

INTRODUCTION:

Firstly I would like to extend my own warm welcome to the Madam Chair, trustees, staff, parents and fellow pupils. I would also like to thank Mrs Burnet Ward for her kind sentiments, none of which I deserve!

Little did I think that when I first came to Wycliffe as an eleven year old aspiring squash player, that 7 years later I would stand here delivering this speech at the end of 5 fantastic years as a pupil of Wycliffe College.

Strangely, it was only last Sunday that I began to reflect over my time spent here; thinking about what an all-round life-changing experience this has been. Unlike me, I actually had a *deep* conversation with a good friend and fellow sixth former about the reasons behind why we joined this relatively unknown school. Admittedly, at different times, we found ourselves in a very similar boat; we were both in a position whereby we did not have to come to a boarding school, we were both looking to expand our sporting horizons and in doing so, we were both hoping to profit from a top class education.

With so many schools out there to choose from, we discovered that we fell for this place for the very same reason. Wycliffe is more than a school, it is a family. Here, no one person is seen as superior to the next, everyone has a place and everyone is considered valuable to the community. Never have I been to a school where each individual is consistently made to feel part of the collective student body. It was this homely feel which drew me to Wycliffe. Earlier this week, I was given the book which documents the history of Wycliffe College. In it I found a short excerpt from a sermon delivered by W.A.Sibly, the 2nd Headmaster of the school, dated 1936. It read: *“I want us all to cherish here, and continually to put into practice, the belief that school life can be something better, happier and more beautiful than many schools in fact have found it.”* Every single word which Mr Sibly spoke that day shone through in that Sunday afternoon chat. I would like to think that W.A.Sibly would be immensely proud to see his school in the state it finds itself today and that two boys, and I would hope all pupils, continue

Speech Day Speech 2011

to heed the very words he preached three-quarters of a century ago in our Chapel!

MAIN BODY:

If I was to describe my early Wycliffe life in a word, it would unquestionably be 'tumultuous'! Not only did I nearly not come to the school, but when I did... I was unbelievably homesick! The longest period I had ever spent away from home was one week and, in truth, I did not know what had hit me!

Being a genuine daddy's boy, I was, naturally completely lost in my new, independent world. Within days, I was having to fulfil tasks I had never even heard of, let alone been able to do, such as; 'making the bed' and even taking care of my training agenda at the tender age of 13. Suffice to say, that is when homesickness kicked in.

All those in Year 13 in the audience who remember the Year 9 Greg Mason, will probably recall me with a mobile phone strapped to my head. I will never forget ringing my dad at work after each and every single lesson, during prep time and even in the early hours of the morning, occasionally in floods of tears just to compound his misery. It was a difficult time for him and the entire family for that matter, knowing I was so miserable on the other side of the Severn. It must have proved even more difficult at the sight of my September '06 phone bill, a meagre £264! The only upshot to this episode was that as Vodafone's newest, most valued customer, I received the best upgrade packages known to man!

I was all but ready to leave the school before Christmas, but I was convinced by a few notable people to stay. These people I will come to mention later on, but their love and support at the time, gave me that little bit of hope I looked for and made me determined to see the process through. Undoubtedly, I owe my present situation to the time and care they invested in me, and this is something for which I will be eternally grateful! It would also be

Speech Day Speech 2011

an injustice to decline to mention the people in our year group who played their part in making me see the enjoyable side to life away from home. However, I think I will take a leaf out of Mrs Burnet Ward's book and avoid rattling off the entire list of names, but to all those past and present, I will never forget what you have done for me.

Now, moving away from my Eastenders-esc initiation, I slowly began to see the sense in the words of W.A.Sibly that school life could be something more!

Squash has undeniably been the major influence on my time here, but despite the fact I joined for the sport 5 years ago, constant injuries have played a part in hampering my progress as a player! The squash squad became the family I could call on if ever I was in need. It has irrefutably given me my most memorable school experiences; whether it be trekking the precarious mountains of Macchu Picchu, ice skating in Central Park or even just team dinner at the Mason's (sorry mum!). Never will I stop playing the sport which gave me the opportunity to come to this fine school, but I know deep down that it will never be the same again without you all beside me. Thank you for making all the 7.00am fitness sessions, half enjoyable!

The seemingly never-ending number of sports teams and activities you can find yourself involved in here at Wycliffe is truly mind-boggling! Where else could I start a Public Limited Company with a group of friends at 1.30pm, be mid-way through a squash one-on-one an hour later and by 3.30, find myself in the middle being bowled out by a girl in a school cricket match... she was an international though!

Wycliffe is an experience to be lived to the maximum, and I have had the pleasure of doing just that. These extra opportunities have made me the individual I always wanted, but never thought I could be! A full plate is always better than an empty one, and if there is one thing I would want any pupil to take away from the rubbish I talk this afternoon, it is that by immersing yourself in additional activities and pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone, you will learn an awful lot about yourself and gain a wealth of experience for later life in the process.

Speech Day Speech 2011

When I think back over my time here, it is clear to me why this has been such a memorable experience. When I scour through photos and loose papers dating back to 2006, I am staggered by the things I have had the chance to do and see, by the fun I have had along the way and by the bonds I have made with people from nations I did not even know existed, like England! I do not think it is right to select one or two highlights because that would be predictable and all that has happened seems far too special for that!

With regard to the things that I have learned from this experience, I would suggest that getting my prep in on time still isn't one of them! I USED to pride myself on my behavioural record; I could boast not a single gating nor detention to my name... that was, until late this year. It may come as shock news to the majority of students, partly due to my covert cover-up operation, but I became the first Head of School to receive an academic detention whilst serving in the role. Funnily enough, it actually stands out as a special memory. At the end of the day, nobody is perfect and quite frankly, I had had a guts full of being the goody-good! I received a few looks of disgust from certain junior students who asked me what I was doing in detention, in response I told them bluntly, "I am supervising, now please be quiet!" The only spanner to this plan came when the actual supervisor strolled in and proceeded to call my name on the register... as they say, the game was up!

