

## NPBHS Speech

Headmaster, guests, teachers and staff, young men .....

This school changed my life.

I would like to tell you why.

My first school was at Mauku which no one has ever heard of. It was two small rooms. My parents were told I created a world record for playing hookey.

I went to high school at Opunake . It was so small that all the primary and secondary pupils were in the same school.

I loved Mount Taranaki. But I slid 2,000 feet down the ice one day and broke my neck. That was the end of my mountaineering career.

I loved surfing enough to compete in the NZ Lifesaving Championships. But no one would pay me to be a lifesaver.

I learnt to play golf and indeed I became the Opunake schoolboy golf champion. It was a great disappointment to learn that this did not qualify me for the Masters.

At Opunake, we spilt phosphorous on the science teacher's tie and set him alight. We had the fire extinguisher handy and it did the job. That was the end of my science career.

So careers in mountaineering, surfing, golf or even science were not looking promising.

I often went to Army cadet camp in the school holidays and on a couple of occasions became top cadet. At school the teachers did not believe it. My friends could not understand why I put myself at the mercy of Army discipline but then they had not experienced the discipline of my parents. So much in life is relative.

After four years, I ran out of classes at Opunake and had expired the patience of the teachers with my innumerable questions. My Father was told that my final school report was so bad that it would never be issued.

So I came to New Plymouth Boys High School for my last year at school.

My life needed changing. This school saw to that. Big time.

In my first exams here my marks were so low that one day the Headmaster, Mr Webster, a formidable man, came up to me in the playground and asked if I was Deane. Yes Sir I replied. So you are not doing well he observed. No Sir I said, wondering why he was taking any interest in me. He instructed me to return to school in the

evening for extra lessons. I asked if my best friend Rick, also from Opunake, could come too. Mr Webster took us for special classes twice a week for two terms. It turned out he had read the Army reports on me and was curious about why I was doing so poorly at school.

His lessons were like a miracle. I would often be up until 2 a.m. doing his extra homework.

At university I felt compelled to write to him and thank him. As I was about to post the letter, I read that he had died in a car accident.

In school classes I kept asking heaps of questions. Now they all got answered. The teachers were wise and generous to me. They treated me like an adult and a huge world of learning opened up before me. They also had high expectations of good behaviour and much hard work.

I got the message.

This school, your school, taught me that life is all about making the most of one's talents, getting on well with others, working within teams, and pursuing vigorously the opportunities one is offered. For me, a country boy from the tiniest country schools, to be head of the New Zealand public service one day and head of the country's largest companies another day, to work with eleven Prime Ministers and as many Ministers of Finance, demonstrates the breadth of these opportunities.

Last month I met Professor Richard Faull who started school at Waitara and like me had his final year here at NPBHS. At Waitara, he had to teach himself much of the science he learnt. Yet he is now a Distinguished Professor at the University of Auckland, winner of New Zealand's top science honour, the Rutherford Medal, and Head of the Centre for Brain Research.

Richard's story of the difference this school made to his life is the same as mine.

Given my love of Mount Taranaki, I was greatly taken at a dinner one night when the guest of honour talked about how when he was a youngster he dreamt of visiting a place with clean air and high mountains, green fields and glaciers, with beautiful lakes and pounding surf. He told us how he had found that place when he was 50. That place was NZ. That person was Bill Clinton.

You will not be in the least surprised to learn that at that dinner the President was greatly more taken with my wife Gillian than he was with me, including taking back to Hilary a possum fur stole Gillian was wearing that night.

You will all know of Sir Colin Meads, one of New Zealand's greatest All Blacks, some would say the greatest. But he is less well known for all the work he did for the IHC. I was for many years President of IHC NZ. In that role we worked together closely for many rewarding years. Colin had a gift for helping people and particularly those who are disadvantaged.

I went sailing with Peter Blake on Auckland harbour, and dined several times at the home of Bill Gates in Seattle. The companies I was associated with supported Team NZ in the America's Cup competitions and we were partners with Microsoft in experimenting with new approaches to the internet in its early days in NZ.

When the sun goes down in Seattle, the blinds in Bill's house go down automatically and the reflections are picked up instead in a more muted form on the inside wall of his dining room.

These stories illustrate what can emerge in life if we make the most of our chances.

I hope you will ensure that this great school does the same for you. In preparing these remarks, I said to a friend that I was anxious to avoid sounding like an ancient dinosaur. She said, disconcertingly, that it is not easy to escape the truth.

Be that as it may, if there is any lesson from my somewhat diverse career, it must be what a wonderful array of opportunities this school can effectively create for us.

I have become acutely aware that life is not simply about the jobs we get but rather about the ideas we work with; not about the day to day projects we carry out, but rather about the people we do them with; not about the industries we work in, but rather about the amazing diversity of opportunities we face if we have the courage to grasp them.

So thank you Headmaster for the honour you have done me today. I hope my experience with this magnificent school is an example to all who attend here of how one's life can be changed by fine teaching and high standards.

In reflecting on what advice, if any, I could give you today, I asked my friend, the cartoonist, Tom Scott, for some guidance.

He suggested a simple rule of thumb to assess your success: if you make it to 30 and your job still requires you to wear a name tag, you may have chosen the wrong career.

Someone once said to me that our schooldays are the best days of our lives. I can promise you that is not necessarily the case.  
But your schooldays should be an exciting step on the way to the rest of your life.

Let me conclude.

Never underestimate the depth or diversity of your own talents.  
Never underestimate your ability to keep learning and contributing to life.

Grasp your opportunities.

Add to the world.

Do not be afraid to attempt things outside your comfort zone.

Enjoy being part of a team.

Care for your friends and treat them as precious.

Set high standards.

Value highly your integrity.

Be true to yourselves.

Thank you.

Sir Roderick Deane  
18 August 2014