OUR INTENT –
proud of our
Grammar tradition
we are a SECUNDARY
SCHOOL THAT ESTABLISHES THE
educational foundation
FOR YOUNG women
TO CONTRIBUTE
confidently to their world with
WISDOM imagination
AND INTEGRITY

Brisbane Girls Grammar School aspires
CHAIR’S WELCOME
MS ELIZABETH JAMESON
CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

It is with great pleasure that I present the Brisbane Girls Grammar School 2013 Annual Review.

It was a dynamic year in 2013, punctuated by significant events and activities that touched upon every facet of the School — planning for a new building where research and innovation will be pursued, developing new grounds where sporting prowess, teamwork and community spirit will flourish, and leadership that will continue to drive the School’s unwavering commitment to exceptional scholarship. These developments and many other activities continued to build the holistic experience we provide to Grammar girls as they prepare for the challenges and opportunities of life.

The girls’ motto of ‘Embrace the new! Link the Blue!’ this year extended well beyond our main campus at Spring Hill to embrace Marrapatta and Fig Tree Pocket — the School’s newly acquired sports campus. This important expansion of the School’s portfolio prompted me to consider the very unique roles of each of these special locations that comprise our School experience.

Our main campus at Spring Hill is the thriving heart of the School and the focus of our pursuit of exceptional scholarship. It is also where construction began this year on the new Research and Innovative Learning Centre — a five-storey building, integrating flexible teaching spaces and a contemporary library facility. The Centre is set to open in 2015, coinciding with the introduction of Year 7 to Girls Grammar and the School’s 140-year anniversary celebrations.

The Outdoor Education Programme at Marrapatta represents our spirit of adventure — a natural environment where adolescent girls can explore their characters and capabilities. While our new Sports Campus at Fig Tree Pocket will provide the wide-open spaces and sporting fields where our girls will fill their lungs and experience the highs and lows of competition as they represent the School with pride.

The diverse experiences offered by each of these campuses build the School’s collective character, culture and philosophy. Of course, a school is more than buildings and grounds; it is nothing without strong leadership and guidance and a passionate and experienced teaching staff that attracts a cohort of girls proud to wear the ‘blue’. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my fellow Trustees: Adjunct Professor Dr Mary Mahoney, Deputy Chair; Mr Tony Young; Mr David Yann; Mrs Margaret Huth; Ms Gillian Adams; and Ms Diana Lohrisch who have served the School with diligence and commitment during a year in which we made one of the most critical decisions in more than a decade — the selection of a new Principal.

In Term II, we welcomed the 16th Principal of Brisbane Girls Grammar, Ms Jacinda Euler. The Board was inspired by Ms Euler’s passion for the education of girls and her deep understanding of our School’s defining ethos. At the conclusion of her first partial year in the School, we stand proudly behind Ms Euler.

And as the year drew to a close and we bid the graduating class of 2013 farewell, I was reminded of the great responsibility we all share as custodians to care for the very special place that is Brisbane Girls Grammar School. No matter how far and wide we range in life, we will always be connected to part of the life, soul and fabric of this School. At Speech Day, I urged the girls to continue to treat the School with care and consideration for those who are yet to come, because after all, ‘The School belongs to none of us and it belongs to all of us, but more fittingly, we belong to it’.

Please enjoy reliving the highlights from 2013 of Brisbane Girls Grammar School.
The girls’ 2013 School motto ’Embrace the new! Link the Blue!’ perfectly captured the vitality and openness with which students and staff approached the year.

The School continued to wholeheartedly embrace its important role in recognising the strengths and needs of every girl, in every class, across every year level at Brisbane Girls Grammar. Our commitment to seeking and drawing out the best in every girl engenders in them a genuine belief that they can be whoever they wish to be. We celebrate their individuality and provide a range of avenues for them to explore, challenge and develop important aspects of themselves.

We continued to hold for each and every girl the gift of high expectations — for when we hold high expectations in every area of endeavour, not just in academic studies, we all grow, aspire and lift. In 2013, with the support of their teachers, staff and the wider Girls Grammar community, the girls continued to astonish us with their achievements — academic, sporting, musical, creative — and inspire us with their generosity and contribution to service.

The environment we created for the girls and the opportunities they were afforded across our three campuses built upon the traditions and foundations of our 138-year history — a history we imbue with a constant flow of new ideas that drive us to challenge, to strive and to lead.

In 2013, we continued to promote the importance of deep reflection, deep questioning and deep understanding to extend imaginations and to allow thinking to soar. We encouraged the girls to develop disciplined intellectual habits and systematic curiosity; to allow them the space to appreciate beauty, mull over truth, debate about goodness and to encourage this deep thought.

Our girls will soar highest, and we as a school, will be exceptional leaders in scholarship, only if we have depth. There must be depth in our thinking and in our scholarship, in our connection to this School and in our relationships. So in 2013, we continued to laud the extraordinary and ponder the profound, taking our students deep into worlds that are different from everyday experiences.

At Speech Day we acknowledged all of the girls for their accomplishments, and commended them on the joyful way in which they celebrate the achievements of one another. I am confident that our graduating class has a very bright future ahead.

In 2014, we will continue to challenge and provide the necessary guidance to ensure our girls confidently embrace the future with optimism, a love of learning and a willingness to challenge assumptions. Being extraordinary is about enabling our girls to be the best they can be — drawing out the extraordinary from the sometimes seemingly ‘ordinary’. The ongoing professionalism and dedication of our teaching and professional staff, and the unwavering support of the Board of Trustees and broader community, sees us well prepared for another successful year ahead.
GENERAL REPORT
MS COLETTE PRETORIUS
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

FINANCE IN FOCUS

The continued subdued economy in Queensland has had little impact on the School’s financial performance with only a slight rise in timing of collection of debts; debtor balances outstanding still remains low compared to industry standards. The political climate has been of interest to the School with education policy, revisions to the national curriculum and funding of private schools under ongoing review by the new Government.

The year-end financial results were favourable and were in line with the Board-approved annual budget. The graph below compares the School’s financial results over the past five years.

The graph indicates that the surpluses have reduced from 2009 to 2012 but improved for 2013. Surpluses are used to fund payments on capital loans, capital expenses, savings for large future capital projects and savings for uncertain events. The improvement in the surplus in 2013 is a result of an efficiency improvement strategy implemented with the aim of keeping fee increases to a minimum.

The following graph shows that the key sources of income for the School are:

- Tuition Fee Income – 71%
- State and Commonwealth Government Funding – 20%.

Both of these income categories rely heavily on enrolment numbers. The School has recorded full enrolments in 2013.

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Both of these income categories rely heavily on enrolment numbers. The School has recorded full enrolments in 2013.
The sources of funding were deployed to ensure the School was adequately resourced to provide our students with a high quality, contemporary and creative learning place, as well as engaging outstanding staff to produce exceptional scholars.

The School’s operating expenses have been illustrated in the graph below, while the core operating expenses are highlighted as follows:

- **Employee benefit expenses/staff costs** — staff costs make up 66% of the School’s total operating expenses and ensure that the School maintains its record for employing exceptional teaching and professional staff.
- **Information technology (IT) and printing** — technology remains a key focus for the School in preparing for the Bring Your Own Device Strategy and, together with printing costs, made up 7% of the total expenses.
- **Repairs and maintenance and utilities** — the School is very proud of the high standard of maintenance across its campuses supported by a rotational maintenance programme. Repairs and maintenance and utilities expenses made up 6% of the total expenses.
- **Depreciation and borrowing costs** — depreciation of the School’s assets and borrowing costs through Queensland Treasury Corporation (QTC) funding large capital building projects made up 8% of the total expenses.
- **Tuition costs** — these costs fund the day-to-day student activities both in and outside of the classroom and include approved activities such as camps, co-curricular activities, excursions and visiting speakers. Tuition costs made up 4% of the total expenses.

**GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE**

The School would like to acknowledge the contributions made by the State and Commonwealth Governments in the form of grant allocations. The grants received and approved in 2013 included:

- **Recurrent State and Commonwealth Government Grants, including Indigenous assistance:**
  - Commonwealth Grants – $3,835,872
- **Literacy, numeracy and special education grants, including English as a Second Language, special education, Asian languages and students with a disability grant received from Commonwealth Government – $16,952
- **Commonwealth Government Digital Education Revolution Contribution for sustainment to 31 December 2013 – $161,673
- **Funding from the Queensland Government for VET Coordination, literacy and numeracy and special education – $17,396
- **Queensland State Endowment grant provided to Grammar Schools in Queensland to assist with the additional compliance cost to comply with State Government legislation for Statutory Bodies – $21,500**
GENERAL REPORT
MRS JUDITH TUDBALL
DEPUTY PRINCIPAL (OPERATIONS)

LIFE-WIDE LEARNING – LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

‘Let the mountains speak for themselves’
(Nold, cited in Dirx & Lavin)

Learning from experience has long been lauded within educational circles. While the experiential learning concept is not a new one, there has been little formal research into the theory behind learning outside the classroom. However, Brisbane Girls Grammar School remains committed to leading the way and providing exceptional opportunities for our students to engage in learning outside the classroom.

‘A child’s contact with nature will influence health in adulthood as well as having many other long-term gains.’
(MacGibbon, 2010)

Outdoor education was introduced to the School in 1978. Marrapatta, the School’s outdoor education facility located at Imbil in the Mary Valley, was opened in 1987. Twenty-seven years later it remains the only outdoor education facility operated by a single-sex girls’ school in Queensland. Outdoor education is essential for enriching the education experiences undertaken in the formal curriculum at the Spring Hill campus. Taking the girls out of their usual routine and comfort zone, and reaching beyond the standard academic realm develops life skills and explores the diverse interests of our students. Simply put, the Outdoor Education Programme focuses on three areas: learning about the environment, personal discovery, and working with others in teamwork situations. Five Outdoor Education staff, supported by visiting academic staff from across all faculty areas, lead the students in sequential activities designed to not only challenge, but to also explore personal characteristics, thereby developing important skills required by the girls to embrace life effectively. Tonia Gray, Associate Professor from the University of Wollongong refers to relationship, resilience and reflection as the ‘three Rs’ that are overlooked in the modern curriculum (MacGibbon, 2010). Outdoor education, however, lends itself beautifully to doing just that.

