OAKHILL

THE JOY OF LEARNING

HEADMASTER'S NEWSLETTER

11 March 2014

Dear Parents

Our year has hardly begun and we already have some amazing stories to tell.

Our inter-house galas and athletics days were a wonderful display of colour and camaraderie. Our Grade 6's have been on their hike. The Grade 5, 6 and 7's enjoyed the Valentines Ball and Knysna was amazed with the wonderfully successful Oakhill Water Polo Chukka Festivals held in the Knysna Quays.

Our Cricket results have been truly outstanding with our College 1st XI beating both York and Outeniqua this season. Chris Marrow, our Captain, also scored an Oakhill best of 154 not out against Outshoorn High School and all of this took place on our new sports campus. Our Prep School u11 Cricket side have also recently beaten Knysna Primary and Ryan Shearer scored a century against Plettenberg Bay Primary.

The College planned their annual Experiential Learning Day which was enjoyed by all and our Athletics days vs Glenwood in both the College and the Prep School were outstanding affairs. It has been a busy term and it is also going to be a very long one and already I have noticed some tempers flaring. I would like to remind all parents that we are here to ensure that we deliver a superior product to you and your sons and daughters, but this cannot be achieved when teachers are attacked – either verbally or via email. This type of behavior undermines trust and ultimately the very fabric which binds our School together. Teachers, as all of us, are very human and there is no doubt that we will disagree at times. It is at these emotional and sensitive stages that we should be remindful of our own humanity and treat each other with respect. Most of all we should always clarify what our kids are saying to us before we jump to conclusions.

We have also had the good fortune of celebrating the unbelievable achievements of some Old Oaks and I was delighted to be informed by Nik Martin (Dux Scholar 2013) that he was awarded a major scholarship for being ranked in the top 5 students, out of 800 in the Architecture faculty at UCT. Emma Horn and Nicholas Cuthbert have also been placed on the Deans Merit List. Emma has just completed her first year in Chemical Engineering and Nicholas his first in Electronic Engineering. Simone Heymans has also just passed her Masters in Fine Art, with distinction. These achievements continue to prove that Oakhill prepares young men and women for the rigours of life after school.

The process of writing something down allows one to really grapple with the issue, to argue with yourself (and others) and ultimately it makes you think – hopefully about solutions and how you can make a difference.

Recently I wrote a blog about the ambiguity of living in South Africa. Ultimately, if we cannot live with ambiguity, says JP Landman, we should consider moving to another country. I cannot help thinking that the same applies to Oakhill and 'the joy of learning'. Oakhill is an ambiguous space – it always has been and I suppose the same applies: if you cannot deal with the ambiguity of diverse opinion then Oakhill is not for you. Oakhill is a rigorous space where thinking and learning is encouraged in all spheres. Recognizing the individuality of each child embraces the fact that every person is unique in their own way and this premise, in itself, promotes independent thought, diversity and ultimately raises the levels of ambiguity. Most importantly, for our community to thrive in this freedom, ambiguity and respect need to be bedfellows, albeit uncomfortable bedfellows but nevertheless we need to be open and tolerant of different opinions. Ultimately it is our reaction to problems and everyday issues which will define us.

Unfortunately, modern culture demands that we have a right to be happy. That we should always feel entitled to enjoy all we do. The truth is: if we never experience difficulty we would never experience joy. If we never struggled we would never succeed. If we never disliked an experience, we would never understand what being ecstatic was. If we never lost we would not be motivated to win. Our society has an obsession with the extraordinary and somehow we think that we have a right to always be euphoric. The fact is we don't have this right! We have the responsibility to have the ordinary come alive and that is why I love this poem by William Martin:

Make the Ordinary Come Alive

Do not ask your children
to strive for extraordinary lives.
Such striving may seem admirable,
but it is a way of foolishness.
Help them instead to find the wonder
and the marvel of an ordinary life.
Show them the joy of tasting
tomatoes, apples, and pears.
Show them how to cry
when pets and people die.
Show them the infinite pleasure
in the touch of a hand.
And make the ordinary come alive for them.
The extraordinary will take care of itself.

