

HEBRON SCHOOL

April 2007

Principal's report to Council and Parents

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends and Family of Hebron School – Welcome!

This past academic year, 2006-7, has seen my wife and I reach a milestone: our 50th birthdays. This year, 2007, we shall celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary. Growing older has excited much comment over the years. Albert Einstein once said, 'The most aggravating thing about the younger generation is that I no longer belong to it'. Someone else retorted, 'I finally got my head together. Now my body's falling apart'.

I prefer, however, to see the positive side of growing older. As a Christian, of course, the older I get the closer I am to eternity in heaven with Jesus. But I am also reminded of two helpful sayings: firstly, 'There's many a good tune on an old fiddle'. However, you all know I'm not very musical, so I'll settle for this one: 'When you're over the hill you pick up speed!'

Growing older can also have its more challenging sides, especially in relation to one's children. Last December, whilst we were on leave in the U.K., my wife and I attended the school Carol Service where our son was working as a volunteer staff member. At the conclusion of a wonderful candlelit service in a medieval church, an excited youngster ran down the aisle towards us shouting, 'Mr. Reid, Mr. Reid'. I prepared to stand and greet this young unknown youth who had somehow heard of me when he pushed passed down the pew to give Christmas greetings to my 18 year old son, now Mr. Reid in his own right!

So, why am I telling you all this about age and families? It's partly because of the milestones that seem to be passing in our own personal lives – for the first time in well over 20 years we no longer have a child living with us at home. It's partly, too, because Hebron has just passed its 108th birthday whilst Lushington Hall has reached its 180th anniversary! This reminded me, too, that the Lushington family which constructed the Hall in the 1820's, had been part of the Anti-slavery Society in the U.K. which saw the realization of its aim to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire and on the high seas in 1807, some 200 years ago last week. (It's interesting to note, too, that the first Council Chairman – or, rather, President of Governors – of our Link School, Dean Close in Cheltenham, was at the forefront of the campaign to abolish slavery altogether in the Nineteenth Century).

Thus, we have anniversaries, age and people in families. It's issues concerning the latter which I want to dwell on for a few moments before giving a brief overview of the year just past.

The story is told about some parents who had just tucked their 3-year-old child, Sam, into bed one night when they heard sobbing coming from his room. Rushing back in, they found Sam crying hysterically. He told them that he had swallowed a penny and he was sure he was going to die. No amount of talking helped. His father, in an attempt to calm him down, palmed a penny from his pocket and pretended to pull it from Sam's ear. Sam was delighted. He snatched the coin from his father's hand, swallowed it, then cheerfully demanded: 'Do it again, Dad!'

Family life is often great fun and a great blessing. Here at Hebron we endeavour to be a large family – indeed we talk about belonging to the Hebron Family. As with all families, there are times of great joy – such as we experienced with the recent visit of the Princess of Thailand and I also witnessed at the Alumni Reunion in London. However, there can also be times of sadness and pain. This has been seen in the recent disagreement between two staff members. Thank you, all,

for your on-going prayers, love and concern for both families and for the school community as a whole. At times of difficulty, such as this, we often ask of God 'why?' and 'How long?' There are rarely easy answers, but as I have reflected on all this – and as I considered the incredible sacrifices all of our staff make in order to serve at Hebron – I was drawn to the following passage in Mark's Gospel in the Bible's New Testament:

Mark 10: 28 – 31

Then Peter spoke up, "Look, we have left everything and followed you."

"Yes," Jesus said to them, "and I tell you that anyone who leaves home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and for the gospel, will receive much more in the present age. He will receive a hundred times more houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields - and persecutions as well; and in the age to come he will receive eternal life. But many who now are first will be last, and many who now are last will be first."

So, whilst we are promised many good things in compensation for sacrifice, not least new families, we are also told that there will be persecution and difficulty, too. One other thing we can also be sure of is that God is with us through such times.

An article in "National Geographic" magazine several years ago provided a penetrating picture of God's wings and His protection.

After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to assess the inferno's damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, perched statuesquely on the ground at the base of a tree. Somewhat sickened by the eerie sight, he knocked the bird over with a stick. When he struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother's wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings, instinctively knowing that the toxic smoke would rise.

She could have flown to safety but instead she had refused to abandon her babies. When the blaze had arrived and the heat had scorched her small body, the mother had remained steadfast. She had been willing to die so that those under the cover of her wings would live.