Our Outdoor Education staff led the way by contributing to the Outdoor Educators’ Association of Queensland Biennial Conference held in Cairns in 2013. Mr James McIntosh, Director of Outdoor Education, is the President of the organisation, and Marrapatta staff played an integral role in the planning of the Think Outside: No Box Required conference. Furthering professional learning opportunities for outdoor educators, the Marrapatta staff hosted a weekend Active Reviewing workshop with leading international outdoor education expert Roger Greenaway. This programme focused on reflection and the significant impact outdoor education experiences can have on the social and emotional development of young people. Workshop attendees developed reviewing and debriefing techniques and learnt how to capture energy and imagination in reflective practices. The concept of reflection in teaching and learning is another well established one, however, in the busy ‘connected’ world we now live in, it is often challenging to find the time to do so. The Outdoor Education Programme, along with the Year 8 Philosophy of Learning subject, provides students with the time and space to reflect on their learning and thereby evaluate their capacity to grow as confident learners.

The outdoor education campus also provides a vehicle for the Fathers Group to connect with the School through a very tangible form of support. Their weekend retreats at Imbil provide an outlet for fathers to bond and share parenting experiences while undertaking projects to further enhance the Outdoor Education Centre. This year, the Fathers Group provided essential support to build a new camping pad located high on a beautiful ridge behind Marrapatta, in preparation for the School’s intake of Year 7 in 2015.

Complementing our outdoor education facility is the newly acquired campus located at Fig Tree Pocket. Monday 14 January 2013 was a significant day in the history of Girls Grammar, as it marked the day the School officially became custodians of this new 13-hectare campus located at Sprenger Street, Fig Tree Pocket, bringing the number of Girls Grammar campuses to three. The Fig Tree Pocket campus will provide a home venue for competitive sports including cricket, football, touch football, hockey, and cross country invitational meets,
and a training venue for other sports offered by the School. Participation in competitive sports allows students to experience and develop a mindset for success through developing good time management, creating strategies to improve their skill set, building a strong sense of focus and concentration, developing internal skills to handle pressure, learning how to take calculated risks, and most importantly, taking responsibility for their success or failure (Mango, 2012). These attributes strongly align with the Philosophy of Learning subject where students discuss embracing challenge, developing resilience to cope with failure, and using failure well to promote good learning.

While the Fig Tree Pocket campus will be widely used for sporting activities, a much broader vision that incorporates environmental education is also envisaged for the campus. In 2013, a master planning process identified the immediate and longer-term priorities. To date, a major upgrade of the clubhouse change room facilities has been completed and the playing fields have been restored to competition standard, including the reinstatement of the turf cricket wicket on the main oval. Staff and students have engaged in two greening projects with local environmental groups to assist in the restoration of vegetation along the Cubberla Creek waterway bordering the campus, and investigations are underway for the planting of a butterfly trail and the possible creation of an ephemeral frog pond. The School has direct contact with a Brisbane City Council Creek Catchment Officer to assist with the development and planning of this environmental aspect of the campus. This new campus will play a strong part in widening community engagement opportunities for our School parent groups – already the Fathers Group has conducted some weekend workshops to upgrade the spectator seating overlooking the main oval.

The life-wide learning opportunities afforded to the students at Brisbane Girls Grammar School enhance a vast array of curricular and co-curricular offerings available at the Spring Hill campus. Experiencing learning beyond the classroom is considered an essential part of the social, emotional and cognitive development of our students and the School remains committed to providing the very best opportunities for this to occur.

REFERENCES


The challenges facing teachers, and the practice of teaching have never been static. As research, community expectations and technology have evolved, the sense of what it means to be a ‘good’ teacher or a ‘good’ school has evolved with them. Schools, as institutions, have always endeavoured to prepare students today for their lives in the world of tomorrow, and as society and the economy change, so too has the way we view quality teaching and learning.

By the end of 2013 Brisbane Girls Grammar had accumulated 138 years of tradition in educating young women to become independent and well-rounded thinkers, prepared for the rigours of life in the years ahead. We had accumulated 138 years of educational tradition, practices and cultures that had grown over time, and that have become what many might refer to as the ‘Girls Grammar way’ — an approach to schooling that defined what it meant to be a student in a classroom here. Increasingly, however, that approach is being shaped by Federal and State Government agendas.

A school like Girls Grammar needs to resolve a tension in how it approaches teaching and learning. This School, like all others around the country, needs to work within the regulatory frameworks developed by the varying levels of government in Australia. This can at times run counter to the ‘independence’ of a school, or the motivation to build cultures and practices that respect the traditions and innovate in unimagined ways.

A school must walk a fine line at times to ensure that it meets its obligations to educational authorities, but also maintains its ability to offer programmes and experiences that are unique and valuable in the lives of its students.

The adoption of the Australian Curriculum in Queensland is a case in point. Grown from the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008), it sets out the core knowledge, understanding, skills and general capabilities for all Australian students. It provides a common curriculum for all Australian students up to Year 10 for the first time across all learning areas. In a sense it standardises the curriculum across diverse state-based educational jurisdictions.

As the Australian Curriculum is implemented, the challenge for Girls Grammar has been to ensure that it still allows the School to maintain its view of quality teaching and learning, preserving its traditions and continuously allowing for innovation. In other words, making national syllabus documents work for the School and its students.

The continued development of our Philosophy of Learning programme, taught to our Year 8 students is a good example. The metacognition subject that seeks to build reliance and reflection in our girls as learners sits alongside mandated curriculum. On one level the School has prioritised it by finding time in an already crowded curriculum, but on the other has embedded its values into the approaches taken by all other curriculum areas. In this way, we build the skills in girls to help them be students very much in a Girls Grammar style.

Similarly, we look forward to the introduction of Year 7 in 2015. The School has prioritised the elements of a rigorous secondary school education and designed programmes to stimulate learning in new ways. Providing all Year 7 girls with the opportunity to learn Latin on one level underlines the foundations of a Grammar School liberal education, but in the hands of our International Studies Faculty, it builds new skills and linkages across literacy and numeracy domains. Through the innovative curriculum design and development across our academic disciplines, traditional academic faculties have developed individual and unique approaches to delivering the Australian Curriculum.

On a national level, teaching as a profession receives increasing attention as part of the school improvement agendas. This has been realised most recently through the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2011) and the necessity for every school in the country to annually review the performance of each teacher against these standards (AITSL, 2012). The importance of providing the opportunity for schools and teachers to critically reflect on how their practice influences the learning of their students cannot be underestimated. The Australian Council of Educational Research for example, in its analysis of highly effective schools, draws attention to the role of ‘school-wide, shared responsibility for student learning and success’, and ‘the development of a culture of continuous professional improvement’ (Masters, 2012).
The continual evolution of quality approaches to teaching and learning is now (as it should be) a regulatory requirement.

The integrated approach to professional development and critical reflection on their own practice by teachers at Girls Grammar has made collaboration to find better ways of doing things in classrooms the status quo. Across 2013 teachers learned from each other in formal and informal environments, in workshops run by their peers or through observations of each other in classes. In different Faculties teachers broke down the walls between rooms and combined classes, working together and learning from each other’s different approaches. Similarly in our virtual spaces, teachers from across Faculties developed online learning courses used by students across subjects and year levels. Collaborative practices of these types are what Dr Ben Jensen argues are the most influential in promoting the quality of teaching in a school (Jensen & Reichl, 2011).

In reviewing all of this professional learning, and as teachers reflecting on and evaluating our work, the School asks us to return to a central question: How do the practices we develop as teachers promote the depth and breadth of the learning experiences of our students?

In other words, how is the quality of what teachers are doing, extending the opportunities and improving the outcomes for the girls they interact with? For Girls Grammar (as it should be for any educational institution) there exists no higher moral purpose.

In all curriculum contexts Brisbane Girls Grammar is in the enviable position of being able to foster best practice in teaching and learning. It has a track record and culture of excellence in student achievement, and a philosophy that supports teachers in creating the ideal conditions whereby students can flourish. The ability of the School to say to its teachers, and as singer Lindsey Buckingham would urge, to ‘go your own way’, is as true now as it has always been. The experiences of our current student cohort, and those cohorts to come, will benefit from the School’s propensity to apply educational policy frameworks in a manner befitting our aspirations of exceptional scholarship.

REFERENCES

SCHOOLS ARE AWASH WITH DATA

Brisbane Girls Grammar School is proud of its philosophy to provide a broad, liberal arts education that encourages students to select subjects that provide a balanced, holistic education. However, the School is always conscious of the tension that can be created in the wider educational environment where the focus on matriculation results and student Overall Position (OP) scores seem to promote a narrowing or limiting of this liberal education.

One can be forgiven for thinking that the world today is driven by an obsession with continual measurement and benchmarking. Even the term ‘big-data’ has been coined to indicate the amount of data and data sets that are collected by numerous organisations around the world. Education has not escaped from this phenomenon. The current educational debates focus on the analysis of ‘data’ gleaned from The Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) which aims to evaluate educational systems worldwide or The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) which tests skills in literacy and numeracy.

In this current climate of increased accountability and transparency, it is important that we continually question the value we place on increased measurement. Do we measure what we value, or do we come to value that which can be measured? More importantly, what does this mean for the teaching and learning that goes on in the School? What can this data tell us about how we can improve the teaching and learning in our classrooms?

Too much emphasis placed on the collection of data can create the situation outlined by Hargraves (as cited in Robertson, 2013):

Data-driven instruction ends up driving educators to distraction – away from the passion and enthusiasm for rich processes of teaching and learning in classrooms and enriched relationships with children, into a tunnel-vision focus on manipulating and improving test scores in literacy and mathematics by any quick fix available – more test preparation here, after-school classes there, concentrating on cells of children who fall just below the line somewhere else. All this does nothing to enhance the actual quality of teaching and learning.

However, to quote Brookes (2006), ‘Data aren’t an answer, they are only the beginning.’ Perhaps data is only one piece in a very large puzzle.

In their paper, Data-driven accountability in Australia: an unfolding story with lessons for leaders (2011), Smeed, Ehrich, Kimber and Perry, put forward eight key messages from research and literature for school leaders to consider. Two of these are particularly relevant to our context at Brisbane Girls Grammar School:

... there is some research that suggests that there is a link between the effective use of data in decision making and improved student performance outcomes (Alwin, 2002, as cited in Park & Datnow, 2009).

... using data from high stakes testing is likely to hold great potential for diagnostic purposes as it provides educators with valuable information on how to plan for improvements in student learning at the classroom and school level (Smeed et al., 2011).

During 2013, much attention was paid to the increasing importance and collection of Academic Achievement data that specifically informs the teaching and learning programmes within the School – the creation of a data literate culture. As part of a focus on building data literacy, a series of professional discussions among the staff were convened. Through these discussions, shared understandings developed about the information that could be drawn from this academic data. This in turn facilitated cross-faculty discussions and collaboration around how we could improve what we are already doing.
Results of standardised testing are often used by the media to ‘rank’ schools ... such a practice is not educationally sound as it places too much importance on a single testing instrument ... results should not be viewed in isolation; however, if used thoughtfully, the results can provide data regarding the learning needs of students, both as a group and as individuals. The value of this testing then lies largely in the potential of the data to inform teaching practice in a very specific way [Euler, 2013].