We should, once again, find the wonder in allowing our kids to struggle through the ordinary – it builds resilience. We should allow our kids to experience hurt – it allows them to see how much we love and care for them. We should encourage our kids to do well at the things they do not enjoy – it allows them to understand the meaning of hard work and perseverance. We should allow our kids to solve their own problems – it prepares them for the journey of life. We should allow our kids to understand that they will not like every individual who crosses their path – it encourages them to be tolerant. We should allow our kids to learn that not all men are just – it will enable them to see that for every scoundrel there is also a hero and for every enemy there is also a friend. We should teach our kids that it is not the end of the world to fail – it will allow them to understand that cheating is not an option. We should teach our kids to be honest, especially with themselves – it builds self-awareness. We should teach our kids to stand up for what they believe is right but to consider other opinions – it will allow them to develop confidence.

We all want our kids to grow up learning these lessons but sometimes we protect them too much to allow them to experience situations which will nurture this growth. Recently Forbes published an article entitled: *the 7 crippling parent behaviours that keep children from growing into leaders.* Dr Tim Elmore suggests that we are failing our children today – coddling and crippling them – and keeping them from becoming leaders they are destined to be. Dr Elmore had this to share about the 7 damaging parenting behaviours that keep children from becoming leaders:

1. **We don't let our children experience risk.**
2. **We rescue them too quickly** and I see this every day at School where parents swoop in and try to solve their children's problems. Tim Elmore says: *when we rescue too quickly and over-indulge our children with 'assistance', we remove the need for them to navigate hardships and solve problems of their own*. I personally believe this perpetuates our children's perception that life always needs to be enjoyed and happy! They manipulate us as parents to solve their issues without always informing us of all the facts!
3. **We rave too easily.** Bill Gates famously said: *if you think your teacher is tough, wait until you get a real boss and your school may have done away with winners and losers, but life has not. In some schools they have abolished failing grades and they'll give you as many times as you need to get the right answer. This does not bear the slightest resemblance to anything in real life!* **Parents raving too easily** allows kids to feel good but it's not necessarily connected to reality and kids quickly work this out! The most dangerous consequence of this behaviour by parents is that kids eventually learn to cheat, exaggerate and lie and avoid any difficult reality. They have been conditioned to avoid it!
4. **We let guilt get in the way of leading well.** Your child does not have to love, and be happy, every minute of every day and you certainly do not need to feel guilty if they are not!

5. **We don't share our past mistakes.** Our kids need to learn consequences.
6. **We mistake intelligence, giftedness and influence for maturity.** Allow kids to develop a sense of independence! We need to grow and nurture this in them.
7. **We don't practice what we preach.** This, I suppose is the most difficult. 'Do as I say, not as I do' does not hold water with this generation. We need to lead by example and swallow our pride!

You see the more we chase happiness, the more it will elude us. The more we chase joy the more difficult it will be to live lives which are filled with purpose and the joy of learning. I cannot promise you that your sons and daughters will enjoy each of their classes every day. Nor can I promise that they will achieve 80% in Afrikaans, nor can I promise that they will be ecstatic about writing a Maths test, but I can promise you that I have seen young men and women thrive and beam when they see the results of their hard slog have paid dividends. I can promise you that your kids will be thriving when they link the threads of cause and effect but only if we, as parents, support this thinking. I promise you that we are committed to ensuring that your sons and daughters are nurtured but not coddled, because only the test of fire makes fine steel. We are committed to enabling, guiding and facilitating your sons and daughters grow and are prepared for the real, modern 21st century world.

So, if we agree that the joy of learning is not about being happy all day, every day, then what does the joy of learning at Oakhill really entail? Can you define it and is it the same for everyone?

Does the joy of learning mean, sailing through life, happy and engaged in what you are doing? Doing only what you love? Experiencing emotional highs which you try to sustain for as long as possible? Dreaming about the ultimate creative space?

Or does it entail embarking on a journey which stretches you, which places you in challenging and uncomfortable spaces which allow you to learn more about yourself. The fact is not all kids are going to like and find all teachers amazing and exciting – the chances are they will connect with some and not others. So the question begs: what do we do when we don't seem to connect with a teacher? What do we do when we think a teacher is overly pedantic about how you present your work? What do you do when you fundamentally disagree with a teacher?

The 'Joy of Learning' is not allowing kids to do as they want.
The 'Joy of Learning' is not allowing kids to only do the things they love.
The 'Joy of Learning' is not allowing kids to be disruptive and ill-mannered.
The 'Joy of Learning' is not allowing kids to get away with inappropriate behaviour or language.
The 'Joy of Learning' is not allowing kids to think that they know it all.
The 'Joy of Learning' is not allowing kids to be apathetic.
The 'Joy of Learning' is not always getting your homework right.
The 'Joy of Learning' is not getting straight A's.
The 'Joy of Learning' is not having to enjoy every lesson you attend.
The 'Joy of Learning' is not dependent on teachers' entertaining you.

