

Address to the Old Boys' Chapel Service, Sunday 25 March 2007

This weekend we celebrate the 75th Anniversary of the Old Boys' Union. Young men have been leaving the School for 75 years or more. The first generation left the School in the 1930s. They went into a world recovering from depression and preparing for war. Sadly, we remember some of these fine men in the beautiful window behind me. They were asked to give the greatest sacrifice of all, so that we may enjoy the peace and prosperity we all now enjoy. There are some from that noble generation with us today. Their presence here reminds us of the contribution that they have made over many years to the School that we know today.

The second generation to leave was my generation. I left in 1969, into a world of student protest and national division over Viet Nam, a world whose youth were rebelling against the ideologies that saw it divided into military blocs, East against West. Here in Australia we, the baby boomers, were about to become the first real beneficiaries of the technological revolution, the liberalisation of social attitudes, and, most of all, the emergence of the mini-skirt.

The third generation to leave this School has gone into a different world yet again, a world where the expectations and aspirations of Generations X and Y are vastly different from those of their baby-boomer parents. These are the adventurous, mobile, multi-talented generation, blessed with technological skills, full of experimentation, demanding, and impatient of old ideas and styles.

As the generations have changed in thought and attitude, so too the School has changed. Physically, the sheep paddocks that were here in 1929 have progressively been transformed into a grand school, with excellent facilities. (The boarders won't believe me, but even the boarding houses are better now than the drafty corridors that the boarders had when the School was first built). Thousands of students and hundreds of staff have come and gone, uniforms have changed, attitudes and approaches to teaching and learning have changed, interactive white boards have replaced chalk and the blackboard. Caning has been replaced by caring.

But in other respects, things have not changed so much.

There has always been a chapel in the School, not this one, true, but a chapel nonetheless. When I was confirmed in 1964, I took my first communion in a small wooden hut not far from where the front doors now stand. In 1965, this wonderful chapel was built. It is the most beautiful of all the spaces that I remember from my school days. And it is for me a very special building. My father's portrait hangs in the stairwell leading down to the crypt, I was married here in 1985, and my son's leavers' dinner was preceded by a moving and memorable service here in September 2003.

In this place we are in the heart of the School. It is here that we pause to reflect on the lives that have been led in the spirit for which the School stands. It has been here that we have farewelled so many of the School's favourite sons, and paid tribute to those whose lives have moulded and built this School.

It is here that we are most moved to think about the values that the School means for us. The School's ethos has been constant, to develop the physical, intellectual, spiritual and moral capabilities of the boys (and girls) who come to the School. This ethos, and the beliefs which stem from it, link the three generations which have been here, the current generation, and the ones to come. What connects us all, to each other and to the School, are the values we share, the values for which the School stands, and the values which this wonderful chapel symbolises. It is this shared moral dimension to our lives which gives the School its true sense of community.

This is a young school. We are the early generations. There will be others to come, hopefully many. We can only guess at what sort of world the next generation will face when they leave. The current generation is here at a time when Australians have enjoyed possibly the greatest period of prosperity in our history. We cannot assume that that will last. The fact that the School has an honourable past and a vibrant present does not mean that the School has an assured future. To prosper, the School must continue to grow, to mature, to change and to accommodate the demands of an increasingly complex and demanding world.

We are all integral to its survival. The next generations will only worship in this chapel as we have done if we collectively accept that we have an obligation to pass on to them a School which is in better shape than it was when we came to it. That is why it is

so important that you boys who are here now remain connected to the School, long after you have finished your studies here, to play your part in the School as it moves forward. Because you will continue to be members of the School community long after you have left. I hope you will all look for ways to contribute to the School after you have left it, just as the generations before you have done.

Mark Harrison

OBU President 1998–2000
Board Member 1998–2007