

## *Ladies and Gentlemen, Graduates of the class of 2010,*

You can all identify with this scenario - the clock is ticking and you're still staring at the blank screen or the blank piece of paper! Where is the inspiration when you need it? Where to begin? Then - all too soon - the self-doubt follows. Can I do this? Am I capable? Will they like it? So, there I was the other night in that situation that you've all been in and the deadline was looming! What did I do? Well, I stumbled - and I stumbled again - and just when I thought I'd stumbled enough, I stumbled some more. Of course, the really hip members of the audience have already grasped what I 'm talking about, but for those of you who were like I was until two or three weeks ago, I'll explain. 'Stumble Upon.com' is a web-site where you pick a topic and you click on the 'stumble' icon to go to another link or an entry or a post or a you-tube - something in the category that you've chosen. If it doesn't grab you then you hit the stumble icon again, and then, of course, you can select a different topic. It's made for the curious, ideal for the fidgetter and perfect for a dilettante like me, so I recommend it to you - although I'm not sure that all would approve of the Headmaster's advice to his audience being reported as, "Go and stumble!" Apart from the fun that you can have, the metaphor works well for me because, as you well know, there's a lot of stumbling that has to be done in life if you are to pursue knowledge and success. I could say: "If you've never stumbled then you've never lived" but now I'm getting carried away! However, as I stumbled, I did realize where I wanted to go and I forced myself to get on with it - does that sound familiar?

So now, for me to stumble is another of those verbs to which the modern world has given a new or added significance like *to boot up* (much more painful in the old days) or *to sink* which was what famous ships did when they hit ice-bergs. It seems that you can make almost anything into a verb these days - and so we can *google*, we can *facebook*, we can *you-tube*, we can of course *tweet* like the birdies and we can *tex* ( no 't', as in he *texxed* me!) Technology has ensured that there is a whole new lexicon to learn but I want to focus on the fact that so many of the terms are verbs, or 'doing words' as we used to call them in English class and 'doing' is an excellent concept to dwell upon. Aristotle's famous utterance, "*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit*" puts an admirable emphasis on the paramount importance of our actions as does the Ripley's House motto in a simpler way, "*Acta non Verba*". Ironically, today is both a recognition of many things done and a further call to action of sorts for the Grad Class.

Ladies and Gentlemen with the balloons, for months you've been assailed by the message to finish well and you have, but now it's time to start well! Just like the somewhat corny old seventies poster that used to adorn your parents' residence rooms about tomorrow being the first day of the rest of your life, you are moving on to the next stage. I hope above all else in amongst all that you've learned here that you've learned how to handle fear and apprehension . The plaque in our fabulous new theatre foyer says boldly, "*The only enemy of art is fear*" - well, I would extend that from art to the teenage years in general, maybe even beyond. Fear may well be one of the cleverest enemies that you'll ever face as it is insidious. It seeks to undermine you whenever it can and is always ready to strike when you're vulnerable. But you have all already shown in so many ways at a demanding boarding school like Shawnigan that you can both conquer and dismiss fear, and that should give you the essential confidence to know that you can do whatever you set your mind to do. The world needs you to be a positive force and an inspiration which will influence others as the memorable words of Marianne Williamson remind us,

*"And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others".*

Where though does that confidence come from and how do we gain it? I would contend that a key piece is the exacting conscience, both external and internal, which forces us to find the discipline within us - that discipline that is an essential component of any success. Then, of course, our confidence grows with each success or achievement and, while the war may never be over, the battles are being consistently won.

Many of those 'exacting consciences' are in fact seated in these gardens: parents, mentors, friends, and I acknowledge them all. However, at this point, I want to shine the metaphorical spotlight on the superbly talented people in front of me, to my right, and that would be the staff! You don't just work at Shawnigan - that would be altogether too inadequate a way to describe the commitment that you the staff here make. You invest your whole being into the school community and you pour your whole selves into the lives of all who come here - that's what sets us apart from a lot of other schools. The famous Carl Jung captured it well when he said, " One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with particular gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the young person." Ladies and gentlemen, I would contend that our staff at Shawnigan exude both warmth and brilliance and that they're always there to pick you up when you stumble! So please join me in thanking these outstanding people for another year of incredible commitment, passion and devotion to the young people of this school! Just to show that we don't take ourselves too seriously, some are already saying, "How

appropriate that he should be quoting a famous psychiatrist when he's talking about the staff!" And, as we know, some of our finest are not getting any younger. So it won't surprise you when I tell you about Messrs Cox and Lane who are great friends but who are getting to that age, as they say. They both went to the doctor's together recently in fact to tell him that *they were having problems remembering things.* *When they arrived at the doctor's, they explained to the doctor about the problems they were having with their memory. After checking them out, the doctor told them that they were physically okay but that they might want to start writing things down and making notes to help them remember things. As it turned out, the very next day they were both at breakfast in Marion Hall( I watched this!) Coxy got up to go to the kitchen and Lane asked him , "Will you get me a bowl of porridge?" "Sure." replied Coxy, but Lane said, "Don't you think that you should write that down so you can remember it?" Coxy replied quickly, "No, I can remember that." Lane then said, "Well I would like some brown sugar on top. You had better write that down cause I know you'll forget that."With irritation in his voice, Coxy declared " You want a bowl of porridge with brown sugar on top - I don't need to write that down I can remember that." He then fumed into the kitchen. After about 10 minutes Coxy returned from the kitchen and handed Lane a plate of bacon and eggs. Lane stared down at the plate for a moment and said, somewhat vacantly, "You forgot my toast."*

