



14 April 2016

Dear Parents,

On the 06<sup>th</sup> and 07<sup>th</sup> April I said goodbye to a group of girls who travelled from Johannesburg to complete the Oakhill Odyssey. This journey started approximately a year ago when I met Grant and Mone Wheeler who asked whether Oakhill would be prepared to facilitate an experience for a group of girls from schools in Gauteng. These young ladies flew down to embark on their 21 day journey. As we gathered at the flag posts at the front of the school our current Grade 10's made their way from class to give them a unique farewell. Little did I know that our girls had taken it upon themselves to write letters which they handed out at the farewell ceremony. This gesture reminded me of the growth of self-awareness and empathy that is prevalent after a facilitation of this nature.

Soon these Johannesburg lasses had said their goodbyes and were heading down the path on what will be a life-changing experience. This reminded me that some of the lessons I have learnt in life certainly did not emanate from mountain top experiences but from the times when I struggled the most. The problem with our generation is that we feel that life owes us something and when we have to face adversity we almost feel hard done by and we forget that our best learning experiences were not necessarily the ones we enjoyed the most. This is not to say everybody hated the Odyssey - quite to the contrary I have received many letters and phone calls indicating that our young men and women realised that life has some ups and some downs and that ultimately we will be judged by how we face the good and the bad.

So why would I mention this you might ask? Because I have had the privilege of interacting with a family who lost their mother recently. This was the most tragic set of circumstances and their father decided to send the girls to Knysna to live with their Grandparents and attend Oakhill. These young girls have been smothered in love and have grown in stature in their time with us but I have been intricately affected by the way their grandparents adapted to this set of circumstances. To be frank they have been an example of steadfast courage, love, kindness and selflessness. These are not traits one often sees in the modern world and I have been reminded that we should hold ourselves to a higher standard. We are quick to blame when things don't go our way and even quicker when things do not turn out quite like we had hoped for our children. Unfortunately this continual molly-coddling does not build resilience and certainly does not encourage our children to deal with the vicissitudes of life.

I have also acutely realised that life does not prepare us for the realities that ultimately unfold. A young lady who was about to fly down from Johannesburg to embark on the Odyssey with her friends has had to deal with the reality of her father's death the night before she was about to depart. This wonderful father had written 21 (handwritten) letters to her for the 21 day journey. I can only imagine that these treasured letters will keep her strong as she experiences excruciating emotional pain at the present time but I know they will also be significant as she embarks on her life's journey. His words will shape her thinking and guide her actions for the rest of her life.

You see, one would not wish this set of circumstances on anyone but because we constantly get caught up in our own nonsense we forget to see and empathise with the pain of others. Perhaps we should all follow the example of our Grandpas' and Grannies'. Stop complaining, start supporting. Stop moaning about your own selfish, entitled stuff and start seeing the beauty around you. Stop worrying about what could have been or would have happened. Start making good things happen. Stop rushing, slow down and appreciate your family. Stop spending time on your phone and get out and cycle with your kids. Stop listening to gossip and add some positivity to the world. Stop trying to point out the wrong in others and focus on your own inadequacies. Stop expecting the world to dish up strawberries and cream and accept that from time to time things do not go according to plan. Stop trying to prove a point and get your ego out of the way and make the world a better place. Stop protecting your kids from any sort of heart ache and start helping them to see what they have learnt from the experience. Stop wallowing in self-pity and become an active citizen who makes a difference in the lives of others. Stop pointing fingers and start taking action to help solve problems. Stop creating problems, stop being the problem and start finding solutions. Stop believing that life owes you something and concentrate on what you owe the world. Tell the pessimists to move on and believe that despite all the pain, you have what it takes to spread beauty, kindness and love.

I read this excerpt from the Talmud to our Odyssey groups as they depart:

*“Be yourself – But be your best self. Dare to be different and follow your own star. And don’t be afraid to be happy. Enjoy what is beautiful. Love with all your heart and soul. Believe that those you love love you. Forget what you have done for your friends and remember what they have done for you. Disregard what the world owes you, and concentrate on what you owe the world. When you are faced with a decision, make the decision as wisely as possible – then forget it. The moment of absolute certainty never arrives. And above all, remember the God helps those who help themselves. Act as if everything depended upon you, and pray as if everything depended upon God.” – The Talmud*

We should all take heed of these words at this time in our history.

We live in significant times and I am hoping that all our families watched our democracy at work during the reading of the Nkandla judgement by Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng. It may take some time for the consequences of this judgement to play out in the current heated political scenario but we should all be immensely proud of our constitution and what it stands for. If this set of circumstances is not a call to action for all of us, then I’m not sure what will lure us out of our apathy.

Our own Grade 10 Odyssey celebrated five years since we first started this facilitation in 2012 and we should remind ourselves why we initially decided to embark on this rite-of-passage: we wanted an event that would challenge young men and women to become more self-aware and in doing so release the enormous untapped potential which makes up each individual. We also wanted a rite-of-passage that would enable young men and women to start interacting with the type of men and women they wanted to become. Over the last five years we have had 19 groups, 224 students and more than 86 staff members embark on this journey and it has truly been a privilege to see them grow and develop in the process. We welcomed back our 38 Grade 10’s to their first assembly this term and we are truly grateful that they are all back safely.

Term 2 has started in a magnificent fashion and as always our campus has come alive with the laughter and joy of your children.

Unfortunately we I have to announce that we have some resignations at the start of the term:

**Tamzin van Staden**, my PA will be departing in May to once again take on the full-time role of being a mother. We have already managed to secure her replacement and I am pleased to be able to announce the appointment of **Lyndall Hill** to this position.

**Deborah MacDonald**, our Grade 2 teacher is also departing at the end of Term 2 and we wish her all the best in the future.

**Daleen Halton**, who has been with us for a number of years has taken up an exciting opportunity in Beijing, China where her daughter is currently residing and we hope that this new experience will be fulfilling for her in the future.

Although it is always stressful when a teacher leaves, I want to assure you that we are following due process. We are currently interviewing for these positions as well as our Geography position in the College and I will be able to announce these appointment in the next few weeks.

Our Dancers in the College have recently been to the RSA Performing Arts Championships in Johannesburg and their results have been stupendous:

Hannah Micklewood came third in the Open Solo 13 – 15 Dance section, earning the Bronze Medal

Erin Young and Hannah Micklewood came third in the Ballet Duet 13 – 15 section, earning the Bronze Medal

Erin Young, Hannah Micklewood, Gemma Kilian and Lauren Boni came third in the Lyrical Small Group 13 – 15 section, earning the Bronze Medal

Erin Young and Gemma Kilian came second in the Open Duet 13 – 15 section, earning the Silver Medal

Lauren Boni, Kalcey Polson and Kayleigh Packwood came second in both the Lyrical Trio 13 – 15 and the Jazz Trio 13 – 15 sections, earning silver Medals for both

Gemma Kilian and Nicholas Thomson won the Contemporary Duet 16 – 17 section, earning the Gold medal.

To crown these wonderful achievements, Gemma and Nick were both chosen to represent South Africa at the World Championship of the Performing Arts, which takes place in July in Los Angeles. We are really proud of their achievement!

Lastly, please be aware that you will receive a letter from me regarding Oakhill School's Independent Quality Assurance process in the next few days. We would like you to be involved in an online survey and I would urge you to take the time to complete this over the long weekend.

Enjoy the rest of the term!

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shane', written in a cursive style.

Shane Kidwell  
HEADMASTER