As Bowgren and Sever (as cited in Catalyst, 2012) maintain, when teams of teachers engage in the interpretation of student data, they are able to generate solutions to achievement gaps. Building a data culture in the School where data is used with discernment, as one part of the overall picture of students is vital. It enables teachers and educational leaders to continually engage in discussions, to share understandings from the data gathered and to modify their professional practice to improve students’ learning outcomes.

The School is proud to acknowledge the 2013 Year 12 student cohort whose results were outstanding. They reflect the efforts of students and staff and the positive, rigorous yet holistic, approach to education at Girls Grammar.
QTAC Offers 2013

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Overall Position results 2013

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* State OP 1–25 = 100%

Queensland Core Skills Test results 2013

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REFERENCES


GENERAL REPORT
MRS ANNE INGRAM
DEAN OF STUDENTS

EMBRACING THE NEW

The annual Student Leadership Conference provides newly elected senior school leaders with an excellent forum to discuss and plan for the upcoming year. Co-ordinated and managed expertly each year by Associate Dean Mrs Pauline Harvey-Short, this Conference marks the formal commencement of each girl’s leadership journey in their final year. A key session of this Conference is used to identify the motto for the year ahead. Knowing Dr Amanda Bell’s leadership of the School would conclude in 2012, the girls were acutely aware that 2013 would be a year of substantial change. The arrival of the 16th Principal of Brisbane Girls Grammar School, Ms Jacinda Euler, was keenly anticipated throughout Term I of 2013 and the School motto of Embrace the New, Link the Blue was deemed to be the most fitting for this particular time in the life of the School. The senior leaders of the School viewed their leadership role as one of welcome and support as our new Principal became established. They also sought to focus on maintaining strong, cohesive links between students across all year levels and uphold strong School spirit and pride.

With the new year came new community connections, particularly demonstrated in the area of Service. The Service programme continues to be an integral part of the School’s curricular and co-curricular programmes, designed to strengthen healthy social and emotional development of teenage girls. While the wider community derives substantial benefit from the girls’ time, energy, fundraising efforts and involvement, the girls themselves also acquire a deeper appreciation of those in need and a positive sense of community.

‘The act of service nurtures an ethos of social responsibility and self-respect and provides a wonderful opportunity for students to learn what personal growth and responsibility is about. The maturing adolescent comes to realise that she has a responsibility to herself and to the community, a mind of her own and her own place in the world.’ (Stubbington, 2013)

In 2013, Girls Grammar Service forged a new connection with the Cerebral Palsy Alliance. In line with the School’s Strategic Design and Aspiration to be a leader in exceptional scholarship, the School sought to create opportunities for exceptional scholarship across all areas. Linking Service with a research-based charity, particularly one of such significance to women, was a strategic decision. Connecting with a working scientist was also purposeful. Led by Service Co-ordinator, Mrs Lynne Mungomery, Brisbane Girls Grammar School has enjoyed a rich and rewarding connection with the Research Foundation of the Cerebral Palsy Alliance, raising much-needed funds to support researcher Ms Hayley Smithers-Sheedy. At the beginning of 2013, a commitment of $5,000 was made from the School to sponsor Ms Smithers-Sheedy in a research project focusing on newborn blood screening and the impact of cytomegalovirus on cerebral palsy in children. School Service Captains Caitlyn Duke and Aakanksha Desai enthusiastically adopted the cerebral palsy project and were well supported by the wider School community through an array of fundraising activities that continued throughout the year. The ‘September’ campaign, a four-week health and wellness initiative specifically designed to raise funds and awareness for the Cerebral Palsy Alliance, received exceptional support and was instrumental in creating a positively charged sense of community within the School. Throughout 2013, well over $25,000 was raised; an overwhelming response from the School community to this Student Council Service initiative. The work of Mrs Lynne Mungomery has been significant throughout 2013, bringing Grammar Service to new heights and resulting in her appointment to the new position of Director of Service in 2014. Mrs Mungomery is to be congratulated for her strategic vision, her tireless efforts and continued support of the girls as they worked to achieve their Service goals.

New opportunities for leadership and the chance to connect globally were developed during the International Young Leaders Forum (IYLF), held in September at Brisbane Grammar School. Eight Year 10 students were invited to attend the Forum which is hosted annually in turn by members of an alliance of five schools in the Asia Pacific Region: Binus International School in Indonesia, Bugil Academy in South Korea, Hwa Chong Institution in Singapore, Suzhou Foreign Language School in Sushou, China and Brisbane Grammar School. The first Forum was hosted by Suzhou Foreign Language School in 2009 and IYLF has enjoyed success each year since. The overall objective of the week-long, live-in forum is to create a platform for student leaders from the participating schools to interact and to develop new networks; and to inculcate in them a keen awareness of global issues and a strong sense of social responsibility. For the delegates from each school, the significance of the opportunity to become part of a global
network of young leaders cannot be underestimated. Using social media, the delegates took advantage of the opportunity to continue to maintain contact with other delegates. At each Forum, the opportunity exists to promote a rich intercultural understanding for the delegates as they experience the culture of the host school as well as a taste of the culture of delegate schools.

IYLJ student delegate Macada Roebig (10 Hirschfeld) was a keen participant and found her involvement in the Forum to be both memorable and personally challenging, as outlined in her reflection:

Despite the truly inspiring and instructive experiences, the most learning was done in the most informal of ways. It was the late night discussions between the top and bottom bunks and the passionate debates over the dinner table that made the Forum irreplaceable. Night times were often spent either trying to pick up a new language or simply talking about daily life in another country. It was through these seemingly simple conversations that relationships were built, and hidden in these conversations were silent lessons to all involved. Lessons about leadership, values, the importance of customs, structure and education were all subconsciously being learnt as we shared our experiences and knowledge.

REFERENCES
The year 2013 provided the Year 12s with such experiences, encounters, personality types and failures as well as successes. Steered by Head Girls Elizabeth Redmond and Sophie Weir, the Student Council very ably embraced their goals of grade integration, innovative ideas and School spirit to take the cohort on a memorable journey.

This journey was instigated in January with the Student Council Conference where the elected leaders of the School bonded through discussions, shared physical experiences and reflective moments. Biro (2013) believes that leadership can be ‘acquired, honed and perfected’ and that each leader draws on a tool kit to enable these leadership talents to shine. These tools include emotional intelligence, continuous learning, contextualising, inspiration, honesty, kindness and respect, collaboration, and an awareness of the collective’s goals.

The Student Council worked diligently as a team to craft the School motto for the year and the Head Girls delivered the motto of ‘Embrace the new, link the blue’ to the School at their induction in February. These words embodied their goals and established their modus operandi for the year.

To realise these goals, the Student Council established and maintained a positive and responsive conduit between the student body and the School, where views and ideas were conveyed and discussed at meetings and outcomes communicated. The Suggestion Box provided often entertaining commentary about the desires of different year levels ranging from the awarding of academic pockets to combining GrammarNet and Moodle.

‘Leadership is learned behaviour that becomes unconscious and automatic over time ... Many people wonder how leaders know how to make the best decisions ... The process of making these decisions comes from an accumulation of experiences and encounters with a multitude of different circumstances, personality types and unforeseen failures.’ [Glen Llopis, Forbes Magazine, 2013]
This form of communication provided the Council with the chance to discuss realistic solutions, tactfully respond to requests and negotiate the outcomes. Traditional events such as Valentine’s Day, Blue Days, Pink Day and BiGrammar also provided the vehicles through which Student Council members explored their abilities to make decisions, communicate, be accountable, delegate, develop relationships and enjoy their creations.

The opportunity to lead by example and channel positive energy arose with Grammar Goes Green and the restoration of a recycling programme in the School. The Year 12s embraced both concepts, perpetuating the environmental conscience of the student body with many hours spent working on the banks of Cubberla-Witton Catchments on Brisbane City Council land at the northern section of our new Fig Tree Pocket campus. Raising the School’s awareness of on-site recycling was a much more challenging task. It presented the Council with the prospect of raising awareness, educating the girls, taking a moral position on a significant issue and working collectively for its success. The result was cytopurple and yellow recycling bins which proved to be a successful addition to the School environment and a facility embraced by the students.

Leadership is not restricted to the Student Council. Early every year, each Year 12 student is given the opportunity to accept or not, the XII badge which identifies her as a senior member of the School, a person to be relied upon, and an exemplar of responsible behaviour. Accepting this symbol is never presented as an empty ritual but a meaningful and personal decision by each Senior. The responsibility that accompanies the badge is the culmination of four years of leadership preparation affording each girl the chance to realise her personal and collective aspirations and potential. Therefore, every senior is encouraged to set her own leadership goals and develop a skill set to achieve them.

Critical thinking and reflection are integral aspects of good scholarship. It is imperative to evaluate performance to enable improvement and progress. In Term II, the Year 12 students were asked to reflect on their individual goals and their group goals for the year. The major outcomes of this reflection identified academic success, hard work and becoming the ‘best me I can be’ as individual goals. The group aspirations spanned the whole cohort where girls sought strong QCS outcomes, lasting friendships and greater collaboration with specific groups. One example was the Prefects whose goals included making the Year 8s feel welcome and integrated into the school family, as well as being positive role models. These were realistic, attainable goals focusing on the collective good, continuous learning, respect and collaboration.

In their Exit Surveys, the Year 12s once again were asked to evaluate critically the School’s performance and provide a ‘report card’ for 2013. The best aspects of Grammar from their perspective were the friendships, grade unity, leadership opportunities, teachers and events. The negative aspects centred around stress, workload, QCS and assessment. The most popular life lessons taught by the School included hard work and its benefits; developing and maintaining friendships; accepting challenges; resilience; service to the community; self-worth; and seizing opportunities. The Year 12s of 2013 took their leadership responsibilities seriously to the very end, providing honest and mature responses upon which the seniors of 2014 can build.

The elements of good leadership and successful goal setting are open to discussion. However, if Girls Grammar produces graduates who clearly enunciate their desires, demonstrate skills which will help them achieve their dreams, and have an awareness and empathy for the world into which they step, then the School has created a platform to enable each student to develop and grow. This is perhaps best summed up by a Year 12 student in her Exit Survey closing statement:

I have loved my time at Grammar and will always remember my experiences at this school. It has provided me with lifelong friends and experiences to help me achieve and become the best person I can be in the outside world. I have learnt to engage enthusiastically in all opportunities provided and that if you sit on the sidelines, you miss out on creating memories and experiences that help [you] to grow and mature. Grammar has taught me to take nothing for granted and to care not only for my friends and family, but to also take care of the people in the community abroad.

