**SPEECH – REUNION, 26 SEPT 2021**

The last time I made a speech here was on the occasion of the annual prize giving for Farnham college students. That was quite daunting as I was supposed to be giving a motivational speech and all I could think of was how I managed to skive off for a whole term of PE and still get A for effort on my report…

However, that pales into insignificance with the prospect of speaking to fellow old pupils who have been there, seen it all, and done it all and don't need any motivation for anything now. *(I am also mindful that I am followed by the great Geoff Whiting who does this sort of thing all the time).* So to help me remember what I’m going to say, I have made a few flash cards. (Can you tell I’m a teacher?!). In no particular order,

SHOW **FLASHCARDS** (*Knickers, Pants, Boys, Sex, God*)

They are also a warning sign, so if you are feeling at all sensitive, you will know when to close your ears.

So let’s start with a few memories of Farnham Girls Grammar School. The headmistress then was **Mrs Honick** whom we rarely saw apart from when we proudly collected a **signature**. To be awarded a signature, you had to get three consecutive pieces of work marked with A - A or A plus. You then queued outside Mrs Honick's office with all the other girls collecting a signature. She would look at your work and would sign it. If you collected 10 signatures in a term I think you got a special mention in assembly. I don't think I ever got a signature in Chemistry; the third piece of work always seemed to be a B plus… I still hold Miss McMahon responsible for the feelings of inadequacy I have felt ever since.

The **sixth form girls** seemed a world apart; as well as being much older, they seemed so much more sophisticated with their long hair and short skirts. They were our prefects and they had special privileges such as using the quad at breaktimes and being allowed to use the old grand staircase outside Mrs Honick’s office. I so looked forward to the day when I could do both those things, but sadly it was not to be – until I attended an Open Evening at South Farnham and ran up and down the stairs a few times. Somehow, the magic had gone.

The sixth form girls were responsible though for what was in our eyes a daring prank. Our row of form rooms looked out onto the playing field which was on two levels with a slope in the middle. We came in one morning to find the word **KNICKERS** written in large white letters on the grassy slope, visible to all classrooms. Shock horror! It was very quickly removed...

Talking of knickers reminds me of **PANTS**. For PE we had to wear navy pants over our own knickers. I thought it might be a good idea to buy a pair so that the girls could be reminded of how ghastly they were, and the boys could see what we had to put up with. But when I googled ‘Navy Blue gym knickers’ (pants seeming to have the American meaning of trousers), I was warned by Microsoft Bing that this would bring up **adult content** and I would have to change my settings to allow this… Just proves how inappropriate our PE kit was.

Our needlework lessons in the first year involved making our own **gym skirts**, either flared or pleated, with a waistband, and if your sewing efforts weren't up to scratch then you had a permanent reminder every time you wore it for PE.

By the way, did the boys school have those ghastly **foot baths** you had to walk through at the beginning and end of gym lessons? They were full of some smelly chemical or other, almost impossible to avoid although we never gave up trying to jump over them. I imagine they were to stop the spread of verrucas. I can still smell them now…

As well as needlework, we studied **Home Economics**. We spent the whole of the first year not going anywhere near a kitchen – I’m not sure what we learnt, but I do remember putting my hand up to volunteer to spell diarrhoea. We started actually cooking in the second year – the first lesson we made coffee and toast, the second lesson we made tea and sandwiches… I still have my recipe **BOOK** and here’s the recipe for coffee;

*Pour boiling water into the coffee pot to heat it. Empty and put in coffee and a pinch of salt. Pour boiling water over the coffee and leave in a warm place for 10 minutes to infuse. Strain into a saucepan and reheat. Heat milk in a separate saucepan.*

Who knew it was so complicated to make a coffee??

Moving on to **SEX**

Of course, in the girls’ school we didn't have any opportunity to investigate this, but we did have biology lessons to explain everything about birds and bees, storks and gooseberry bushes. Our class however drew the short straw. There were two biology teachers. The first, our teacher, was **Miss Champion** who seemed to be really, really old, probably going on 60. Clearly, to our minds, being unmarried and ancient, she wasn't going to know anything about sex so we had a very disappointing lesson on eggs and sperm with no indication of how the two might meet. However, the other form struck the jackpot and had **Mrs Melling** – young, pretty and married - who gamely answered the question about whether she'd done it and confessed to doing it a couple of times. Miss Champion’s class were agog at what the other girls had managed to find out. However, we couldn't work out why she didn’t have two children, having done it twice - obviously we hadn’t been introduced to the concept of practice...

I can't end recollections of Farnham Girls Grammar School without mentioning **St. Mary's Bay**, the destination of our infamous field trip in the second year. What can I say, except that we were apparently the most slovenly dreadful girls Miss Walker had ever taken there. But after some rather strong words, curfews, and a thorough cleaning session we won the Most Improved Award. Apart from that I remember a crypt full of skulls in Hythe, throwing the quadrant over our shoulders on Dungeness beach, and the French day trip, which in fact I didn't go on, spending the day on the beach with Miss Bound instead.

So after two years at Farnham Girls Grammar School we joined the **BOYS** at Morley Road. I think it was one of those scenarios where you can't wait to meet boys, it’s all you talk about – and the reality completely punctures that fantasy. I’m afraid our first impressions were of spotty adolescent boys looking nothing like the boys of our dreams – I’m pretty sure we didn’t match up to your expectations either.

