

ROYAL COLLEGE 175TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER.-

TOAST TO THE SISTER COLLEGES.

PROPOSED BY S. SKANDAKUMAR

(6TH MARCH 2010,CINNAMON GRAND OAK ROOM)

Hon Minister,past and present Principals of our revered institution, our eminent guests of honour, the Principal of Ladies College and Warden of St Thomas College, distinguished fellow Royalists and their equally distinguished spouses,

I consider it a great privilege indeed to have been invited this evening, to propose a toast to two outstanding schools rich in shared values, and for whom we Royalists have the greatest respect and admiration .

Warden Sir, I know that you must be aware of the fierceness of the rivalry that exists between our two institutions, on the playing fields and on cricket grounds in particular. You will have your first experience of it in the coming week. That rivalry, has over the years, given rise to some of the strongest bonds of friendship between Royalists and Thomians; an excellent reflection on the quality of our mutual education. As for Ladies College, Madam Nirmali, it will be sufficient if I said that successive generations of Royalists have had nothing but love for your wonderful girls. *And you too are in that category today.*

It would not be inappropriate on an occasion of this nature, for one to reflect briefly on one's own school career and I would like to share with you, three incidents for their diverse nature.

The first concerns a Teacher, who too was quick to use the cane, no matter how trivial the mischief may have been. He had a curious way of doing it, in that he would get the student to kiss the wall with his nose while raising both arms to the maximum. His theory was obvious; more taut the body, greater the sting!

Once his deed was done he would turn calmly to the black board and write the following line. "A life without pain, is like being on a road that's going nowhere."

The second was a much loved senior Teacher, who with the passage of time, found it increasingly difficult to stay awake in the first twenty minutes or so in the period immediately following the lunch interval. So on arrival for a class in applied mathematics, he would instruct us to turn to a page of his choice in Humphreys text book on Dynamics, and

attend to the sums on it. He would then take off his spotlessly white coat, place it on the back of his chair and rest his weary head between his arms on top of his desk, to surface 20 minutes later. On one particular day, he woke up ahead of time and decided to walk round the class. At the back end he found one of the students to whom math was a never ending mystery, deeply engrossed in a magazine depicting ladies of easy virtue, in their natural splendor. In confiscating the magazine he said to the boy, "Young man, you are rotten, even before you are ripe:" The incident went no further. That was Royal.

The third applied to a form master who was a passionate admirer of that great American President Abraham Lincoln. So intense was his admiration that he was even nicknamed Lincoln!! Two things that he quoted remained etched in my mind for the hope and confidence they inspired in me. They were from Lincoln's letter to his son's teacher, when he decided to send the boy to school. "Teach him" he wrote, "that for every scoundrel, there is a hero..... Teach him also that for every corrupt politician there will be a statesman.' Fortunately, in the ensuing years, we were also taught the fine art of a waiting game called eternal patience!! Looking at the erosion of values in the world around us, I have in recent times, asked myself questions which would have crossed your minds as well. Why did Wall Street, which supposedly had some of the finest brains emerging from the best Universities and Management colleges of the world, collapse as it did?

Why is it that governments in many parts of the world have the painful task of combating, their own citizens, to resolve internal conflicts? And, why is the United Nations looking as if it is heading for a re-classification as the Divided Nations?

I have tried to look for the answers in the time tested values that our three schools have upheld from inception.

On my first day at school I was made to realize that I was a Ceylonese, as an equal citizen of a beautiful and happy nation called Ceylon. While still knee high to our Teachers, we were taught to distinguish between Right and Wrong. Here I would like to quote an eminent Queens Counsel who hailed from an equally reputed school in the hills , who said 'In the field of justice and fairplay, right is right, and wrong is wrong. The two can never meet. To compromise the two takes an elastic conscience. Such men should be shunned for they are the bane of society.' Thereafter we were encouraged to emulate the strong, but reminded to protect the marginalized and the weak. The next was an important lesson on Leadership directed at Class Monitors, School Prefects, Captains of Games, Heads of the Cadet Corps and Literary Associations, Interact Clubs etc. who were made to realize that every right implied a

responsibility. We learnt leadership required exemplary conduct and its success was synonymous with a golden word... Accountability. Greater the authority, greater then was the accountability.

Earlier this week, I made a nostalgic visit to our assembly hall, and let the memories of the solemn Friday morning assemblies roll by. My eyes swept the portraits of all our distinguished scholars. You too, Warden Sir, and Madam Principal, have preserved similar halls of fame in your respective schools. Those outstanding men and women are remembered even today, for two reasons; their intellect and their integrity and, through them we learnt another important lesson for life, the priceless value of honesty. Finally, we were taught to be gracious in defeat and humble in victory.

It is not a mere coincidence then, that our first lesson was one of equality and the last on humility. In our temporary stay on earth we have paid our respects to those who have moved on before us, and heard the familiar line at the funeral services, 'Death humbles us all because in death we are all equal ". I have therefore asked myself the question, Why then don't we use our God given intelligence, and prepare ourselves better for that eventuality, by practicing equality and humility in Life, rather than wait for death to impose it upon us? Yes Ladies and gentlemen, The illiterate of the future will not be those who cannot read or write; they will be the educated who simply will not learn.

On the opposite side of humility stands man's ego. While some degree of it is not only desirable, but even essential, an ego out of control could be as dangerous as the weapons of mass destruction that only the egos of George Bush and Tony Blair were able locate in Iraq . It was the same ego out of control that led Tiger Woods to believe that his right to improve on his handicap over 18 holes extended beyond the boundaries of a golf course! So, if only our time tested values can find universal application, to be discharged with common sense and one's conscience, humanity may well see a heaven on earth !

Ladies and Gentlemen, May I ask you please to rise and drink a toast to two outstanding institutions with whom we have shared precious values and traditions. May they all be upheld inflexibly in the future as well, so that St Thomas College Mt Lavinia, and Ladies College Colombo can continue to produce for our country, as they have in the past, the men and women who can make the difference. TO ST THOMAS AND LADIES COLLEGE....Thank You ”