REFERENCES


The longstanding tradition of philanthropy at Brisbane Girls Grammar School continued during 2013, as evidenced by each and every name - current and former students, parents, staff and Board of Trustees - listed on these pages as well as those who have chosen to remain anonymous. In total, the School was grateful to receive $467,745 in gifts from 240 donors.

Great things are achieved when like-minded people come together for a shared purpose. Our $1m+ Building a Tree of Learning Capital Campaign was launched in October 2013 with gifts and pledges totalling $474,792 from 91 donors being received by the year’s end, including a $200,000 gift from the Parents & Friends Association. Whether gifts are directed towards a building, the library or a bursary fund, every gift makes a difference in the lives of Grammar girls, and all gifts are tax deductible.

When reflecting on the extraordinary achievements of this year, a quote from American educator Rensis Likert comes to mind:

“The greater the loyalty of a group toward the group, the greater is the motivation among the members to achieve the goals of the group, and the greater the probability that the group will achieve its goals.”

A special mention needs to be made of our graduating class who has established the 2013 Alumni Bursary — their generous gift is a great example of grassroots giving. It will inspire others to follow their philanthropic leadership so that girls’ schools can start to enjoy the level of support that boys’ schools in Australia have enjoyed for generations.

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HIGHLIGHTS

SCHOOL

• **Educational Leadership:** Ms Jacinda Euler commenced as the 16th Principal of Brisbane Girls Grammar School; former Governor-General, Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO launched a landmark publication commissioned by Brisbane Girls Grammar, and written by renowned Australian educationalist Professor Erica McWilliam called *Educating Girls*; The School was granted The Workplace Gender Equality Agency’s Employer of Choice for Gender Equality (EOCGE) citation for 2013.

• **Academic:** The School’s exceptional record of academic achievement continued with the 2013 Year 12 students achieving excellent results in the Queensland Cores Skills Test and in their OP scores. 14.35% students received an OP1 and 46.52% received an OP1-5; Girls Grammar was confirmed as Queensland’s top performing girls’ school in Year 9 NAPLAN results released by the Queensland Studies Authority; A record 72 girls achieved a VHA at Year 12 exit in English.

• **Infrastructure:** Construction commenced on the contemporary $17.3 million five-storey Research and Innovative Learning Centre to be opened in January 2015 when our first Year 7 cohort arrives.

• **Sports:** The first home-ground cricket matches were played at the new Girls Grammar Sports Campus at Fig Tree Pocket; The School won its 20th consecutive QGSSSA Cross Country title — a remarkable sporting achievement.

• **Co-curricular:** The School continued its commitment to Service with a four-week health and wellness initiative ‘Steptember’ to raise $24,000 for the Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation, while $40,000 was raised to support local, national and global causes; The School staged a successful Senior Drama Production of the commissioned play *The Chosen* by multi-award-winning Australian playwright, Lachlan Philpott. The play was the culmination of two years of workshops with the playwright and has since been published by Playlab; Girls Grammar hosted the 18th Biennial Australian Combined Schools Music Festival with Brisbane Grammar School — 67 girls participated and Richard Gill OAM conducted the Symphony Orchestra, hosted another successful Gala Concert, *Picture This*, showcasing the School’s musical talent at The University of Queensland Centre.

PROFESSIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION BY STAFF

• **Appointments:** Head of Accounting, Phillipa Greig, was appointed to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) Advisory Board for the Economics and Business Curriculum; Director of English Stephen Woods was appointed to assist the Quality Assurance Unit, Queensland Studies Authority for presentations to the Ministry of Education, Tonga; Co-Directors of Technology Studies Brendon Thomas and Shane Skillen were appointed to the Board of the Queensland Society of Information Technology in Education (QSITE); Head of Co-Curricular Drama, Katrina Riveros was nominated by Independent Schools Queensland to join the Expert Teacher Group; Co-Director of Technology Studies, Shane Skillen was appointed to the Joint Council for the Queensland Teacher’s Association; and Drama Teacher Robyn Shenfield was re-elected to the 2013 Drama Queensland Management Committee as Communications Editor.

• **Conferences & Symposia:** Director of Sport, Sally Northcroft presented at the Sport and Society Conference in the USA; Marrapatta staff played an integral role in managing the Outdoor Educators’ Association of Queensland’s OEAQ 2013 State Conference ‘Think Outside – no box required’; Director of Mathematics, Margaret Gunn spoke at the Mathematical Association of Victoria Annual Conference in Melbourne; The Technology Studies Faculty hosted a Q&A forum for industry leaders, technology teachers and curriculum managers; The Creative Arts Faculty hosted the inaugural Creative Futures Symposium attended by arts educators, artists, industry professionals and students; Co-Director of Technology Studies, Brendon Thomas presented and facilitated at the QSITE State Conference 2013; Deputy Principal Mrs Marise McConaghy joined a hypothetical panel run by esteemed psychologist Dr Michael Carr Gregg at the Queensland Positive Schools Conference 2013.

• **Media:** Dean of Academic Development Trent Driver participated in a radio interview on ABC Life Matters with Natasha Mitchell on developing resilience in children.

• **International placements:** The Centre for Professional Practice hosted 27 pre-service teachers from five Australian universities and a TAFE college, and internationally from the University of Akron, Ohio, USA, and Saarland University, Germany.
STUDENTS

- **Awards & Scholarships:** A Year 12 student was awarded the prestigious $100,000 Tuckwell Scholarship to study Bachelor of Philosophy in Physics at the Australian National University, Canberra; Four Year 12 students were awarded University of Queensland Academic Scholarships for 2013; One student was awarded one of 14 Secondary Schools Citizenship Awards from The Order of Australia Association, Queensland Branch for 2013; Three Year 11 students were awarded half scholarships to attend the January 2014 Sound Thinking Summer Music School in Brisbane; A music student was awarded the R.T. Jefferies and Anne Etheldreda Jefferies Bursary for the third time — an unprecedented achievement.

- **Competitions:** Four students participated in the five-person team representing Australia at the 26th International Young Physicists’ Tournament in Taipei, Taiwan; Science students in Years 10–12 participated in the Junior Young Physicists’ Tournament in Singapore, and the International Junior Science Olympiad in Pune, India; Four Year 9 Multimedia and Interactive Technologies students were placed fifth overall in the junior national Robocorp championships; Six students participated in the University of Sydney’s national computer programming competition with one student achieving a high distinction and another a perfect score for the weekly challenges; Seven technology students competed in Young ICT Explorers (YICTE) at the University of Queensland; Four students received a special merit for their eSports co-curricular club initiative that aims to provide fun and innovative ways to engage secondary school girls in ICTs; The School fielded Year 8 and 9 teams in the Da Vinci Decathlon with the Year 8 team winning the English section and placing second overall, while the Year 9 team won the Mathematics section and came fourth overall; Two students were selected to represent Australia at the 2013 Asian Cadet (U17) Fencing Championships in Bangkok in March; Students extended their mathematics study by participating in the Australian Mathematics Competition, QAMT Problem Solving Competition, Intermediate Mathematics Olympiad, Maths Team Challenge, QAMT Year 8 Maths Quiz, Maths Challenge for Young Australians, and the Mathapatta ‘maths camp’; Four Year 10 students travelled to Singapore to participate in the 3rd Annual Singapore Mathematical Modelling Forum and Challenge hosted by Raffles Girls’ and Ngee Ann Secondary Schools; A team of students competed in the Australian Space Design Competition and progressed to the Australian titles; Four Year 10 Multimedia and Interactive Technologies students won the QUT FIRST Tech Challenge PTC Design Award for innovative design and their engineering processes; Across all year levels, 600 students were awarded Royal Life Saving Society certificates, and 225 Year 10 girls completed their St John Senior First Aid Certificates.

- **Specialised study experiences:** The School welcomed students from, and travelled to, French and Japanese affiliate schools, participated in a German immersion trip to the Goethe Institute in Sydney and confirmed the China Study Tour for 2014; Nineteen students attended Space Camp in the USA and received age-appropriate astronaut or pilot training; Twenty Year 11 students participated in the annual Drama Tour to Sydney, attending workshops and performances at major playhouses; Renowned Buddhist practitioner and teacher Jakob Leschly spoke to the Study of Religion students about his experience in Tibet and his personal approach to this important world philosophy; Aboriginal elder, Uncle Albert spoke to Year 10 students about Indigenous issues; Professor Pat Pattison, an international song writing lecturer from Berklee College of Music, Boston, USA assisted 20 young songwriters to hone their craft at the School.

ALUMNI

- **Awards & Scholarships:** An alumna was awarded one of only twenty 2013 Prime Minister’s Australia Asia Award for Australian undergraduate students; An alumna was offered a sport scholarship to Northeastern University, Boston, USA; The President of the Old Girls Association and an alumna, was awarded an AM in the General Division; An alumna received the Williams College Book Award (Berkshire); An alumna was awarded the 2013 University of Queensland Vice-Chancellor’s Alumni Excellence Award; Two alumnae were awarded The University of Queensland Distinguished Young Alumni Award; One alumna was awarded the Sydney University Young Alumni Award for Achievement for her work as an advocate for gender equality, ending violence against women, and social inclusion; Five alumnae were named in the 125 Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) Queensland Leading Women Award which celebrates 125 years of YWCA Queensland working with and for women and girls throughout Queensland.

- **Competitions:** An alumna was selected to represent Australia in the 2013 Asian Junior (U20) Fencing Championships in Bangkok, and in the 2013 World Junior (U20) Fencing Championships in Croatia; An alumna won the Ocean International Open Women’s Climbing competition held in Noumea, entitling her to automatic entry in the Open World Cup events to be held in China and France.

- **Other achievements:** An alumna appeared with Margaret Atwood at the Brisbane Writers Festival Bookend in February 2013 for an evening of words and music, singing hymns from Margaret’s novel *The Year of the Flood*; A past student’s work was chosen for an online digital photography exhibition by Digital Arts: California entitled ‘Wide Open Digital’ showcasing work by 67 digital artists and photographers from 22 countries.
I pay my respects to the traditional custodians, past and present, of this place where we gather as I welcome you to Speech Day and Distribution of Prizes in the 138th year of the School.

Lately, I have been thinking about the relatively new tradition, in our society at least, of recognising the custodians of the places where we gather. It is a tradition that has taken time for many of us to fully understand and therefore importantly to do with genuine respect and meaning. I suspect it is now helping us as a busy, stressed modern-day society to think about some of the ways in which we could better respect and acknowledge the custodians of our own heritage.

