

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS Delivered by Edd Frost on 15th June 2013

Ladies & Gentleman, good evening and welcome to the 2013 SOSA Presidential Dinner. I have to say we have not had so many at a Presidential Dinner for some years and it is really fantastic to see so many of you here tonight.

I've said it many many times before, that after attending Sibford School, it is very much like the marmite advert, you either loved it or hated it. I for one loved it, thrived on the freedom and creativity we were given and through this, experienced some of the greatest experiences I have had in my life.

I came to Sibford with attitude. Some of the former members of staff here this evening probably think I left with attitude too! I really really did not want to come to a school, firstly where all my friends were not going to attend, and more importantly to a place that made children go to school on a Saturday and worse still, wear green blazers! Every morning I would set off to catch the school bus and en route cram the heavy green felt blazer with leather elbow patches, into the furthest corner of my school bag where it would be fished out, somewhat dishevelled, upon arrival at school. (This was in an attempt to protect my untarnished reputation in Adderbury and basically prevent the heavy stick from all my friends on the Warriner bus that would pass me by on their way to school). Mind you I was always the popular one in the end as from the age of 14 where else could you bribe a friendly sixth former to go in and buy cigarettes that were sold separately for 10p each and then sell them onto friends for 20p? None other than Greens shop in the village!!

I ended up at Sibford in September 1985. My family traditionally had always gone to Bloxham School but after my brother passed the 11+ to attend Magdalen College School in Oxford it was only a matter of time that I was put in for that dreaded exam. I have always maintained that I failed the entrance exam on purpose to MCS mainly as they didn't have girls and most importantly played hockey rather than football!! This was a no no for me!! In actual fact I would never have survived an academic school and would have hated every minute of it. Having then been deemed a bad influence on two of my close friends in the village where I grew up, (I understand that our parents got together and decided that we should all go our separate ways with schooling) Strangely the other two ended up at Bloxham leaving my parents with Sibford as the alternative.

Sibford's saving grace was that it played football (quite badly in my opinion) but by half term of that first term I had lost the angry attitude and started to develop an understanding of the place. Within the first year I had grown accustomed to the daily moshing at the tuck shop, dodging fireworks that were thrown at 1st years from wayward 5th formers and enduring the feeling of a cigarette being extinguished on my arm by a gallant 4th former, whilst he was showing off to the girls when having a sneaky smoke in the Adventure Playground (a location now long gone at Sibford).

Being a day pupil at a boarding school, as Sibford was in my time, was an environment you had to work hard at being accepted into. I was always the class clown which got me accepted into the community a lot quicker. I seemed to spend most of my maths classes being sent out to sit in the corridor outside room 3. Most maths lessons would involve a solitary visit to the corridor with a table and chair. I seem to remember on one occasion being ushered out of the room within 20 seconds of entering. Needless to say Maths was never a subject I thrived in!

Sport was my first love when I first came to Sibford and I developed a huge liking for Chris Guy and at that time, more importantly, his rather attractive blonde haired and brown legged wife Maggie Guy, the then girls PE teacher! Chris Guy always supported me in the variety of sports we played.

My only downfall was that for the five years I was at the school I seemed never to grow. I remained a size 5 shoe until I reached 16 and never grew taller as the rest of my peers seemed to shoot up around me. Not a brilliant physique for the games field when my love of sport was really put to the test on the rugby pitch and getting squashed, thrown around and thumped more times than I cared to remember. The highlight of each year though for me was always the term after Christmas when it was football season. All I longed for was the chance to play on that 1st 11 pitch that at the time ran alongside the south corridor. (outside Brian (Doc) Holliday's classroom and many a geography lesson was spent looking out of the large windows at that pitch watching Percy Turner, the head groundsman, mow and roll it). I also have great memories of the staff v's pupils matches too!! And to end my time at the school a trip to the USA playing with the 1st 11 squad for a week in Kansas.

The other real passion that developed over the years was the performing arts. The mid to late 80's at the school must surely have been one of the best times that the school had ever known with regards to its performing arts. Rock Opera's and Musical Theatre productions under the inspirational direction of Chris Bateman and Bryan Lee and use of other staff namely The Spring's at the time, for their lyrical skills MR J, WAZUNGU, EDIE (the story of Edith Cavell) and STREET CONVERSATIONS to name but a few. Some of these productions saw us as Sibford pupils performing on the London stage two consecutive years running as finalists of the Barclays National Youth Theatre and Music Awards at the Royal Festival Hall in London. What an experience that was!! I seem to remember the entire school being bussed to London to support the performers and the audience sounding like the Crackerjack audience every time Sibford School was mentioned.

I only really have fond memories of this school and very much regard it and indeed its Quaker ethos for moulding my life. Having qualified from college with a qualification in piano tuning maintenance and repair, then spending the next 15 years of my working life as a drummer in a touring band, 5 years in a teaching post at Winchester House Prep school in Brackley and then the last 7 years as a funeral director working largely in the Banbury area for a well known and respected family firm, then moving to Birmingham briefly before only very recently starting my own family funeral directors business in Banbury. Some of the most important skills were learned and developed through my time at Sibford. Where else could you forge friendships with people from all over the world, learn the life skills that only you would learn at such an early age through attending a boarding school, and to be part of the Quaker movement that only in recent years has become a large part of my life and work.

Quakers to me, before I started school, were those strange looking people on the side of cereal packets with funny shaped haircuts and hats I didn't want to be part of that! rainbow jumpers, vegetable shoes or sandals and any excuse to protest, strike and have sit ins for peace?..... No thank you very much, I wanted to jump around making a lot of noise and enjoying myself. And that I did whilst without realising taking on board the values and teachings of Quakerism. But never the rainbow jumpers or sandals! I never really knew or understood the significance of Quakerism while at the school and was regularly baffled by the sitting in silence at morning meeting!! Only when entering my profession were my eyes open to the wonders and the spirituality and strength of this faith. To be so inclusive and "user friendly" to non-quakers and attendees who you see every time have that look of panic on their faces as they enter the Meeting House for the first time thinking what on earth is going to happen here!! Inclusivity is just so fantastic and to have been involved in some truly inspirational funeral meetings has been a real joy.

It has been a real privilege to be President this past year and my grateful thanks must go to my fellow committee members for their support, advice and most of all to Mike Finch for his encouragement and great support particularly in these last months as today approached at the same time as opening my own new business. I couldn't have asked for a better wingman. Who would

have thought it all those years ago – with frequent trips to his office for a bollocking of some sort, usually to do with the removal or destruction of some piece of school property and it was indeed the cost of 7 fire extinguishers that were placed on my school bill by this very same man!

I have also been incredibly privileged to have had some inspirational former members of staff return earlier today that played a huge part of this School's running and foundation. David Foulds, Stuart Hedley, Brian Holliday, Chris Bateman, Kay Goodband, Chris Guy and Tony Skeath all long standing staff members that were ever present during my time at the school but also for a long time before and after. We are all aware of the dark times this School suffered during the early 90's and some of those big names were discarded without a thought for the service and care they had given to Sibford pupils during their time at the School. It was so wonderful to see and hear of the School return to how it always was perceived, with a tight knit staff and dedicated leadership from firstly Sue Freestone and then Michael Goodwin who I have got to know personally and always feel so welcome when returning to the school each time for different occasions. I've witnessed emotional returns today from some of those inspirational members of staff returning after being away for so long and really hope that they may feel comfortable once more in the place that they were so well thought of by so many past pupils. I look forward to further encouraging past pupils to return to see the changes that have taken place since leaving and maybe some more past staff members too!

Thank you very much ladies and gentleman and please enjoy the rest of your evening.