You see, learning your times table is not always fun, finding out about the depravity of human behaviour over centuries is not necessarily exhilarating, and learning the periodic table certainly does not necessarily inspire the heights of joy!

The point is: figuring these things out, being inquisitive, wanting to find out the meaning of life, is at the very heart of the joy of lifelong learning – one realises that you might never figure it all out but the ups and the downs of the process are what count and this in itself is what should motivate you intrinsically. Realising that we are human and that we are allowed to make mistakes is what ignites the joy of learning. Realising, that we say and do things which are dreadful at times, generates the desire to want to be a better person, to be more forgiving, patient and kind. Realising that you have the capacity to improve propels you to wanting to learn more.

The ‘Joy of Learning’ is embracing ambiguity.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is realising that life can throw you a curve ball.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is knowing that for every valley there is a mountain peak.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is understanding what you love and knowing that there are times you will do things you don’t enjoy.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is the desire to know more.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is making mistakes.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is wanting to improve.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is realising that you have the capacity to learn more.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is realising that we cannot live only for ourselves.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is developing self-awareness.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is learning to be honest with yourself.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is making the ordinary come alive.
The ‘Joy of Learning’ is realising that learning never stops.

So, do I experience the joy of learning at Oakhill? I certainly do and my interaction at assembly last week reassured me that we are not perfect but we are self-aware. We are making mistakes! Our young men and women are remarkably honest and face up to challenges when given them. This does not mean that they will always be polite or regurgitate rote platitudes when you pass them on the pathways but it does mean they would be disappointed if they don’t see you and engage with you because it is in this interaction that we learn. This does not mean that the young men and women of Oakhill will be the smartest, best dressed or groomed scholars in the country but it does mean that should you wish to engage with them you will find a thoughtful, connected and compassionate individual.

Lastly, we have travelled a huge distance since 2008 and I thought I would share with you the enormous generosity of the Oakhill community over the last few years. We have, particularly in the last year, been able to maintain and develop our facilities due to those parents who have opted to take a debenture or donate generously toward our building and development fund. Not only has this commitment from parents been of enormous academic, cultural and sporting benefit to our students, but it continues to allow us to remain the leading school in the area. Oakhill can also hold its head high in the national international context when it comes to results and growing facilities.

Building projects since 2009:

Set out below is a schedule of projects undertaken since 2009. It is interesting to compare costs from 2009 to date and it is quite easily noticeable that replacement costs today would be exorbitant. The fact that we have spent close to R30 million from current budgets, debentures and donations only goes to prove parents’ wholehearted appreciation for the need of new facilities.

2009	Hall refurbishment	R100,000
	Classrooms and new Administration block	R4,000,000
	Sports office	R100,000
2010	Refurbishment of classrooms	R1,000,000
	Coffee Shop and tuck shop	R500,000
	Pathways and play areas	R1,000,000
	Landscaping	R500,000
	Staffroom refurbishment	R80,000
2011	Parking areas and Classrooms	R700,000
	Prefabricated classrooms	R800,000
	Pool area refurbishment	R100,000
	Staff accommodation	R100,000
2012	Refurbishment of music classroom	R100,000

2013	Purchase of new land	R3,800,000
	Construction of new fields	R3,000,000
	Construction of Astroturf	R6,000,000
	Infrastructure: roads, sewerage, water, workshop	R1,000,000
2014	Road infrastructure	R50,000
	Music Centre	R1,000,000
	Art, Drama, Library and classrooms	R5,000,000
	Repair land slip	R300,000
	Clubhouse	R300,000
	IT upgrades	R360,000
		R29,890,000

Future Projects:

Future projects include building a Boarding House, Clubhouse, a new pool for the aquatics club, netball and tennis courts and a new commercial hub which would include a new coffee shop, tuck shop, stationery shop and clothing shop.

Section 18A tax certificates will be issued in respect of any donation to the Building and Development Fund.

We urge all parents to get involved in our fundraising initiatives and I would encourage you to contact us at the School should you want to be involved.

Yours sincerely

Shane Kidwell
HEADMASTER