Let us then acknowledge the presence today of two exceptional custodians, dare I say ‘elders’, of our School’s recently past heritage:

- Dr Judith Hancock was one of this School’s longest-standing and most notable Principals serving from 1977 until 2001. She very directly shaped the lives of many thousands of girls who passed through the School. I speak from personal experience.

- Dr Cherrell Hirst — it took 120 years for a past student, or any woman, to serve as Chair of the Board of Trustees. Dr Cherrell Hirst wears that badge of honour, having served as a Trustee from 1990 and then as Chair from 1996 to 2006.

In this place are gathered many significant others too as I acknowledged at the opening of my speech, but if I start naming some, I will have to name all 2000-odd of you (and more) for we are all custodians in different ways of the place that we know and love as Brisbane Girls Grammar School.

But is it in truth a ‘place’ at all?

It is I think more accurately a family, a community, a culture, a way of life. It belongs to none of us and it belongs to all of us. Or more fittingly, we all belong to it, in just the same way that Indigenous communities, farmers, those on the land, even those who pass through the extraordinary prehistoric landscapes of central Australia, speak not of owning land (or place) but of being owned by it; of having responsibility to care for it.

BGGS is like that. It doesn’t belong to any of us. We belong to it and have responsibility to care for it — mere custodians of today on behalf of those who cared for it before us, and on behalf of those who will care for it after we are long gone.

Why has this notion of custodianship been on my mind so much this year?

In September this year we welcomed the former Governor-General, Dame Quentin Bryce AD CVO, to launch Educating Girls, authored by Professor Erica McWilliam; a thoroughly researched thematic account of what it means to ‘be’ Brisbane Girls Grammar School. Professor McWilliam was initially appointed as scholar-in-residence for the School’s 135th year, which later led to her appointment as writer-in-residence in 2012 for the dedicated purpose of writing a themed history of the School. Educating Girls, the result, showcases the School across the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries as a place that constantly breaks new ground for the education of young women.

The book is beautiful and rich both in its visual images and in the textured stories it weaves of so many of the custodians of our long and often colourful history. In terms of colour, go straight to chapter 6 entitled ‘Being Eccentric’, which kicks off with Miss Charlotte Pells who, in the 1890s introduced Indian club swinging as part of the regular calisthenics programme of the School. It winds its way through 14 decades of marvellous eccentricities of teachers and Principals, including Miss Lilley and her Silky Terrier Geordie that it was recalled accompanied her everywhere and had a cushion of its own by the lectern when she addressed morning assembly. When it comes to long-remembered eccentricities, Miss Milisent Wilkinson of the first decade of the 1900s deserves a mention. She customarily took a small bottle of champagne with her lunch each day, the book relates, and enjoyed her salads topped with a large red M (for Milisent) made of chopped beetroot!

Educating Girls is a rich celebration of the truth that our culture at BGGS today is not ours alone, but is born of 138 years of dedicated, professional, interesting, eccentric, passionate, and very ordinary people. We are all but temporary custodians of this wonderful School’s ethos.
The importance of good custodianship also came to the fore in this year of significant change. It is often only in times of real change that we really test the culture of a place, and see if the culture we inherited from our past custodians withstands change and blossoms into its new phase.

Let's reflect on what happened in our year of significant change. We had this time last year farewelled Dr Amanda Bell after 11 years as Principal and started the School year awaiting the arrival of the new Principal in second term. The School community leapt into 2013 with as much vim, vigour and vitality as ever. Perhaps even a little more than usual; the anticipation of the new and unknown can do that.

Fortunately for all, our experienced and much-respected Deputy Principal, Mrs Marise McConaghy, had stepped forward willingly and ably to the role of Acting Principal. Mrs McConaghy is herself one of the leading and living custodians of our heritage. I know that she holds as much affection and concern for this School and the welfare of its students as it is possible to have. The Board is deeply appreciative of this and was confident to have such a steady pair of hands into which to place the care and custody of the School during first term. It was business as usual from day one, thanks to Mrs McConaghy, the senior leadership group of the School and each and every one of the staff who obviously live and breathe the ethos of the School such that our girls didn’t miss a single beat during first term.

Thank you Mrs McConaghy and all of the staff.

This year of change also highlighted how very fortunate we are to have our Board Secretary and Chief Financial Officer, Ms Colette Pretorious, as the custodian of our financial resources. In addition to her usual trademark vigilance to the School’s financial management, in this transitional year Ms Pretorious took an even greater role in mission-critical projects.

Twelve months ago today we didn’t own sports fields. Today, almost 12 months to the day since we signed the purchase contract, the Fig Tree Pocket Health and Environment site is well and truly up and running despite many years of neglect of the grounds. This is largely thanks to Ms Pretorious and her team, including the indefatigable Mr David Foreman. But as if that wasn’t enough, Ms Pretorious took a leading role in securing $2.2M from the Queensland Government Flying Start program towards the construction of the Research and Innovative Learning Centre on the site of the old carpark at the front of the School on the Kalinga Avenue boundary in time for the addition of Year 7 in 2015.

There was one other small change this year — the arrival of Ms Jacinda Euler at the beginning of Term II as the School’s 16th Principal. Ms Euler came ‘home’ to BGGS where she had been appointed in 2001 by Dr Hancock as a history teacher and later became Head of House until 2007. Ms Euler had obviously carried a custodial flame for BGGS for all of the intervening years she spent in Sydney at Pymble Ladies College and SCEGGS Redlands. Indeed when some of us spoke with others with whom she had worked in her role as Deputy Principal at Redlands, we commonly heard ‘oh, yes, we know all about BGGS; Jacinda is always telling us how we should do this and that and the other, the way you do at BGGS!’

The Board was enthused by her brimming enthusiasm for, and understanding of, the defining ethos of our School. At the conclusion of her first partial year in the School, we stand proudly behind Ms Euler, confident in the knowledge that she understands the significant burden that comes with custodianship of the responsibilities, traditions and wonders of the office of Principal of BGGS.

We look forward with great excitement to the years ahead under your leadership Ms Euler. We know that you will follow in the footsteps of the unbroken line of 15 exceptional women Principals that have gone before to ensure that the girls who pass through the School under your leadership live the School’s aspiration to exceptional scholarship and its intent to send them out into the world with wisdom, imagination and integrity and that they will recognise and respect the traditions that have gone before but are never captives of them.
Another good reason to reflect on the concept of custodianship this year is because we are now entering the final year of the current four-year term of the Board of Trustees. The Board has custodial responsibility for the governance of the School and takes that role very seriously. We share, I believe, a common understanding that the School does not belong to us but we to it. We are accountable to the School community for our custodianship. This is not the appropriate forum for a dissertation on the finer points of the Queensland Grammar Schools Act 1975 under which the Board and School are formed. Suffice to say under that Act, the board of seven Trustees comprises three who are elected from the Roll of Electors (or donors to the School) and four who are appointed, on the Board’s recommendation, by the Minister for Education.

In May next year the election process for Trustees will begin for a new four-year Board term starting next November 2014. We will keep the School community well informed of that process and how you can engage in it, including if you are interested as a candidate for the Board.

In the meantime, I would acknowledge and thank all of my fellow Trustees — Adjunct Professor Dr Mary Mahoney, Deputy Chair; Mr Tony Young, Chair of FAC; Mr David Vann; Mrs Margaret Huth; Ms Gillian Adams; and Ms Di Lohrisch who have all served your School with diligence and commitment over this past year in which we made one of the most critical decisions in more than a decade, namely the selection of a new Principal, and one of the most ground-breaking decisions of the past three decades in the acquisition of the School’s third campus at Figtree Pocket, to supplement our spiritual home on Gregory Terrace and our second campus, the Marrapatta Memorial Outdoor Education Centre at Imbil.

That leaves me with only one last acknowledgement. Year 12s, at the close of tomorrow you will cease to be the most senior members of the student population and custodians of that tradition. You will instead become the most junior members of the alumnae — or body of past students — of the School. I hope that you will also all join up and become members of the Old Girls Association and enjoy an active lifelong relationship with the School through that 114-year-old association. No matter what, though, you will always be a member of the School’s alumnae. This means that no matter how far and wide you range in your life, you too will always be a custodian of some little part of the life and soul and fabric of this School. Treat it with care, for the sake of those yet to come. Put your school badge and a few other treasured mementos of these years in a safe place and one day 30 years from now when you take them out and gaze at them as your daughter, your niece or your best friend’s daughter receives her leaving certificate, I think then that you will know what I mean.

The School belongs to none of you and it belongs to all of you. But more fittingly you belong to it.
I wish to acknowledge the Turrabul and Yuggera clans who are the traditional owners of the land upon which we meet today. Philosopher, Bertrand Russell once said: ‘History makes one aware that there is no finality in human affairs; there is not a static perfection and an unimprovable wisdom to be achieved’ (cited in Watson, 2001).

One of the distinguishing features of Girls Grammar since its beginnings in 1875 has been our continuing drive to challenge, to strive and to lead. We understand that we would never claim to have attained a ‘static perfection’ or have the misguided arrogance to even aim to achieve an ‘unimprovable wisdom.’ Rather, it is the pursuit of exceptional scholarship, commitment to girls’ education in the fullest sense and the challenge to discover what is possible, that drives our school. Each year we build and strengthen.

Girls, you continue to astonish us with your achievements — academic, sporting, musical, creative — and inspire us with your generosity and your contribution to service.

Staff, thank you for your support of our School. It has been a demanding year for academic and professional staff alike but your incredible hard work in so many areas, your optimism and collegiality has been so greatly appreciated and so important in my first year. And as one teacher said in an email to me this morning, ‘in this busy, sometimes frantic time of year, we just have to remember the reason we are here — we are all here for the girls’. And another said, ‘Speech Day is to be enjoyed’. And so we will.

In particular, I have been grateful this year for the leadership of what we call D-Group, which might sound like a rap band or a secret club but actually comprises our Deputies and Deans. Deputy Principal, Mrs Marise McConaghy’s generous support as I made the transition to Principal of Girls Grammar was so important in ensuring that I felt settled and well-prepared and the School was at ease. Deputy Principal, Mrs Judith Pretorius and her team.

Naturally, when assuming responsibility for Girls Grammar as a new Principal an important question to ask ourselves, to ask myself, is: What is the purpose of education? And more specifically: What is the purpose of a Girls Grammar education? What is our responsibility to the girls? And, what is their responsibility to utilise this unique education, not only for the benefit of themselves, but also of others?

Year 8 girls — you are you (and as Dr Suess has said — no one can be ‘youer than you’), but how will our School’s culture develop you, nurture and shape you? Year 12 — we might ask what influence has Girls Grammar had on your outlook on life and who you will become?

