Mr Denis McKinnon Valedictory Address 2019

There was once a man who lived by a river. He heard a radio report that the river was going to rush up and flood the town, and that all the residents needed to evacuate their homes. But, the man said, “I’m a religious man, I pray, God loves me, God will save me.” The waters rose up, and a guy in a row boat came along and shouted, “Hey you, you in there, the town is flooding, get in and let me take you to safety.” But the man shouted back that he was religious, that he prayed, that God loved him, and, that God would save him. And still the waters rose up.

Well, the man drowned. And standing at the gates of St Peter, he demanded an audience with God. “Lord,” he said, “I’m a religious man, I pray, I thought you loved me? Why did this happen?”

God said, “I sent you a radio report, and a man in a row boat. What the hell are you doing here?”

Good afternoon Headmaster, colleagues, boys, and today, the Class of 2019. It is an honour to stand before you, and say vale, or farewell, on behalf of the staff of this fine College; an institution for which I have had the pleasure of being part, these past three years. But, for some of you, St Kevin’s has been your life since Glendalough. For most, it will be from Year 7. It will therefore be with sadness, mixed, with relief, anxiety, and hopefully, an enormous amount of pride, when you leave the College today, on this, your final day of schooling. To have reached this far, is worthy of congratulation. It is not, however, the end. Nor is it, to paraphrase the words of Churchill, “even the beginning of your end. But it is, perhaps, the end of your beginning.”

There was much deliberation over this address...I think the first time in my life I had to stop and think before speaking. There is a time, as the Bible tells us, for everything. This, could be a time I make a joke or two about myself, jokes at the expense of some of you. And yet, there is more to be said, more to be pondered; one final chance for you to cling to an ideal, as you begin this next phase of your life; as the ending of your days as a boy begins, and you step into society as men.

Gentlemen, today, I want to speak to you about choice, the most precious gift given to those of us born into the right circumstances, and at the right time. And why, faced with abundant choice, you must fight for what is right. I want you to think of that man by the river. Presented with a series of options, whether divinely guided or not, the man chose to ignore what had been put before him, these clear signs of salvation, these signs for living, and he perished as a result. Ponder his choice.

Over the past number of years, I have encountered almost every boy here, in one capacity or another: academic, sporting, or cultural. You are, indeed, a most diverse cohort. Collectively, and individually, you have been determined, engaging. Things have not always passed smoothly. They never do.

And so it will be, as you leave Heyington and begin your journey as young men, ready to study at institutions of higher learning, or to head into the workforce, to vote, and to
participate as fully fledged citizens in this our fair, and yet imperfect, democracy. More challenges await. And things are not passing smoothly.

In 2001, for most in this group, the year of your birth, the world had seemingly settled, after almost 100 years of continuous conflict. Only a few years previous in the early 1990s, one of the most poignant thinkers of his generation, Francis Fukuyama, had, at the time, declared that this was the end of history, in that the Western way of life, and with that, freedom in an open and democratic world, was the summit of our human progression. Choice was all around us, it surrounded you as you lay in your cot; and the possibilities were endless.

However, in a short space of time, our world changed. As was remarked at your Year 12 Retreat, the September 11 attacks, disrupted this peace. A new enemy, in the form of the “other”, emerged. But it was not just physical conflict that has erupted since the year of your birth. The spread of technological advance, in the form of the iPhone, artificial intelligence, social media, these were disruptions. Worldwide financial disasters, with its effects still felt, were another. And our religious institutions, so long cedars of Lebanon, tall, strong, sturdy, became embroiled in turmoil. Our world seemed ready to be ‘reduced to rubble’, as Malouf had envisaged his reimagined city of Troy. Suddenly, the world to which you were the new inheritors, was forever changed. We were more divided than we should have been. We were more hateful than we needed to be. And with this, our choices narrowed, YOUR CHOICES narrowed. The fight became uncertain.

Thus, to refute Fukuyama, history had begun again. The world, after centuries, had no central philosophy, and no frame of reference for how to live...this is the world, into which you now step.

This world, gentlemen...It needs rebuilding; it needs new voices.