In Psalm 91:4 we read of God: "He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge".

I would at this point like to take the opportunity to thank publicly all of our staff, those who teach, those who administer, those who support – indeed all involved with our Hebron family. They are an amazing 'bunch' who time after time rise to the challenges life and opportunity throws at them. The story is told of a school teacher who injured his back and had to wear a plaster cast around the upper part of his body. It fitted under his shirt and was not noticeable at all. On the first day of term, still with the cast under his shirt, he found himself assigned to the toughest students in school. Walking confidently into the rowdy classroom, he opened the window as wide as possible and then busied himself with desk work. When a strong breeze made his tie flap, he took the desk stapler and stapled the tie to his chest. Discipline was not a problem from that day forth! (Hebron male staff please note: this teacher was wearing a tie!)

It is always a delight to receive letters from parents or former students which reflect on their experience of Hebron and its people. Here is an extract from an email I received from a current parent just last month:

It is a matter of pride that the school is rendering yeoman service and has been doing a noble task in the field of education moulding thousands of tiny-tots into responsible citizens, instilling in them a sense of value, spirit of dedication, hard work and above all a love of God.

Moreover, teachers in Hebron act as an agent of change in the child's attitude values and cultures. He understands the psychology of the child and his family background. He identifies the Child's strength and weaknesses. He is, one can say, a part-time parent, who is a philosopher, guide, demonstrator, resource person and friend. Without compromising on discipline he creates in the child a love for learning. In Hebron the teachers discharge their duties with full devotion to attain divinity. They render service with missionary zeal, but not like machines. Sometimes they forgo their needs in order to fulfill the requirements of the students. In a nutshell teachers in Hebron are like candles: they sacrifice their lives in order to illuminate the lives of the students' community.

Also last month, we received a long and newsy email from a student who graduated four years ago and is currently studying in Canada. He talks about his medical studies and his forthcoming Masters' degree. Then he writes:

So that's basically my story since I left. I have been quite successful in all areas of my life since leaving Hebron. No only have I been successful in my education, but in a social and spiritual sense I have settled very well into my surroundings. I attend a great Tamil church and am doing my part in the ministry as a Sunday School teacher, and church interpreter (interpreting the Sermon from Tamil to English every Sunday as the Pastor preaches). I did not write to simply tell you all that I have accomplished and succeeded in, but I wrote because I feel I am greatly indebted to you.

Last week, as I was walking home, it was so misty and foggy and it was drizzling a little bit. Somehow, it felt like I was back in Ooty at Hebron. As I walked I remembered all the great times I had back there and I strated to think of where I was now and what I am today. If I have accomplished anything at all in these four years, I can say without a doubt that I owe much of my success to you and my time in Hebron as a whole.

Educationally, I may not have done so well while at Hebron, I do not know why. I'm not giving excuses but I guess I was a little too young, and hence may have lacked the maturity that was probably needed to excel in that environment. It was the first time I was away from home and I lacked the mentality to be able to organize myself to be able to devote time to study and other things appropriately. Whatever it was, it was through these mistakes and failures in Hebron that I am who I am today.

This, then, brings us back to where we were a short time ago: there are difficulties in life but it's important not to give up but to learn from our mistakes and to move on, perhaps a little humbler and certainly wiser.

Sir Edmund Hillary, that great New Zealander who was the first to climb Mount Everest successfully, did not find climbing easy. One day, after yet another failed attempt to climb the formidable mountain, he shook his fist at it and said:

'I'll defeat you yet because you're as big as you're going to get - but I'm still growing!'

Sir Winston Churchill, Britain's war time Prime Minister, was once asked to comment on his apparent failure at Prep School when he was forced to repeat a whole year. His reply was typically bullish: 'I never failed anything in my life. I was given a second opportunity to get it right'.

So, as I conclude this homily about family and striving through difficulties, let me urge all of you parents to spend quality time with your children whenever you can – and this includes Dads! I say this because one of our Hebron parents has been working on a paper recently concerning the importance of family time. She writes:

'I felt constrained to write this paper as I noticed that students (in my school) who were the most troublesome were often the ones who had fathers who were unavailable or absent.' To my national shame, a recent report in the west has shown that British youngsters are at the bottom of the 'league table' as far as children's behaviour is concerned. It points out to the sexualisation of society through toys, clothes, magazines, music and the internet. Role models are pop stars and sports people. Parents and teachers are increasingly marginalized. Here at Hebron, however, we do our best to ensure that students can enjoy a full childhood and that the family, under God, is given central place.