I hope our girls develop the skills and attributes that will give them the confidence to embrace the future with optimism, a love of learning and a willingness to challenge assumptions. Our girls will soar highest, and we as a school, will be exceptional leaders in scholarship, but only if we have depth. There must be depth in our thinking and in our scholarship, in our connection to this School and in our relationships.
We often speak a great deal about synthesis, critical thinking skills, the ability to analyse and synthesise masses of information, to multi-task — all important skills. But there is still an important place for stillness, reflection and depth.

In realising our Aspiration — To be a leader in exceptional scholarship — deep reflection, deep questioning and deep understanding allows us to soar in our thinking, in our imagination. Year 12 girls you will leave here and become leaders in the world and agents of progress and change. We trust that you will contribute confidently to your world with wisdom, imagination and integrity. To enable, nurture and challenge we must develop disciplined intellectual habits and systematic curiosity, for, like Alice down the rabbit hole, things become ‘curiouser and curiouser’ the more closely and systematic curiosity, for, like Alice down the rabbit hole, things become ‘curiouser and curiouser’ the more closely we examine them.

Fundamental to pursuing depth in scholarship is the demand for stillness and reflection. This requires attention and being present, fully present, for, as author William James wrote, ‘My experience is what I agree to attend to. Only those items which I notice shape my mind.’ When we bury our heads in a screen we miss so much around us. The average person now spends more time online than talking with friends and family face to face. The compelling, constantly changing and pervasive nature of social media within our popular culture has meant that we struggle to keep up with it and, at times, cannot step away from it. In a digital world that is exciting and rapidly changing, our attention span is shrinking. And yet, despite this condition of our culture, some things don’t change.

Howard Gardner, from Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, has said that ‘even in light of postmodern skepticism and the side effects of technological advances on our attention spans and ways of thinking’ the virtues truth, beauty and goodness remain the ‘crucial bedrock of our existence’ even as our conceptions of them have shifted over time. And for Gardner, education is crucial for parsing the truth for, he says, ‘The only way you can learn to think like a disciplinarian is by studying those things in depth — not by surfing the Internet or casual postings on Facebook’ (as cited in Sweeney, 2011).

Next year our School will adopt a whole-school BYOD approach because we understand the wonderful opportunities that come with the effective use of technology in teaching and learning, in connecting us to others and in developing the skills our modern world demands. And as Howard Gardner observes, in this era of constant flux, where Wikipedia has become the go-to source for information, the odds of ascertaining the actual truth about something are actually better than ever. In the past, we watched one or two TV channels that brought us the news or we got no news at all, he says. And technology has linked humanity in unprecedented ways, ‘We have a greater opportunity than ever before to become (good) global citizens’ (as cited in Sweeney, 2011). But we must approach this embrace of technology with a critical mind and not ignore its potential ‘shadow side’, as the very thing that opens up our minds to knowledge can work against it.

If we want to allow space to appreciate beauty, mull over truth, debate about goodness and to encourage this deep thought, we must, at times, pull ourselves away from the screen — literally take the phones away (was that a sharp intake of breath girls?) — to see the world around us, beyond our screens. As Nikki Gemmell said, writing in The Australian last week, ‘Screens should not be making us duller; narrow or diminish us’ or ‘suck away curiosity for this wondrous world like a black hole of deadening diversion in a ravishingly beautiful universe’ (2013).

One important antidote might be to get back to nature — finding balance in the tangible world that literally surrounds us. Last year at Speech Day we announced the exciting news of the acquisition of a Fig Tree Pocket Sports Campus. While we are thrilled to at last be in possession of our own sporting fields, in the year since, we have thought deeply about how else we might use this gift.

The idea that we might create a butterfly garden, ephemeral frog pond, a bird list, perhaps even an observatory is not to encourage quaint hobbies or a mere quirky idea. Such direct, hands-on, hands-dirty experiences and study of the science behind them — through geography, biology, and astronomy — helps our students to better understand our world, their intimate connectedness to it and the importance of the natural environment. The physicality of sport and the planting of trees is very grounding and connection to nature is essential for wellbeing. Although I know that some of our Year 12 girls just back from Marrapatta this week felt very grounded in their tents — I believe a little uncomfortably so for some! Still, these experiences are so tangible and a balance to the intangible, abstract cyber world. Exceptional scholarship encourages us to explore first hand, the wonder of the universe, to probe deeply and to plumb the depths of learning.

Social researcher Hugh Mackay has written extensively on the importance of deep connection to place as being fundamental to the human sense of self, sense of community, sense of mortality and sense of destiny. Mackay (2005) suspects that much of the uneasiness, anxiety and moral uncertainty of modern urban societies can be traced to our loss of a strong sense of continuous connection with places that help to define us. ‘Cyberspace, it turns out, is no substitute for the real thing,’ he says (as cited in The Age). A deep and enduring connection to Girls Grammar contributes to our sense of identity — both personal and communal.
Year 12 girls have established deep roots that are grounded in their years at this School. For some of you, the depth of these roots makes it hard for you to leave, but as you do venture out, you will find they will also give you strength and hold you steady.

The importance of the teacher/student relationship in student learning is well documented. Our teachers still fulfil an essential role in education, with their deep knowledge and expertise in their disciplines, despite cries from writers such as Christopher Bantick in *The Australian on Saturday* (I assure you I have read more widely than last Saturday’s paper!) who claimed that ‘Google has deposed the role of the teacher’ (Bantick, 2013). It is true, as Bantick says, that students can now go straight to a required fact, provided by Google, get the answer right, and yet have no understanding of what development of ideas has led to a fact. But it is within the deep learning connections and relationships with teachers that students develop the understanding that ‘is beyond the power of Google’ and as Jennifer James, a cultural anthropologist from Stanford University has said, ‘you can’t lie to adolescents with access to the internet’ but in times of great change teachers must help to establish new wisdom traditions and be ‘honest brokers of the truth’ (James, 2011).

Popular culture is not entirely vapid and vacuous but it has its limitations. It is appealing, exhilarating, even addictive and technology allows us to access and to do what, not very long ago, was unimaginable. It can, however, be shallow. Social media has made it possible, even obligatory, for each and every one of us to have an opinion and to share it. We are inundated with stories of the superficial and need to think critically about how we absorb it and provide students with the tools necessary for them to critique their culture.

While popular culture largely celebrates the ordinary and the average we must continue to laud the extraordinary and ponder the profound, taking our students deep into worlds that are different from the everyday experiences they are exposed to. Our girls celebrate, wholeheartedly, the achievements of one another and I am very proud to say that there is no resentment of tall poppies at this school. In education, being extraordinary, does not mean that everyone has to be an OP1, a soloist at Gala or in the First VIII, rather we enable girls to be the best they can be — it’s about drawing out the extraordinary.

It is part of the tradition of Girls Grammar — a collective wisdom that has built up over 138 years — to be leaders in education and we must continue to take our girls to higher places — these lofty and timeless ideals are only attainable if we have invested deeply in learning, in connection and in relationship.

There is continuity in humanity, in civilisation — things seem so new but we are still dealing with some fundamental goals of education. When we are bombarded by the tyranny of the new — it tricks us into thinking we have to keep up — we can find ourselves treading water rather than diving into the depths of learning, into the depths of life.

To return to Bertrand Russell, there is no such thing as ‘unimprovable wisdom’ or ‘static perfection,’ and only by thinking deeply, connecting deeply and strengthening our relationships can we sustain an environment where, in the words of our own School Song, we encourage you, girls to ‘set your goals and strive, dare to let your dreams take wing and soar’ (Hadgraft, 2000).

I congratulate all girls for their achievements this year and thank all staff for their professionalism, expertise and accomplishments in support of our School and, as you fly on your way Year 12, we all wish you well.

REFERENCES


James, J. (2011, August). Keynote Address presented at the 10th World Convention for Principals in Toronto, Canada.


Chair of the Board, Ms Jameson; Trustees; Principal, Ms Euler; special guests, and particularly, Ms Ann Harrap; staff; parents; and fellow Grammar girls.

We would firstly like to extend our sincere thanks to Ms Ann Harrap for returning to the School this afternoon and sharing with us her extraordinary career.

This year, with the Student Council, we set ourselves the challenge of ‘embracing the new and linking the blue’. Knowing that our last year would be one of change, we encouraged the girls to find their inner Grammar spirit and joined with them in finding ways to ‘link the blue’ throughout the School, creating and strengthening meaningful connections between girls both within each year and between girls in all year levels. Mottos can be easy to quote, but more challenging to implement.

We feel, however, that we have had success in establishing a happy culture in the school where we hope, most, if not all students feel part of the special bonded community that is Brisbane Girls Grammar School. Embracing the new, most significantly with welcoming Ms Euler as Principal, the opening of the new sports campus and the implementation of plans for the new building to accommodate our soon-to-arrive Year 7s, have been exciting experiences throughout the year. Adding these significant events to the usual day-to-day intensity of Grammar makes us realise what a full and fulfilling year it has been.

As Grammar seniors and leaders, ‘linking the blue’ with our Grammar sisters has been of considerable personal significance to Sophie and I. We have both been humbled and delighted by the level of Grammar Spirit displayed at various events, for example, the Blue Day Dance Floor, house parties, cheering at GGSSSA competitions or fundraising for the School charity, The Cerebral Palsy Alliance. The Grammar spirit was on display earlier this week at Marrapatta as the Year 12s created their finale for the Valedictory Dinner. Thank you to the School for its generosity and for providing the Year 12s with the opportunity to see the Memorial Outdoor Education Centre one last time and replay the unique experiences we had across our high school years at this campus. To spend two days of our final week together in this pristine environment was an added bonus.

A successful year of accomplishments included winning our 20th successive Cross Country title, performances at the cleverly scripted and professional Gala, and the staging of our commissioned play, The Chosen. In a large school like this with a cohesive culture, these successes are only made possible by contributions, large and small, by many people.

Ms Euler, thank you again for your overwhelming kindness and encouragement. It has been our privilege to share our final year with you and be part of your introduction to the School as Principal. Your efforts to accommodate our needs, particularly your generosity with time as you settled into your new role, are truly appreciated.

To the many teachers who have guided, taught, enthused, challenged, cried and laughed with us over the years, our sincerest thanks. For the hours that you did those things before and after school, online, or at sports, debating, drama and music venues, thank you again. We will never know the full extent of the sacrifices that you have made for us through your commitment to your chosen vocation. We are, however, aware that there is much going on ‘behind the scenes’ that makes our lives so enriched and enables each student to develop into an independent thinker and learner. We will endeavour to make those sacrifices worthwhile.