There are some people who recognise the need to foster these voices. Many of you know that I grew up in the country, though standing before you now in formal dress as a rather unlikely son of dairy farmers. My mother farmed the land with Dad, both working long, unforgiving hours, all the while faithfully raising six children. But now, into her 60s, she battles the early stages of Parkinson’s Disease, an insidious force, that will ultimately rob this robust, remarkable, community-minded woman, of her mobility, and her speech. Fate can be unkind.

But I do not mention this to evoke tears or sympathy, but to show you that hope is not lost, even in challenging times, and she has faced many challenges. For her choice, as a strong, independent woman, was then, as now, to dedicate herself to our education, our future, and selflessly fight for six new voices, in this ostensibly broken, and fractured world.

At St Kevin’s we have fostered this same need. We have given you many lessons to help combat these challenges that lie ahead, and to give you the capacity for finding your voice. This was not done blindly. There were rules, but there was reason behind them. For we have taught you to work hard, and the necessity of diligence. We have taught you how to love your neighbour, as you love yourself. We have taught you, to not simply write well for an examination, but to actually heed the messages of Shakespeare, and Dickens, and Shelley, and see that these messages still live. And in the real world, this extends to how you choose
to regard those on the fringes of society. To how you treat the outcast, the poor, the elderly. To how you treat those seeking a new life in Australia. To how you treat women.

However, will you be the man by the river, that ignores the signs given to assist and guide you? Or, will you be that new voice, choosing what is true, and fight for what is right, and what is just?

The choice is yours, gentlemen. And you, more than any other graduand across this state, has this choice in abundance, for to whom much has been given, much shall be required.

The rebuilding of our world is upon your shoulders, not just those of you who pursue high office, but every single one of you. Rebuild this world as decent men, as men of passion, as men of excellence. Rebuild this world as you know it should be, making the right choices, and fight for your voice to be heard.

“Fight on my men,”
I am hurt, but I am not slain;
I’ll lay me down and bleed a-while,
And then I’ll rise and fight again”

That is everything. That is all.
Vale gentlemen. Farewell.
Valedictory Mass Reflections

Rhys Patterson

One of my fondest memories through 8 years at St Kevin’s came only in Year 6, an interstate trip 170kms North of Broome. A 3-hour drive along a corrugated orange dirt road into the West Australian sun culminated in the arrival of 8 11-year-old Skevs boys in a small aboriginal community.

Djaridjin Lombadina was like no other place we had been. Scenic but confronting, the trip brought forward our earliest concern on our need for looking out for the marginalized. We spent several days attending classes with the students in the belief we could grow their school participation. Gaining greater attendances as the week progressed proved to be a milestone in itself, a custom that came of great concern to us boys. I had a similar experience in Year 9, the RICE program and the Larapinta track a formidable experience for myself and those alongside me. Again, the life of an indigenous community and the call to justice we all share proved to be a prominent concern, reflecting on the several disadvantages the community faced.

Swimming has also been a special experience over the years. Looking down onto that familiar black line, exercising at ungodly hours of the morning under Gene’s directive provided it’s obvious challenges. However, working together to achieve a common goal in a sport that is fundamentally individual was one of if not the most rewarding experiences of my time at the school. Sharing in the joy of victory in Year 9 as of the APS Premiership win cemented our mateship and a work ethic that was upheld by all. In retrospect, St Kevin’s provided the memories and the challenges that life brings, but more than developing our intelligence, it has allowed us to build our character. I thank my fellow school mates, for their generosity, commitment and courage. The teachers, for their hard work and sacrifice. And to the parents, we thank them for their ongoing love and support as we continue on into the next chapter of our lives.

James McBurnie

I arrived at St Kevin’s in Prep, 2007. So I’ve been at St Kevin’s for about 70% of my life! And while at times, the slog of homework or exams has been overwhelming, I’ve really enjoyed my time. Every homeroom teacher I’ve had, whether it was Mrs Stewart in prep, Ms Kornacki in Year 7 or Ms Phelan for the last three years, has been passionate and willing to support me in any way they can.

