



17 March 2016

Dear Parents,

As I drive to work every day I have the privilege of observing our town preparing itself for the rigours of the day. I see young and old, black and white, men and women gearing up to tackle a variety of actions and reactions. Perhaps it's the reactions I want to focus on in this letter.

As I wind my way down the hill there is a frenzy of taxis and cars on narrow streets which in Johannesburg would bring a sense of anxiety and stress. Here I only see smiles and acknowledgement as everyone politely gives way and gently nudges each other on, hoping they gather a momentum which will ultimately get us all moving at the pace we need to. Every morning I also see a distinguished gentleman in his 50's walking down George Rex - He always acknowledges us! I do not know him but I know that he sells his wares at the Heads and many of my friends have spoken of the richness of his life and his interaction with them. His walk is always brisk and determined - He has goods to sell and family in faraway places to send money to. Shortly after making eye contact with him I see another portly soul who is always laughing, gesticulating or smiling and engaging earnestly with the friends around him. You cannot place a price on a smile, a laugh or a friend and I can see that he does not take those around him for granted as he holds them captive with his stories. In fact he must be larger than life because I never notice those around him - He holds the platform and he commands attention because of his generous smile.

Further down the road there is always a snaking line of, mostly, men waiting in an orderly fashion outside Loerie Park. These unemployed souls are fed by a gracious lady out of the back of her car. Perhaps this is the only meal they will see today, or perhaps they will eat now and bring food home for their families later tonight. I am always moved by generosity - Particularly when it is done quietly and modestly and I am reminded that there is a special power in these actions. Shortly after I cross the first traffic light I always notice the gentle lady who operates the lights, quietly going about her business to ensure order. I promise to stop one day and say thank you but I never have! Then of course, I round the corner onto the N2 and Hannah, my daughter, makes a special effort to catch Smiley's attention as he waves his arms vigorously pleading and urging vehicles to move faster and to pay attention. He is unwavering in his devotion to the traffic and he is respected by all! To some he is just a face as they speed through from Port Elizabeth on their way to Cape Town but to us he is a local treasure - We often say thanks, drop a snack or a drink and hoot to show our amazement at his skill and to say thank you.

Now the pace picks up and whatever conversation there was dies to monotonous grunts as we realise we are nearing our destination. As we head up the hill to school, I notice the potholes are forming rapidly and this only means one thing - Some complaints from you or the neighbours about the damage Oakhill's 4X4's are causing in the suburb. For some reason, the municipality sees a road in the industrial area as more important than this country lane which accommodates approximately 300 cars each morning and evening. I'm not sure of the reasons but I make a note to ask Zolani Jenteza our Maintenance Manager to see whether we can find the time and money to fix the few really problematic ones.

Finally we arrive at the circle - A claustrophobia descends on me. I'm not fond of tight spaces but I am soon put in my place by a wonderful smile from a student as I head to my parking. Despite the claustrophobic sense, the kids are happy and trying to connect with their friends before the madness of the first class begins. My children eject from the vehicle as it comes to halt and the scurry for bags and sports equipment explodes as they head off to face another day.

I gather my belongings a little more sedately and start to amble up the path. This path was built in 2010 and the trees planted intermittently were saplings at the time. Now they are strong trees and I marvel at how time has passed. I also often remind myself of the families who bought trees for this venture - these were exciting times! I am reminded that it is very easy to take things for granted. I am also reminded each day when I see young men and women sitting under these trees that we should marvel at growth, not only of saplings but of the young men and women who now sit under the shade of the more mature Stinkwood. We are truly privileged because the environment I first encountered in 2009 is far more welcoming and intimate in 2016. The reason Oakhill has very little disciplinary problems is as a result of the beautifying of this environment.

A little later I will walk up to the Learning Commons for Achievers' tea and I will remind myself how awful the cement road is between the classrooms. I am reminded not only because it looks awful but because I hear the noise from the classrooms reflecting off this hard surface and I see teachers and senior students scowling at Grade 3's because they are struggling to concentrate in

their Mathematics class. In my last newsletter, I suggested that we would like to redesign this area to allow for more green space for the kids. The fact is that this will cost R136 000 to do. We will sell trees with personalised plaques which will help us raise 40% of this cost but I am appealing to any parent who sees this as an important project and would like to donate toward it, to contact either myself or Terri Pautz on t.pautz@oakhillschool.co.za. There is no doubt that your donation will directly affect the lives of our children on a daily basis.

