

PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE ASSEMBLY: FRIDAY 17TH JUNE 2016

Yesterday was the 40th anniversary of what was known as the “Soweto Riots” which occurred on 16th June 1976. More than 20 000 pupils from Soweto marched in protest against the legislation that Afrikaans would be enforced on the same basis as English as the official language of instruction. This was symptomatic of the broader problem of the unjust Bantu Education system at the time.

Last week in Chapel, Mr John Holtman gave a fascinating talk about his experiences as a student and an activist in 1976. The matrics and others who were writing exams were not present at the talk and I want to highlight a few very important points which Mr Holtman made:

.....As a species, we tend to remember and, at times, celebrate, the tragic events of our history. Last year we commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Jewish Holocaust during the Second World War, and this year we will commemorate the 40th anniversary of the student uprisings which started on June 16, 1976. Why do we do this? It strikes me that we tend to hold on to these tragic events in our history for many reasons (all valid), but while we remember the victims of those tragic events, we also tend to hold onto our position as victims. Why is this so? I think as victims we always have the moral high ground: no one would dare to tell Jewish people to get over the Holocaust; it happened 75 years ago so we need to move on. In the same vein, we are told here in South Africa to forget about the atrocities of Apartheid. That is all over now; it ended 24 years ago so we have to get over it now and move on. We resist that because giving up our victim status is tantamount to giving away our moral high ground. Some of us enjoy being victims; we hold on to the pain for dear life. It's what drives and sustains some of us. We feed off it. So why am I saying all of this? It's because I have a right to. I was there, in the midst of it. I was an observer, then a participant, and then a victim.....

Mr Holtman then describes his experiences as an activist during the riots and concluded his talk by suggesting that there were some important lessons that we could learn from the events of June 16th 1976:

Firstly, we learnt that, contrary to the beliefs of adults, the youth can change the world. Some may view this differently and may even have alternative understandings, and they have every right to, but as a direct result of the events of June 1976, and their publication in news media around the world, huge pressure was generated by the international community on South Africa to change its apartheid policies. Secondly, the apartheid government was forced to revisit their new language policy and revoke their decision on making Afrikaans the medium of instruction in Black schools, and schooling became much more structured and formal as a result. Thirdly, there was a new awakening among the youth of their right to humanness and dignity, and that blackness was neither ugly nor a curse. And they were willing to fight for it – to the death if necessary. From that fateful June day in 1976, it took just 18 years for apartheid to fall, and while that may seem like a long time, in relation to 350 years of oppression and 48 years of institutionalized racism, it was not so long after all. So for you

*sitting here today, learn from those in 1976 on whose shoulders we have arrived at this point in our history. I know that when South Africans are angry, they march. We march for everything: anti-abortion, anti-the-president, Rhodes-Must-Fall, Fees-Must-Fall, but these days marching often achieves little more than mindless violence. Do something positive. Don't just accept the status quo: if something in your society is wrong, don't allow it to pass you by like the parents of the youth in 1976 did, and were resented for it; do whatever it takes to change your world. Many of you are already, or will be 18 when the next elections come around. Use your vote. Use that hard-earned right to make a difference. Your own children will thank and admire you for your action someday. Our parents were wrong in 1976, and they would still be wrong today if they disagree: **YOUNG PEOPLE, YOU, CAN CHANGE YOUR WORLD***

Sunday the 19th June is Father's Day and an opportunity for all of you to show your appreciation to your Dads. It will be a particularly sad time for some of you who have lost your Fathers and we think particularly of James, Ryan, Mitch and Tom whose Dads have passed away this term.

We all know how important Dads are in the lives of their sons, although some of you may not appreciate it at this time. On an amusing note, it was Mark Twain who said; *"When I was a boy of 14 my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to 21, I was astonished at how much he had learned in 7 years."*

This is the last assembly of the term and I would like to thank you and all the staff for your contributions. It is not over yet as we look forward to the Eisteddfod next week, and I wish you all well for that. During the holidays we have many of you involved in various activities - the Independent Schools' Rugby Festival which we are hosting, inter-provincial hockey, squash and rugby, a fencing tour to Germany, a tennis tour to England, mountain climbers to Russia, the history tour to Europe and a group who will be enjoying the fantastic Okavango swamps experience. I wish you all safe travels and a wonderful holiday.