Similarly, all of my subject teachers are passionate about cultivating students’ interest in whatever area they specialise and helping us to achieve the best that we can. And this passion extends to extra-curricular activities, whether that be Mr Valladares’ chess club or Mr Lane and Mr McKinnon running debating and public speaking. In fact, I’ve participated in debating every year since year 7, and it’s been great. Having the chance to battle it out with another school on a topic that you knew but an hour before is exhilarating. And rather difficult.
Doing community service at Winteringham in year 10, which was a home for those elderly people that had been homeless, was a particularly eye-opening experience, as I interacted with people who truly live on the fringe. I met a man who had lived in his car for a long time, a man who had struggled with drugs and a Logey winning actor who had fallen from grace. Additionally, serving food to homeless people at St Peter and Paul's provided me with the chance to not only help those in need, but also truly understand how fortunate I am.

The school also provides a plethora of sports for boys to try. I ended up choosing rowing from year 8 to year 12, and in the process signed away any life I had. Although I was in the bottom crew every season except my last, rowing was a really rewarding experience. I became great mates with students in both year 11 and year 12 and experienced a form of teamwork that I think no other sport can imbue in an individual. I am eternally grateful that I spent 70% of my life at this school and with this group of boys.

Ethan Rozanic

Tonight I am thinking of my two grandfathers. At my age, my mother’s dad was working on asbestos mines in Western Australia. His demanding life eventually caused him to contract the illness from which he died in 2003. At my age, my father’s dad fled from war torn Croatia with nothing but a hope that his love of football might bring him a better life.

And now, here I am, their age, graduating from a school that has given me all the opportunity they could only have dreamed of. I am so grateful that in year 9 I took a huge leap of faith. I left another school where I believed some people took their privileges for granted. I was attracted to St Kevin’s because of a culture of hard work and even humility. I believe St Kevin’s boys do not think they are born to rule. I believe they think they are born to help others in the same way as we have been helped. I am grateful to so many teachers, especially my tutor Mrs Power.

My time on the Swimming Team proved to be some of the best moments of my time here. Competing in front of the Skevs Army at MSAC, hearing their passionate voices, their cries of support, their passion for the Green, Gold and Blue; it was this display of raw emotion that is emblematic of the spirit of St Kevin’s.

Yet another example of opportunity, was the challenge that the Outdoor Education program offered our Year Level. Whether it be my Year 9 expedition to Larapinta or the challenging, yet divine trails of the Great Dividing Range in Year 10, or exploring the wild corners of our great state of Victoria in Year 11. It is these humbling adventures, with mates, that are the genuine experiences we will call upon in our future endeavours.

Another opportunity was Community Service. Yes, for many of us, it would be wrong to say that we were thrilled about spending Wednesday afternoons at an Aged Care facility or the like. However, in hindsight, for those of us who committed to the variety of House Community Service opportunities, or even that of the Year 10 program, we were exposed to experiences that served to enhance our perspective of the world; for me, it was a conversation with a child migrant from Sudan, at Fitzroy tutoring one evening, I learned of his childhood, his lack of education and the fact that he was born into war. That, is an experience that I will never forget, one which brought me perspective. My hope and prayer
is that his grandchildren will look back on his struggle with all the gratitude that I feel tonight.

Damian Redenbach

I began my journey as a Kevinian in Year 5, coming from a primary school in Point Cook. My first recollections of my time at St Kevin’s involve the panic I experienced on orientation day, as I was faced not only by the challenge of coming to a new school, not knowing a single person, but the extremely heavy traffic worsening the usual 45 minute trip from my home in Sanctuary Lakes. Overwhelmed by the stress, I was warmly greeted by my eventual homeroom teacher Ms Hunter, and it was at this moment that I knew my parents had made the right choice. At Glendalough, the highlight of my time was Wednesday afternoon APS sport. Here, we could experience up to 4 sports a year, and I personally enjoyed basketball the most, with Mr Wong eager to play with us in the undercroft whilst we waited for the bell. My love of basketball has been a constant right up to this year always with a great experience of teamwork and friendship.