I was waking up the path to my office before I got distracted but that's because I would like to avoid my office at all costs. It means I have to be bound to my desk, focus on my computer, answer an average of 70 emails per day and deal with the mundane. I would prefer to scamper across to the quad to teach Grade 8's about the joys of metacognition or wander down to the OSC to coach my U14 hockey side. I am reminded of why I became a teacher at times like this. These children reinvigorate me, they make me come alive because they are motivated, honest, happy and keen to learn. Ultimately, this is what working with young men and women should be about. So, instead of heading up to the office I decide to climb back into the car, phone my PA, Tamzin and ask her to clear my diary because I'm heading out to see the Grade 10 Odyssey students who are already 10 days into their journey. I stop off at Pick n Pay in Sedgefield to buy some easter eggs and head out on a 300km round trip which I know will make my day, my week and who knows, maybe even the term! I have the privilege of cooking breakfast for the leaders when I arrive - they devour a dozen eggs amongst themselves and I make a mental note to purchase some more bacon for when I head back in the next couple of days. These staff members are heroes! They have sacrificed immensely for these young men and women this term. Not only are they exhausted but they are grappling with the very real issues of 20 teenagers on a 400km walk. I am humbled by the stories they tell of growth, physical, emotional, social and spiritual growth. I am reminded that I am also on a journey and I am surrounded by amazing human beings who care deeply for your sons and daughters but I am also acutely aware that with growth there are very often moments of angst and pain and facilitating all of this is immensely exhausting!

After wandering through the solo site and seeing the van Straten group interacting with young kids at a farm pre-prep school, I head back. I have an hour and a half to myself to contemplate what awaits me: appointments with parents, the scholarship exams and touching base with the Deputy Heads around a number of issues. Finally I pull into the car park and realise, I'm back where I started: on the pathway. I trudge up to the office to face what I've been avoiding.

We all have our dreams and aspirations for our children but I remind you that working with boys and girls, young men and women is both exhausting and invigorating and as we head into this holiday I would implore you to stop, like I must along George Rex, to thank the faceless traffic officer who makes our lives easier each morning.

My trudge up the pathway to my office has been made worthwhile by the delivery of letters to the Headmaster, from all the Grade 10's on Odyssey. I look forward to receiving these but I enjoy, even more, reading them because they contain wisdom beyond my wildest imagination. Let me share some of this with you (and I quote):

I hope this is just the start of discovering something new about myself....
Everyone wants more out of life, but I guess we all forget that less is more....
Odyssey has made me realise how strong I actually am....
Killing people with kindness solves almost everything... (WOW!)
I've been so concerned with everyone else that I forgot to ask myself if I was okay....
It has been great to see things and not through the lens of a cell phone camera....
(Isn't that a reminder to us all? To see in the moment rather than trying to capture every moment)
It's okay not to be okay....
Difficulty does not last forever...
You can only help people with words, you cannot cycle up the pass for them, otherwise I would...
I know I can become the man I want to be...

My journey to school is indicative of a greater life journey and our Grade 10's have also embarked on a journey which will change their lives forever. It has forced them to contemplate, it has nudged them into facing themselves and their foibles and ultimately it's reminded them to remain humble and optimistic about what awaits them as they return.

I cannot believe that we welcome them back this week and I would encourage all Grade 10 Parents to savour the moments as they welcome their young men and women back into their homes.

Change of time for Preparatory School

Caroline Payton was appointed to head up our staff development programme last year and has made some innovative and exciting changes which are going to stretch and challenge the staff in the future. To enable this programme to have a lasting effect we

have changed the Preparatory School closing time on a Friday. We have consolidated the day by changing the timetable earlier in the day and your children will not be missing any contact time with teachers but will be finishing school at 13:15 instead of 13:40. Please take note of this and make the necessary arrangements to collect your children at the correct time.

College

Our Grade 8's have settled well after a magnificent Grade 8 camp at the start of the year and I would like to thank our Senior House Mentor, Hannalie Viljoen for ensuring that these young men and women have integrated so well into our Oakhill family. They are a wonderfully energetic, hard-working bunch of boys and girls and I look forward to seeing them develop and grow in the year ahead.

Staffing

Elna Brown has been the voice of Oakhill for 24 years. She was the first appointed staff member of the school and with her imminent retirement comes a changing of the guard at our young school. An era has passed and Elna has played a significant role in it and her presence will be sorely missed by staff, parents and pupils.

Elna has been a committed and passionate advocate of Oakhill. She has been an example of professionalism, generosity, love, happiness, commitment, patience, devotion and forgiveness and my life has been personally enriched by her beautiful presence in our offices. On behalf of all Oakhillians, past and present, we would like to say thank you and wish you every blessing in your retirement.

Welbedacht road upgrade

Another journey will certainly be far more pleasant in the near future because Oakhill will be upgrading the rest of the Welbedacht lane in the next month. We have signed our Service Level Agreements with the Council and we look forward to contributing our part in ensuring that the road to the OSC will be safe for all those who use it. I would like to make particular mention and thank Paul Kotze, the Chairman of our Planning Committee who continues to work tirelessly behind the scenes to get issues like this sorted out. We are truly indebted to him for his time and tireless energy!

Term 1 of 2016 has been immensely rewarding and busy and I sincerely hope that you will enjoy the moments you have alone with your children over the holiday period. They are growing up quickly and we should remind ourselves that all they want and need is our love and time. To those celebrating Easter we wish you a blessed time and we look forward to welcoming you all back in Term 2.

Yours sincerely,



Shane Kidwell
HEADMASTER