The truth of it is, I would not have my 5 amazing years here any other way and yet, I would give it all back just to do it again! Yes, there are certain things I regret not doing, AND doing for that matter, but now that it is all a distant memory, I am extremely happy and proud to have been able to serve the school that has done so much for me over the years!

Now it is only right that I pay tribute to those who I feel have had a significant impact of my life. In my mind, three men have had a profound effect on my development and I hold them all in very high esteem.

Speech Day Speech 2011

1) Firstly, Mr Rob Pavis. Mr Pavis is a Wycliffe legend in his own right! Having served as housemaster of Robinson for over a decade, Mr Pavis left us recently to take up a post in Brighton. I can safely say that Robinson would not be the place it is today without the influence of Mr Pavis. For me, Robinson provided the ideal environment to allow me to push myself and to learn a great deal about myself and life in general. I looked up to Mr Pavis as a role model. Someone who earned the outright respect of his colleagues, someone who achieved what he desired through an unquestionable work ethic and someone who showed time and time again, what an efficient organiser he was. It is a privilege to welcome you back today Mr Pavis and I thank you not only for what you have done for me, but for all Robinson boys, past and present, who your love and dedication has touched.

2) Moving on to Dave Morrish. Like Mr Pavis, Dave has served the school for over a decade and this year, leaves to take up a position as Head Squash Coach in London Squash Racquets Club. That is, London, Canada! Dave has been the rock on which Wycliffe Squash was established; by far and away the most successful coach in school history, but in my eyes, the most loved as well. It was Dave who brought me to Wycliffe back in 2006 and subsequently helped to keep me here in the struggle of my early days. I really will be indebted to this great man for a lifetime. Dave has become a very close friend since my arrival here and I have nothing but admiration for him. It is very sad to see you leave but everyone at Wycliffe wishes you well for what will surely be a brilliant future. Thank you Dave.

3) Finally, my own dad. I want to keep this short otherwise I really will break down! Without a shadow of doubt, you have been the one dependable influence on my life. I am not just proud to call you my dad, but my best friend as well. The time, love and faith you have shown in me from my earliest days, whether it be in my sport or school life, mean the absolute world to me. The sacrifices you have made for me since I joined Wycliffe never fail to make me appreciate what a great dad you are!

The truth is, if I ever become half the man you are, then I will be truly proud of myself AND I will be even prouder, if I ever manage to stay at half your weight!!!! Dad. Thank you so much!

Speech Day Speech 2011

I would very briefly like to make mention a few others:

Mrs Burnet Ward - I have been to my fair share of schools in the past, both state and private, but as you may well gather from my speech, not a single one is a touch on Wycliffe. This is a special place, led by a special Headmistress and I would like to thank you for the help you have given me in this challenging year and all years since my arrival.

Mr Laing - I speak now on behalf of the entire Upper Sixth and would like to thank you for the tireless work you put into our University process. It would be an understatement to say it is a strenuous task but I hope we somehow made it all the more enjoyable!

Mr Mace - Probably holder of the most unenviable job in Wycliffe, looking after the Robinson boys! You have done a fine job in your first year as Housemaster and I look forward to returning in the near future! Thank you for a great year!

The Prefect Team - This year seemed to fly by without any reckoning... not that we had any fun!!!! We have some brilliant memories to take away with us and I can only thank you for making our team what it was. I will miss you all!

Sheryll and next year's Prefect Team - You were a super bunch to work with and no one is in doubt that you will do well. Please do not show us up too badly!

The Robinson Boys - Unfairly, I think we have a bit of a bad reputation around school. Jealousy if you ask me! I could not have asked for a better set of brothers over the past 5 years. Please continue to make Robinson the best house.

Two Friends of Mine - Will Hewer, I have never met a kinder and more considerate person in all my days. You were the first Wycliffian I met and I know that we will never lose contact. At this point, I would also like to thank the Hewers for their spare bedroom! I really do appreciate your kindness towards me. Then, to Alex Lewis (A.K.A. Church). You would have had a nice mention from me, like Will's... had you not set a chicken loose in my room for half-an-hour! I have to this day, still not managed to clean it properly! In all seriousness however, you have been a great roommate and source of entertainment for 3 years and I really will miss having you around!

Speech Day Speech 2011

To all those who I have omitted to mention, whether by request or out of forgetfulness, I can only apologise; but I am truly, truly grateful for everything you have done for me.

CONCLUSION:

To all Year 13's in the audience, I just want to say this: "Don't be sad because it's over, be glad because it happened!"

Yes... today is the day where we leave behind everything we have ever known, where we leave behind treasured memories and the place where special bonds were formed BUT today we start afresh! Change is inevitable, and saying goodbye and moving on does not signal the end, but a new beginning!

I would like to close with the words of the first Head of School I remember. Sam Dressel was a boy who I really admired during the short time we overlapped as pupils. It has been a great privilege for me to follow in his footsteps.

He ended his speech with a particular line which to this day I have never forgotten. Those words he said that afternoon always stuck with me as the years rolled on, but I never gave much thought to them. Only NOW do they really ring true! All he said was this, "Your school days really are the best days of your life!"

THANK YOU.

We would now like to show you a short slideshow of memories compiled by Year 13, to show you exactly what we have been up to since 2006! I would like to take this moment to personally thank Charles Russell and Tom Hartley for their hard work on the project. I hope you enjoy!