My family moved twice, in year 7 and 8, and although it was somewhat difficult to adjust to the new suburbs, my SKevs mates made it far easier. St Kevin’s was my community. They say home is where the heart is and my heart was here.

My dad was diagnosed with myasthenia gravis in late 2018, a chronic illness which affects the capacity of skeletal muscles. And whilst dealing with such a struggle is indeed first and foremost a family matter, everyone part of the St Kevin’s community, whether knowingly or not, makes this a much less difficult task. It is easy to be mates in the good times but the tough times is where real belonging shows itself. I have thought about this reaching out, in my turn, to the poor as part of Mccarthy’s justice project at St Peter and Pauls in South Melbourne. So much of life is about helping those in need.

It was a journey when I first came to St Kevin’s. Now another journey lies ahead. I hope that I and the whole class of 2019 can remember the core lessons of justice, compassion and humanity.
Reflection from Thomas Gilbert

As a recently graduated student in a position of leadership at St Kevin’s College, I feel that I have an obligation to address the crisis which has enveloped our school in the past few days.

Firstly, let me make myself abundantly clear: I, and the VAST MAJORITY of our students, staunchly and unwaveringly oppose misogyny. It is a toxic and morally warped ideology which has no place in our modern-day society. Also, I agree that the chant must be both condemned and stopped. Whilst it may be perceived by some as light-hearted humour, it’s potential cultural ramifications are frightening. And, I have every confidence that many of the students who participated in the chant this past weekend, or in previous years, can now recognise this.

And, I would like to apologise to any women who have been negatively affected by the chant, or any other problematic behaviours committed by students in previous years. You deserved better.

However, I was equally devastated to see that some former students are taking this opportunity to turn against the school, and chastise it as a “hypermasculine echo-chamber” and a breeding ground for misogynistic views. Amidst a time where the press and the general public are casting aspersions upon the integrity of our school, we are in need, more than ever, of people to stand up and defend our school and its culture.

What these students have omitted to mention, through their scathing attacks against our school, is the range of initiatives our school employs to mould young boys into charitable men. For instance:

- The 80 hours of mandatory community service every year 10 must participate in each year.
- The several visits to community service for Year 11s and 12s.
- The fact that, earlier this year, St Kevin’s raised 1/7th of all the funds collected for the UN Walk for Women, a brilliant initiative participated in by 16 schools.
- The fact that, even during Year 12, our school dedicated 3 periods to ethical education. 1 of which, is allocated to hearing the story of an extraordinary guest speaker who has helped change our society for the better.

What these initiatives prove, is that our school is dedicated to educating the person. We are not merely an institution which voraciously seeks high ATAR’s for all its students.

Furthermore, whilst some students may deviate from the inclusive views constantly espoused by the college, this CANNOT BE CONSIDERED a fault of the entire private school system, or the St Kevin’s College leadership.

Misogynistic views are IN NO WAY sponsored by teachers. I know this, from the fact that my House Head was tearing up in his office about this news just yesterday morning. Our teachers are devoted to educating well-rounded men who have a passion for the common good.
It is my view, that the misogynistic tendencies of some individuals are instead the fault of our wider society, and the tendencies of the adolescent male to view women through a pejorative light. This stigma is what must be changed. And, I agree that our school has a large role to play in facilitating this change.

But, given that our school has over 2000 students, and that only a miniscule fraction of them seem to actually endorse these misogynistic views, I will not stand idly by and let my school, a school dedicated to justice and solidarity, be ruthlessly slandered and defamed.

It is unacceptable, that our teachers, who have poured their hearts and souls into shaping good men, are now framed as perpetrators.

Further, whilst many of you may be unaware, the perpetrators of this chant are already discussing ways to rebuild the school’s reputation, and encourage a more progressive view of women in society.

This is a time where members of the community need to unite together and attempt to actually create some positive change. It is helpful that the chant was exposed and critiqued. But unfair vitriol does not achieve anything constructive.

I truly hope that, as I enter the world as a school graduate, I am not harshly prejudged or profiled for having attended the school responsible for “that chant”.

For we ARE SO MUCH MORE than that.

Omnia Pro Deo.