There seemed to be countless numbers of portacabins, or ‘huts’, on the field, serving as classrooms and toilet blocks. We girls used to stand up when the teacher came in - the boys remained slouched at their desks, looking at us as though we were mad. Sadly we sank to your level. It was all a bit of a disappointment at the beginning.

But things quickly perked up and new friendships were formed. I learned to play bridge at school, playing bridge most breaks and lunch times. The end of year shows were particularly entertaining especially **Paul Hobbs** on stage (so naughty) and **Susan Shattock** in The Crucible, apparently nude on stage (did that really happen?). I was going to say I had great memories of cross country but I think I only did it once - I used to run back to school to get my duffel coat on and nip down to the shop at the end of the road.

**PANTS**

This makes an appearance again (so handy to have multitasking flash cards). The girls decided one lesson to festoon the lights with our lovely navy blue pants. Unfortunately, for us anyway, that joke fell flat as the teacher never gave them a second glance and the lesson went on as normal. I think it was Reverend Innes actually, in an RE lesson. Which brings me neatly to

**GOD**

I’m not trying to suggest the Rev Innes is God, but talking about the Rev Innes, I remember the gossip around his **school trip to Russia**; he actually smuggled bibles into Russia! We were so impressed, he went right up in our estimation on a level with James Bond.

There came a time when we didn't have to do PE on a Wednesday afternoon and could do volunteering instead. I have fond memories of working at the Ridgeway school and at Cobgates, although I have a feeling I might have skived off Cobgates too. I certainly remember Wednesday afternoons spent in the **coffee shop** in the Borough with Debbie Preece, Howard Gibbs, and Julian Walden, eating rum babas. There we are Julian, I’ve dropped you in it too.

Which other teachers do I remember? Well, in the girls’ school I remember **Mrs Bullock**, our maths teacher I think – again, like Miss Champion, seeming incredibly old, but I worked out recently that she must have been about 50. Quite young in fact..!

**Miss Blair** taught us italic handwriting, one lesson a week for a whole year. I did rather well at that – but as soon as lessons stopped, I reverted to my usual scrawl. So I’m not really sure what the point was, although it awakened an interest in graphology, the study and analysis of handwriting. Interestingly, at More House School, where I work, we teach handwriting in Occupational Therapy lessons. Draw your own conclusions…

**Miss Walker** of course worked at both schools – we were always terrified of Miss Walker, I like to think her bark was worse than her bite, but was never brave enough to test that one out. We looked forward to the Christmas show just to see Miss Walker as the star turn, gamely dressing up in some costume or another and being a jolly good sport.

**Miss Parish** taught us PE and very kindly gave me the aforementioned A for effort even though I skived the whole summer term and she wouldn’t have seen me at all…

**Mrs Macaire** won’t be that well known to many of you as she taught Latin – and only two of us, myself and Charlotte Starmer, managed to take it all the way to A level. She inspired in me a lifelong love of Latin, and I hope she would be pleased to know of the influence she had - I have also studied mediaeval Latin, and am now teaching Classical Latin one hour a week, using exactly the same Cambridge Latin course that we used 50 years ago. For those who did Latin, Caecilius est in horto, still…

And on the languages theme I have to thank **Mrs Jude** and **Mrs Schofield** who taught me French and Spanish up to A level, and inspired me to study them both at University. I didn’t go on the first Spanish trip to Spain – ask Paul Hobbs about that one – but I did get to Valencia in the Lower Sixth and loved it.

We didn’t have many male teachers at the girls’ school so it was another thing we had to get used to when we joined the boys. **Mr Wilson** was the careers teacher and also taught Sociology. I remember he asked the Language Dept for some useful phrases before his road trip to France. In particular, he wanted to know how to say ‘Help me, I have broken down’ (he obviously didn’t have a lot of confidence in his car). Mrs Jude obligingly taught him to say ‘Aidez-moi, je suis fou’, which he went around repeating for several days to the amusement of the French students until someone finally translated the phrase for him – ‘Help me, I am mad’…

**Mr Taylor** taught me Maths and Additional Maths, and I was disappointed not to be able to take Maths A Level at the time. I did manage to take it finally a few years ago, and I hope he’d be pleased to know I have followed in his footsteps and have been teaching Maths for the past 18 years!

Being local, there are a few people I still see around – **Janet Jude** at music concerts, **Jenny Commerford** who used to help at Weyfest, **Rev John Innes** who helped us out during the interregnum at St James church in Rowledge. As for former students, **Caroline Gooding’s** daughter and my son were in the same class at Rowledge school (we had high hopes there, but they have thwarted our plans for an arranged marriage and are each living with their partners). I’m still in contact with **Martin Pratt** of tuckshop fame, and I bumped into **Charlotte Starmer** the other day in Farnham who sends her best wishes.

I think it’s quite remarkable that we are still meeting up after all this time. I remember one reunion for all years that was held in the Girls Grammar School at Menin Way. The very Old Girls and very Old Boys sat at separate tables, not mixing. We on the other hand all sat together. Caroline Gooding and I attended the FGGS Old Girls AGM held that day where it was strongly hinted that, being the youngest there by far, we should take over the running of the Old Girls Association. But we agreed that for us, our schooling was very firmly co-ed and I think it’s testament to how well we merged that we continue to have co-ed reunions.

Thank you, Mike, John and Julian and the rest of the committee, for bringing us together and keeping the Grammar School candle burning – it was a very special time.

I would like to finish by raising a glass to the Farnham Girls Grammar School – please join me.

Thank you!