at a time when most Primary Principals were men. I was there for 25 or so years. Music was my skill and passion. It led me to teaching; music got me my first teaching job. I told myself that I was good at music and would be good at teaching.

In the pursuit of my passion I became a willing learner. Through music I explored many disciplines. I wanted to learn more about music than just how to play the piano well. I was curious to know how music fits into life in general; into history; and into science and maths. I needed to find out about the physics of sound, the neuroscience of music, how it affects our brain, and our emotions. I needed to know how music is used as a language; why is it innate in all humans, and why it is such a powerful form of expression, more powerful than words. I wondered why I had success using music to calm children who suffered from autism or other disorders. In short I learned how to learn, and to be a good teacher you have to be a good learner. To be successful in life you have to be a good learner, for knowledge gives you power.

Learning is the gateway to everything. Learning makes it possible for you to earn an income and change careers several times if need be. Unlike some specific skills and some knowledge, learning is one capacity that will never go out of date¹. The more successful you are at learning, the more knowledgeable you become, the more competent, independent, self-sufficient and confident you will feel, and the more confident you feel, the more you will say to yourself, *Yes I can*. Successful learning puts you in control and makes you resilient, because you know that if you have to, *you have*, or *can find*, the resources to deal with the unexpected.

Learners are *curious*, they wonder how things came to be and *experiment*, trying things out to see if they work. They *investigate*, find

¹ Claxton, Guy What's the Point of School One World Publications 2008

things out, gather information and then explore possibilities with their *imagination*, using both mind and heart to look at things from different perspectives and put themselves in other people's shoes. Learners know who to *share* ideas with. They balance creative brainwaves with hard critical *reasoning* then stand back and take stock by *reflecting* and evaluating. Most of all learners have *courage*. They stick with things when the going gets tough and they know mistakes are for learning, not just something to get upset about. What makes them successful is how they handle failure.

In 1965 I attended my final St Mary's Prize Giving, in the presence of Archbishop Young. His Grace presented the prizes and gave the address. Not for one minute, at that speech night, did I imagine that 46 years later I would be here addressing to you tonight, at the St Mary's Prize Giving of 2011. Have you thought where you might be in 46 years' time? Opportunities for girls have changed so much since those days. In those days young women were expected to marry and have children, cook and clean for their family and not join the workforce or have a profession or paid occupation. At the time of *my* last speech night no one imagined that in 2011 Australia we would have a female Governor General and a female Prime Minister, or that Tasmania would have a female Premier. At the time of my last speech night, women could not be police officers and married women working as permanent employees in the public service had to retire if they became pregnant. Women did not drive buses, become electricians or plumbers and if they joined the armed services, could only work as typists and the like. Needless to say most of the lawyers and doctors were men and no women were appointed as judges.

All of that has changed dramatically since the time of my last speech night. I say this to you tonight because I want you to understand that the *only* thing that will hold you back from being the best you can ever be, is you. Never before has each one of you had such a great opportunity to utilise your capacity to achieve whatever you want to achieve. Start now; tonight. Grab that opportunity to be an effective and optimistic future maker; someone who will make a positive difference for good in the world; someone who loves learning; someone who will bring aptitude, knowledge, passion and imagination to their work; someone who will find creative solutions to some of the challenges confronting our planet and its people; someone who loves their work.

You know, one of the greatest assets in life is to have engaged, informed and loving parents and inspiring teachers. Those of us who are teachers know that it is the most rewarding job in the world. Our job is to inspire you to want to learn, and to challenge you to identify your talent. Our job is to give you wings of confidence to become the best you can be. Our reward is to see you fly, onwards and upwards. Those of us who are parents know that we cannot determine what you will become; all we can do is fit you out for the journey in the knowledge that you are loved; with a good education; and with a compass of spiritual values and ethical principles to guide you to that imagined, but unknown destination. Having done that, parents know it is up to you, and only you to create your own path there.

Find what you are good at. Find a passion. Find a purpose. Become a learner. Become knowledgeable. Think for yourself. These skills and attitudes will engender optimistic self-talk, and see you succeed at becoming

the best you can be at whatever it is, that you choose to be, in an era of mind boggling technological development; an era of rapid change; an era of breathtaking pace. The 21st Century is one of the most challenging but exciting times in which to live. It's a century that challenges you to make a positive difference for good in the world. *And if you did wouldn't that be exciting?* Thank You.