Forgive the poetic licence, gentlemen! Everyone knows, I think, that these are two of our most accomplished teachers, and sharp as tacks - thank you again! While I am on appreciation, I would like to acknowledge the members of the Senior Management Team for their invaluable help to me and countless hours, often behind the scenes, in making the whole engine function smoothly, and I'm referring to the Business Manager, Mrs. Linda Ewert, the Director of Admissions, Mrs. Gaynor Samuel, the Director of Enrolment, Mr. Chad Holtum, the Dean of Faculty, Mr. Stewart Candelaria, the Director of Advancement, Mr. David Hutchison and my assistant and right-hand, Ms. Rosemary Dolman – thank you all! I cannot think of Senior Management or indeed, perhaps more appropriately, the managing of a senior without thinking of the person who manages me and deserves a medal for that as well as for all the work she does for the School - that would of course be the lady sitting behind me, my lovely wife, Mrs. Lynn Robertson. I do want to single out two more key individuals in that team, whose work has again been exceptional. Our Deputy Head, Jo-Anne Kingstone, embodies the concept of commitment and her marvelous efforts have been relentless in ensuring the successful running of the School - a huge thank you, Jo-Anne! And Rhod Samuel, our much-loved Senior Master, who fought and won his battle with the dreaded 'c' during this year and yet has been back giving the school his all as soon as he was back on his feet - well done, Rhod, and thank you for inspiring us all!

In reality, the School year 2009-2010 has been an inspirational blend of magical moments, simple joys, and special memories, interspersed with the odd challenge or 'stumble', if you will. We had an early opportunity to prove ourselves with the unexpected outbreak of the dreaded H1N1 and we all responded to that challenge in admirable fashion. In many ways, it pulled us even closer together as a community and that spirit proved to be a key feature of our many successes. Once upon a time, the headmaster would perhaps take the assembled company through a veritable panoply of impressive moments and significant achievements, but these days that is perhaps redundant given the access that technology has provided us all with instant communication and even simultaneous sharing! Many of you have already joined us on line recently for a morning event in the Chapel - much to the amazement of the grade 8 boy who said, " You mean they tune in to chapel and they don't even have to!" I should add that his buddy quickly added, " Is there a way for us to check whether our parents have made their beds and tidied their rooms before chapel, like we have to?!" Sounds vaguely Orwellian! My report to you all therefore is that the School is fulfilling its mandate on every front and doing so with grace and humility. What we do repeatedly is to bring our best to everything we attempt and the results can be felt, I hope, as soon as you step onto this campus, fairly soon after the first hello, or even immediately after logging on to the web-site. You again have sitting amongst you provincial champions, national champions, virtuosos, artists, humanitarians of the first order and first-class human beings of the highest order. The palm frond referred to in the school motto has been earned by so many that it is even more appropriate than ever as one of those key phrases of our school culture. That said, I am going to draw attention to some special achievements that transcend the commonplace or the norm. Our Senior Boys 1st XV rugby squad repeated as Provincial champions, quite the feat these days, and I would ask Messrs Murdy, Williams, Doyle, Dobravsky and their players to stand and receive our congratulations! Similarly, two of our young oarswomen, Maylies Lang and Arden Gill, won successive gold medals, last year and this year at the National Rowing Championships- stand, ladies please, with your coach, Ms. Beare. We've again been blessed with huge talent in the Fine Arts as we have already recognized in our Fine Arts and Internal Awards ceremonies, but I cannot let the occasion go by without asking the two leads in this year's musical, both of whom some of you heard this morning in chapel, to take one last bow and our thanks for sharing their talent with us throughout their years here - Jeff Tittiger and Amanda D'Heer! Just in case anyone's wondering about the academic piece - we do that and we do it exceptionally well, but we tend not to boast so much about it as we see excellence in that area as fundamental, a given for a school driven by passionate educators. You will hear more in the ensuing awards' presentations and I could easily have students all over these gardens getting up to their feet to acknowledge their accomplishments this year, but I'll spare them that embarrassment!

Talking of embarrassment, you know how sensitive I feel about my Scottish heritage, especially with the reputation that the Scots have for being tight and I can never understand it. As you know, my father was from Aberdeen and a more generous man you couldn't wish to meet. I still have a gold watch that belonged to him. Yes, he sold it to me on his deathbed and I wrote him a cheque for it - of course I post-dated it! Sounds fair to me!

Soon-to-be Graduates of the class of 2010, my final words are again for you. As I stumbled at my desk few days ago, I was asking myself how I could be different this week as I've now given 100's of speeches!?! Similarly, I want you to ask yourself how you are different because of your Shawnigan experience and how you will make a difference in people's lives, in ways big and small. Place value on the way you treat people and the way that you interact with them. That's as desired a skill-set in the career-world as it's ever been, as the CEO of an International Search firm recently said, *"Ideas will only get you so far these days. Count on relationships to carry you further. The new economy is not just about the exchange of information; it's about the exchange of relationships. It comes down to trust."* To the parents in these gardens, thank you for giving us the trust to share in the development of your sons and daughters - it will never be a responsibility that we take lightly. To the graduates again - to return to my main theme, trust conquers fear and trust inspires people. More than ever, we're all looking for relationships that we can rely on, and ones that are based on solid values. The world needs people who can't be bought, who stand for something and whose strength is infectious. Remember Emerson's words, *"To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."* Be strong. Be the sort of friend you want to have. Be there for each other if you do stumble (other than on the computer). Be proud of what you've accomplished as we are proud of you. Be unafraid of anything (except maybe one of those big, hairy spiders!) Beware of the dangers of assumption. Be aware of the power of the well-placed word and be mindful that a smile is the least expensive way to improve your looks. Always be a part of the solution not the problem. Do sweat the small stuff if that means attending to the details. As the wise man said, "If you think that something small cannot make a difference, try going to sleep with a mosquito in the room!" Thank you all for a great year! Well done!