Of course the cohesiveness in the School is a product of the hard work and year long focus of the 26 members of the Student Council, each girl bringing an extraordinary level of commitment to her various undertakings. Each girl in the council needs to be a responsible leader of her House or co-curricular area, a good listener and an effective facilitator. Thank you all for your ideas, enthusiasm and efforts in making 2013 a very special one for us and for the rest of the School. Soph and I know you are equipped to take on the world. It doesn’t seem that long ago that Lil and I were entering Year 12 somewhat bright eyed and bushy tailed, wondering just how intense 2013 was going to be. Sarvashree and Claudia, we wish you and the new Student Council and of course, all soon to be Year 12s, all the best for the coming year. It is exciting, it is inspiring and it is the fastest year you are ever likely to live. Enjoy!

Whilst we are ready to undertake the next phase of our journey, we know we will miss our lives here with you, our fellow students. We hope we have made you feel that you are a part of a community which cherishes each individual; celebrates achievements — large or small; and strives to encourage each girl to discover her best. As you look for paths that will direct you to your greatest individual potential, remember to be proud of these intense five years which will forever link you to the blue of Brisbane Girls Grammar School and its ideals of wisdom, imagination and integrity.
It’s a great pleasure and privilege for me to be sharing this special day with the 2013 Year 12 graduands and other members of the Brisbane Girls Grammar School community including Ms Elizabeth Jameson, Chair of the Board; Ms Jacinda Euler, Principal; Trustees; staff; parents/families; and girls — the Year 12 students in particular.

I have to confess to feeling a little depressed to think that it was nearly 30 years ago that I was sitting at my own final year speech day. Although it was not held at a venue as large as this — in fact it was at Centenary Hall at Boys Grammar. There were only 859 girls, not the 1,169 you have now; we still had boarders living at the School; I know I had a terrible perm — some of your mothers did too; and Mrs Harvey-Short was still Miss Harvey.

Nearly 10 years after that final speech day, I was living in South Africa as an Australian diplomat. I witnessed that country’s first democratic election where black South Africans stood in queues for hours and days to cast their vote for the very first time in their lives. We all celebrated the election of Nelson Mandela — the man who had been imprisoned by the apartheid regime for 27 years — as the country’s first democratic President on a promise of reconciliation and racial unity. I was lucky enough to meet Mr Mandela three times in my life — the first in 1996 following the passing of South Africa’s new constitution.

Ten years after that I was in London working at the Australian High Commission there. It was a fascinating time to be a diplomat, living as we were in an era of heightened international security and threat following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York. I was mixing with the Heads of MI5 and MI6 (neither of whom looked like Judi Dench!) assessing intelligence in preparation for political decisions to deploy Australian and other military personnel to far-off war theatres.

I then served in one of those war theatres, as the acting Australian Ambassador to Iraq based in Baghdad. I had close personal protection from the Australian Defence Force, travelled in an armoured vehicle with full body armour and helmet, and spent much of my time trying to revive Australian wheat sales to that war-torn country.

And exactly 24 years after graduating from BGGS I was appointed as Australia’s High Commissioner to South Africa, with accreditations to six other countries in the southern African region.

In that role I was introducing Australia’s Governor-General Quentin Bryce to Nelson Mandela, welcoming the Australian rugby and cricket teams, and of course the Socceroos for the 2010 FIFA World Cup. I was having meetings with Presidents and Kings; representing Australia’s position on climate change at the international negotiations in Durban; and advocating Australia’s growing political, trade and development interests on a continent that was really going places politically and economically. I was pressing to secure votes for Australia’s ultimately successful bid to hold a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Sitting at my last speech day back in 1984 I would not have imagined it.

It has been a very charmed and adventurous life so far. But many of the pathways I have taken and many of my achievements are attributable to what I learned at Girls Grammar in an environment that supported ambition and nurtured talent and drive.

Looking back, a couple of particular ideas or values stand out, and I want to share those with you.

The first is the importance of making friendships, building networks, staying connected and being supportive of other women and girls. For me, having a strong network of contacts was a professional necessity — diplomacy is all about influencing key decision makers to your, or your country’s, way of thinking. But that network also provided me with a source of ideas and in many cases, inspiration. Being able to partner with others who shared similar goals or objectives helped to drive the achievement of outcomes that were important to me or to Australia. Being able to link with others — particularly other women — from whom I could draw support, wisdom and experience was absolutely vital for my business success, but also for my personal growth.

I have to say I didn’t always see it that way. I used to get a bit annoyed when I was asked to speak at official events to give the ‘female perspective’, or share my views on ‘women in leadership’, or mentor a group of young women diplomats. After all, I was Australia’s High Commissioner to South Africa.
not Australia’s female High Commissioner to South Africa. I wanted to be asked about my views on leadership — period; about strategies to develop good relations between countries; about how to maintain a happy and productive workplace of both men and women; and about juggling competing priorities to deliver outcomes on time and within budget. I wanted to be recognised for my professional contribution across the board and not just my actions to advance the role of women.

But I soon realised that there are plenty of women in the world who cannot express a view at all — whose voice has never been heard, who will never have the choices we have had and who will never have their interests advanced and represented if we don’t do it.

The opportunities that we all now enjoy in terms of participation in education, in the workforce, in the media, in public life, and in high office, were a gift from women trailblazers before us who, through their tireless efforts across many decades, affirmed the right of every woman to a life of opportunity, freedom and choice. They lived their lives inspired by a faith in women they would never know, and a future they could only dream about.

As my former colleague the Australian Ambassador for Women and Girls has noted — we owe those trailblazers a debt of gratitude, and we owe to them a responsibility: a responsibility to continue to build on their foundations, to do more, to be more, and to make life better for the women who will come after us and for the women who currently have no choices.

It might interest you to know that Australia did not have our first female High Commissioner until 1971 and many male diplomats at the time were still insisting that women ambassadors and high commissioners should not be a reality. One Australian trade commissioner wrote, ‘women would not be able to mix nearly as freely with businessmen as men do, they could not withstand the fairly severe strains and stresses, mental and physical, and the spinster lady can, and often does, turn into something of a battleaxe with the passing years’.

I reflected on that statement when I took up my position as High Commissioner. And it serves to remind me today that until there are more women involved in decision-making, in positions of influence, we must uphold that responsibility to say and do in our own time the things that have been previously held to be unthinkable and unachievable. And we can do more and be more, in part, by working cooperatively, by supporting one another.

Rest assured in my experience the world is tough and difficult enough for determined and intelligent women without us turning against one another. Use girl power and the sisterhood to help deliver better options for yourself, your family, your communities and your world. These, like feminism, are not dirty words. They describe a bond that we should embrace and celebrate. Don’t underestimate the power of the collaborative network that you already have from your school days and don’t be afraid to use it in your professional and personal lives.

Similarly, don’t be afraid to speak up and act — express your arguments, share your views, make a contribution. That’s sometimes harder to do in situations where you are the only woman, and where there is not a critical mass of peers. Sitting where you sit now, surrounded by other girls and family and teachers who nurture the best in you, you might ask, ‘What is she talking about? I can do and say anything!’

And that’s true to the extent that you can make your own choices but just think about the fact that in Australia less than 15 per cent of board members on the Australian Stock Exchange top 200 companies are women. In other words, women are significantly under-represented in private sector leadership positions across the country even though we make up just under half of the workforce. Think about the fact that of the 192 countries sitting at the United Nations, only 18 of them are led by women. Obviously more must be done — our voices must be heard more clearly.

So you must be in the game. You must have confidence in who you are, be true to yourself, comfortable in your own skin, and most importantly, have the courage of your convictions. These are some of the lessons I took away with me from school. And I recalled them and how they had inspired me when I read the story of the Australian state Member of Parliament, Virginia Chadwick, who died in 2009 after a distinguished political career spanning 21 years. When she first mentioned her early political aspirations to a senior male MP she was promptly told that she was, ‘the wrong age, the wrong sex and from the wrong place’.
She proved him wrong in the best possible way — by entering politics and becoming a successful and eminent state Cabinet Minister.

So to all of you as aspiring leaders — whether in public life, in the private sector, in your communities, or at home — know that you are the right age, the right sex and from the right place and it is vital for you to make your voice heard, to be bold and be successful — because that is the best and the only response to those who might seek to discourage you.

There is one final point I would like to make. It’s one that I did not reflect on much when I was graduating although in hindsight I think it’s important to do so — and that is the fact that things don’t always turn out the way you plan. Or in the words of Mick Jagger, ‘you can’t always get what you want’.

For me when I had finished my Arts/Law degree at Queensland University I was always going to be Jana Wendt — she was a well-known successful Australian journalist at the time — and I was going to have a large family. I ended up being a diplomatic with three stepdaughters. My prospective journalism career flew out the window during the year I took off after Uni to backpack around Africa. I was hitching outside of Cape Town (not something that I suggest young people do these days!) and I was picked up by an Australian diplomat. I spent a couple of days with her and decided that there was a lot of similarity between journalism and diplomacy — in particular the need for a curious mind and a love of communication — and I switched career paths. In other words, even though at the end of school I had a fixed plan about what I was going to do, about how my life would turn out — circumstances, fate, chance, and opportunity served to change that.

But the point I would make is that with the benefit of the high quality education I had at this School, with the confidence I felt in myself about being able to follow my dreams, and with the flexibility that I had been encouraged to develop, I was able to take that leap of faith. How you deal with changes of fate and fortune, with challenges, and with crises, will be what defines you.

Of course I hope you all have the family you want, the job you want, the money you want, and the life you want. But if things don’t quite go the way you imagine them now as you sit here, know that with the adaptability and resilience that you have — those characteristics that are so much a part of being a Grammar girl — you are still destined to prevail.

As a former President of the United States Theodore Roosevelt once said:

We are face to face with our destiny and we must meet it with a high and resolute courage. For us, is the life of action, of strenuous performance of duty; let us live in the harness, striving mightily; let us rather run the risk of wearing out than rusting out.

Thank you.
Little did I know, 21 years ago, when I was sitting in your place, that I would have the incredible honour to address you all today.

I remember being imbued with a sense of excitement and anticipation for what lay beyond the doors of Girls Grammar. I admired my fellow students who had a dream, and knew exactly what to do to reach it, but I didn’t have a dream, I didn’t even have a clue. All I knew was that I liked to argue, I was stubborn, I wanted to know why things are the way they are, and I wanted to make a difference — a difference ‘at what’ was less clear to me.

After graduating from school, although I loved university, I was lost — quite literally at times — I never managed to find the location of one of my first year law classes and ended up accidentally sitting an engineering exam instead, come end of year.