My report on the past school year will now be quite brief. Parents will have been updated with most of our news through the twice-termly newsletters and also through the weekly website updates. In a few minutes we shall show you a recently produced promotional film about the school which neatly summarises much of our annual life.

It is important, however, that I give due emphasis to our on-going academic successes this past year. As before, credit goes to the whole school community – and the home – for such success. Subject teachers, the Learning Support Department, Dorm Parents and DPD all play crucial roles. At A level, of 130 individual subjects sat, there was only one failure. With 43% of the passes at 'A' grade it was our best performance since 2002. At IGCSE we had 92 % of subjects in the A* - C range (counted as a 'pass' by most employers / universities. Incredibly, some 81 % were at A* - B level, our highest for many years. Some 55% gained the top grades, A* and A, compared with under 50% for the past four years. These overall successes were capped by the school again receiving top accolades from the Cambridge International Exam Board:

For the third year running the **top female scorer** in India at A level has been from Hebron School: **Eun Hea (Grace) Cho** and this year the **top male scorer** also: **Vikyath Rao**. In addition, this year some of our students have even scored highest in particular subjects:

A levels:

Biology:	Deepak Barkataki
Chemistry:	Abhishek Singh
Physics:	Peter Prescott
Art & Design:	Eun Hea Cho

IGCSE:

Design & Technology:	Abraham Richardson
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In Music we have again gone from strength to strength, partly because we now have a full complement of full-time staff. ABRSM (Nov.06) results were most impressive: 12 Distinctions and 29 Merits. Eun Jin Lee (Grade 7 Flute) was awarded the Admiral O S Dawson Rolling Trophy, for being the highest scoring candidate in Grade 6 to 8 within the southern region of India.

70 students entered for theory exams (41 ABRSM and 29 school based exams) which, this year, were held early in March. Results of these exams will be known in May. The Concert Band, the Chamber Choir and various ensembles have continued to perform with distinction, not least during the Princess's visit.

In sport we have continued to 'punch above our weight' here in the Nilgiris. Once more the boys' football teams have excelled – we were runners' up in the Super Seniors' Division for the third year in succession – and the girls did extremely well in basketball, hockey and soccer. Individual performances in athletics, swimming and cross-country have also been impressive with a very high number of new records being set this year.

In the U.K. the Press continues to bemoan the health and safety culture which has produced a generation of 'cotton wool kids' who are applying for jobs without any leadership or entrepreneurial skills. Here in the Nilgiris, however, we put great store by the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, outward bounds and trekking. Creativity continues to soar through our outstanding Drama Festival, the Clubs' programme, Book Week and in Dorm activities. Student Council keeps us focused on community service and this summer we shall again go to a remote part of Orissa on a village project. Last October's expedition to the foothills of the Himalayas proved that the Hebron Staff and student body of today is as adventurous as ever!

In closing, I would like to record my thanks to my wife, Rosalyn, for standing alongside me as we head up the Hebron family. Thanks also go to my secretaries, Mrs. Marie Rodricks and Mrs. Liz Inglis, for their uncomplaining and prayerful approach to life in the Principal's Office. I am grateful to Council for allowing us six months' leave and to Mr. & Mrs. George and all members of staff for covering so ably for us.

At a recent dinner to celebrate my wife's birthday, attended by Senior Management and spouses, we decided that one of the qualifications of this august body is to be a grandparent – or very nearly so. I close, therefore, where I started with a story about age – and grandparents ...

Grandma & Grandpa were sitting outside watching the beautiful sunset and reminiscing about 'the good old days', when Grandma turned to Grandpa and said, "Darling, do you remember when we first started dating and you used to just casually reach over and take my hand?" Grandpa looked over at her, smiled and took her aged hand in his.

With a wry little smile, Grandma pressed a little farther: "Darling, do you remember how after we were engaged you'd sometimes lean over and suddenly kiss me on the cheek?" Grandpa leaned slowly toward Grandma and gave her a lingering kiss on her wrinkled cheek.

Growing bolder still, Grandma said, "Darling, do you remember how, after we were first married, you'd kind of nibble on my ear?" Grandpa slowly got up from his rocker and headed into the house. Alarmed, Grandma said: "Darling, where are you going?"

Grandpa replied, "To get my teeth!"

Alastair Reid
Principal.

[promotional film]