Things didn’t really change over the next couple of years. I knew what I didn’t want to do, but I didn’t know what I did want to do. My lack of passion or inspiration concerning my studies filtered through to my academic results. During an interview with a law firm, I was asked to name my weakest point, and in a misguided attempt at candour, I said that it would have to be my grades. The interviewer took one look at my academic record and replied, ‘You’re certainly right about that one!’

Before my last year at law school, I went to see a career advisor in order to find out if there was anything out there for me. The Grammar career advisor, Mrs Lynch, had always been very supportive of my fluctuating ambitions. When I told her, quite arrogantly, that I wanted to be the Prime Minister, rather than laughing me out of her office, she responded enthusiastically, but diplomatically, that perhaps 17 was a bit too young to be Prime Minister, and that it might be useful for me to obtain a degree or perhaps some relevant experience beforehand. It is a pity that this advice wasn’t given to some of our current politicians!

At university, I had enjoyed peace and conflict studies, but was not sure whether it would lead to a career. I therefore inquired as to whether there was a way I could combine a law degree with a career with international aspects. In contrast to my experience at Grammar, my question was given quite short shrift. I was advised that international law was more of a hobby than a career, and that any positions were highly sought after. After looking at my grades, I was advised that I would have more luck if I specialised in drafting wills instead — I think I would have died of boredom before my clients did!

Undeterred, I still chose to do international law. During classes, the lecturer mentioned that the University had entered a moot competition for international law and that students should try out, and would be selected by the competitors from the year before. Fortune smiled on me. One of these competitors happened to be a girl from my year at Grammar (Joanna Cuill), who remembered me from debating and public speaking, and managed to convince the panel that my debating experience and enthusiasm for international relations might compensate for my lack-lustre grades. I also promised to bake chocolate cookies for the team every Friday — it never hurts to be creative with what you can offer!

The moot question for that year was based on the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The Tribunal was established by the United Nations to investigate and prosecute genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It was the first Court of its kind since the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, and aimed to promote peace and reconciliation by giving victims a judicial remedy so that they would not seek revenge through other means.

The Tribunal epitomised my perfect career — a combination of law, and peace and conflict studies. The Tribunal had not even been set up when I graduated from school but by following my interests, and trying to do something I cared about, I had found something which inspired me.

The challenge was then — how to turn this dream into a reality? Fortune again smiled on me. A fellow student, who was a few years above me, had just completed an internship with the Prosecution and explained to me how I could apply through their website. If not for her friendly advice, I would have had no idea that such opportunities existed.

I was very fortunate to be selected to be an intern for the first President of the Tribunal — Antonio Cassese. I later discovered that my application had been successful because of my experience in mooting, and the human resources person was intrigued that I had put Latin under languages spoken!

Through hard work, enthusiasm, and sheer persistence, I was eventually hired as the legal assistant for the Registrar of the Tribunal, Ms Dorothee de Sampayo Garrido Nijgh. The Registrar was an incredible woman — a former Dutch judge and diplomat, she spoke eight different languages. Above the door to her office, she had a plaque with the words from the entrance to the oracle in Delphi — know thyself. That was probably the most important lesson she taught me — to know myself.
Due to staffing shortages, there was a period where I was shared between three different sections. When I was wearing my cap for a section other than the Registrar’s office, my supervisor asked me to do something, which I was concerned could create a risk for one of the witnesses. I was only 23 years old at the time so although I expressed this view, ultimately, I did what my supervisor asked. That was a mistake, and things very quickly went pear-shaped. The Prosecutor found out what had been done, complained vociferously in court, and came down to the Registry wanting heads to roll. I was duly called into the Registrar’s office.

Like almost every other war criminal or bureaucrat in history, I tried to explain to her that I had only followed superior orders. The Registrar didn’t accept this, but advised me that no matter my age or experience, I had a duty to make a judgment about my own actions, and to take responsibility for them. If in doubt, I should trust my instincts.

Since then, I have always tried to adhere to the Registrar’s advice, but it hasn’t always made life easy for me. I soon discovered that if a man asserts his view — he is confident and has initiative, but if a woman does, she is stubborn and difficult. I wish I could tell you that in this brave new world, sexism is dead, but even within the hallowed halls of the United Nations, you are not necessarily safe from discrimination. I even had a former supervisor who refused to assign females as defence counsel because he didn’t think that the defendants would listen to them or take their advice.

There is no easy answer as to how to deal with this double standard, but again, the advice ‘to know yourself’ forms a good starting point. It is important to know yourself, and most importantly, to know your own value. You are all exceptional young women who each have a great deal to contribute to the world. There will be a raft of persons and rivals out there clamouring to devalue you — don’t do it for them. I would say that success is 70 per cent about confidence. It doesn’t matter if you are the brightest or most talented person in the room unless you have the confidence to project that.

That doesn’t mean that you have to be arrogant — there are after all, more than enough Boys Grammar boys in the world! But there is a difference between being arrogant, and having the confidence to speak on matters you know of, to put yourself forward for positions for which you are qualified, and to maintain your ground when you know that it is important.

Not every disagreement should be cause to dig in your heels — compromise plays an important role in any environment in which people have different backgrounds and view points. There is, however, a difference between compromise, which aims to build bridges between different beliefs and perspectives, and compromise, which involves sacrificing the key principles that make you who you are; if you compromise on these, you compromise yourself.

For this reason, the German philosopher Max Weber described a key trait of leadership as the ability to take responsibility for the consequences of your actions, and to reach a point, where you must exercise your judgment and say, ‘Here I stand, I can do no other’.

Last year, I was arrested and detained in Libya when meeting my client, Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi. I believe that all persons are equal before the law, and I was doing my best to ensure that my client could benefit from a fair trial. I didn’t think that this was a particularly controversial belief. However, as I was later told by the Libyan Minister of Defence, it turns out that Libya considers that any person who provides assistance to Saif Gaddafi commits a crime worse than murder. It might have been nice if they had stamped that in my visa before I arrived in Libya!

After my meeting with the client, I was arrested with three other staff members by militia brandishing Kalashnikovs. I had with me confidential Defence documents and rather than allow this information to fall into their hands, when the guards weren’t looking, I ate some of the more sensitive portions. This was clearly a rooky error — apart from the lack of nutritional value — it actually takes a ridiculously long time to eat a page. As a result, the authorities were able to confiscate half eaten pages from me, and could clearly see that portions were missing.

We were all kept in detention, and I am still being prosecuted in Libya for the charge of destroying documents and violating nationality security. The name of that particular case is the Prosecutor versus Melinda Taylor, Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi and others — I think it made my parents very proud that I got top billing over Muammar Gaddafi’s son.

For the 26 days that I was there, I didn’t sleep much at night — it was extremely hot, and at the same time, the lack of any distractions meant that it was easy to lie awake and relive events in minute detail. I was incredibly worried for the safety and security of persons named in those documents. With hindsight, it is easy to give in to regret, and to second guess your actions and wonder if you could have done things differently or better. Apart from watching the Arabic version of the bold and the beautiful, the way I got through those long nights was to realise that you can’t choose or control what happens to you, but you can control how you react, what you learn from it, and how it informs your future actions.
Thanks to my time in Zintan, I have learned some choice Arabic swear words. I also feel that I now have more street credibility with my clients. Most importantly, I learned to appreciate fully the importance of having a support network of friends and family, colleagues and compatriots, and the significance of working towards something that you believe in. As John Donne said, ‘No man is an island, entire of itself.’ Our lives become richer when we enrich the lives of others.

During the course of last year, the Libyan Government called me every name under the sun. During one press conference alone, I was accused of spying, trying to help my client escape from jail with a pen and a swatch watch, and trying to poison him with Kit Kats. In a filing, the Government even suggested that I was trying to foment terrorist bombings. I have no idea what that even means. I also don’t know whether to be insulted by the allegation or strangely flattered that they think that I am capable of it.

I am only human and of course these things made me feel sick to my stomach. But then, after about 24 hours of locking my door, ranting and practising some of my new Arabic swear words — I realised that this shouldn’t be about me — it was about my client, who was languishing in complete isolation, and who faced the death penalty. I therefore resolved to focus this anger and frustration to write the best response I could for my client.

Given the amount of time that you may spend working, it is important to find something you care about and which challenges you. But at the same time, your career shouldn’t be the only thing to define you — your life will be composed of many different facets, each of which can bring you unexpected joys and challenges. A balanced life brings both perspective and strength. Whenever I feel like I am banging my head against a brick wall or that I am working on a hopeless cause, my daughter’s smile grounds me and gives me the strength to go back into the fray.

Last week, someone asked me what I would change about my life and choices. The question was a bit sensitive as I had just seen news articles that a counsel working on the same case as me was reportedly dating George Clooney. Clearly, I must have made some wrong decisions because after 6 months on the case, I had ended up in a jail in Libya whereas after the same amount of time, she had scored a dinner with George!

In seriousness though, I wouldn’t change anything in my life because who I am is defined by my mistakes, how I dealt with them, and what I learned from them. What may feel like the lowest point in your life may end up playing a critical role in leading you to your greatest happiness. All of my decisions, whether good or bad, have brought me to where I am in my life, and have made me the person who I am.

I currently work for a Senegalese-Malian lawyer, who is French speaking. When he first arrived at the International Criminal Court, he didn’t speak much English — and in his view, since I was Australian, neither did I. Nonetheless, in a matter of months, he was practically fluent in English. In contrast, to this day, my French basically consists of nodding and smiling at opportune moments and hoping that I haven’t inadvertently agreed to sacrifice my first-born son. Whenever he regales me as to why I don’t utter more than two words of French, he tells me that the secret is that I must not be afraid to make mistakes. I will only gain proficiency when I have the confidence to speak, and speak often, without worrying what people think about me.

As a general lesson for life, unless you are a genius, the only way you can avoid making mistakes is to refrain from trying anything new, and to never leave your comfort zone. Comfort zones are, by definition comfortable, but there is a world of opportunity and experiences out there that you will only encounter if you dare to venture into the unknown. Success isn’t an end point, it is a journey, and it isn’t marked by material goods or superficial statuses. You will succeed in life when you challenge yourself to do what you can, when you can, for whom you can.

Take the time to help others along the way — I would never have ended up where I am without the advice and assistance of other women who were willing to act as mentors rather than competitors. Success also isn’t a zero sum game; if you help others in their careers or lives, you create a network, which will be there to support you one day should you need it.

This week is not about an ending — it is about continuing your journey, and making your mark on the world. It is impossible to guess where you may end up as there are horizons that tonight, you cannot see. You are, however, equipped with friendship, curiosity, courage, and the knowledge that anything is possible. I look forward to having the privilege to meet you all again on your journeys.
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