

Thank you Mr Chairman and Headmaster. I am honoured to have been asked to speak to everyone today.

When we met a few months ago and I was standing outside your office it was a strange feeling, as my previous experiences of waiting outside the head's office had not necessarily been positive!!

It doesn't seem long ago that I was sitting at my own school speech day and wondering who the speaker was and what they were going to say. I know if my sister had been the speaker I would have been embarrassed, so sorry in advance Sophie.

Today I want to talk to you about a fundamental belief I have and that is that

EVERYBODY DESERVES A GOOD START IN LIFE

And that good start is primarily about having an education. I think it's pretty safe to say, looking round this room, that that is something that we have all enjoyed – or are still enjoying. But that is not the case for many children. And I was slightly oblivious to that when I was at school.

I was not a great student, I was a bit of a rebel at school, always looking for ways to break the rules. Academically I didn't try that hard either. I was eventually suspended at age 16, much to my parents' horror. Then when it came to my AS levels, my mocks came back with a couple of Es and Ds. I realised I should probably start working, and so, armed with my gel pens and coloured revision cards, I started some serious revision. I ended up three As for Maths, Economics and Chemistry, a B for Art. I completely shocked my parents, my friends and myself. But it taught me that when you really put your mind to something, anything can be possible.

I left school wanting to do fashion and take a gap year. I assumed my parents would pay. However, they had other ideas.

So I ended up walking down Oxford Street in London handing out my CV to every fashion store and eventually French Connection took me on. I worked for them for 6 months in the day and in the evenings and weekends I worked as a waitress for an event catering company. I really enjoyed working in the real world, earning my own salary gave me a great feeling of independence and I had a lot of fun living in London meeting lots of new people

I saved around £5000 and used the money to travel around the world for 6 months. I spent a month in south east asia, a month in Australia and then 4 of months as a volunteer teaching in a Government school in Tanzania, which was the most rewarding and eye opening experience. If you are thinking of doing a gap year, I would strongly advise you spend a couple of months living somewhere, you learn so much more about a country and the culture. And you really don't get many opportunities if life to take a few months off at a time.

My experience in Tanzania changed me. Living amongst so much poverty, was like nothing I had experienced before. I had never been to a third world country, and I didn't fully understand the reality of how different people's lives are around the world.

Take education for example. In the local Government schools, you have a classroom with no posters on the walls, no colour at all, children sit 4 on a bench, 100 in a classroom. They sat in that same classroom all day, while different teachers for English, maths, science, and so on came and went.

They had no resources. If they were lucky they would have a pen, pencil and exercise book each but share textbooks, rulers, rubbers and sharpeners across the class of 100 pupils. There's no teaching aids, no building blocks and no Bunsen burner in chemistry. No fun classes either, no art, music, IT, or sport.

They just copied off a blackboard all day long. Could you imagine how much more boring school would be if that was the case for you.

And those children were the lucky ones, grateful to be there.

For many children, parents do not earn enough money to put food on the table at night, let alone pay for stationary, uniform and the school contributions required to attend Government school. So these children don't go to school, instead they are put to work on the farms and in the streets from as young as 4 yrs old. As I said at the start, everybody deserves a good start in life and so many of the children I met out there were being denied that opportunity.

Coming back to the UK, I had to do something about it. I didn't want to go into fashion any more, I wanted to go into international development; I wanted to make a difference.

I started my Economics degree at Edinburgh University, and by the second year, I had signed up for a half marathon and persuaded my Dad to run it with me. I raised about £2,700 and decided to take the money I had raised back to Tanzania. I wanted to give something to all those struggling families and help all the children who were being denied the most valuable start in life – an education.

So I used the money to set up the Bright Stars nursery school for orphans and children from some of the poorest families in the area. There is no government support for orphans or poor families. So I set up the nursery school to provide somewhere where these children could receive an education, a space to play, two meals a day and care from our teachers.

I had help on the ground from a man I had met when I first went out there volunteering, he shared my vision and he agreed to oversee the school while I was back in the UK. I went back to Uni and set up a charitable society to fundraise to support the school, we did cake sales, gig nights, art auctions and more sponsored runs.

A year later I went back to visit the project and I found out that the man I had trusted had been stealing the majority of the money. The teachers weren't being paid for 6 months and the children weren't receiving any meals.

I was devastated. I felt completely let down and I felt that I'd let people down who'd donated their money. I felt so naïve that I could have trusted someone so much and to be honest I just wanted to give up. But the community wouldn't let me. The parents begged me to continue to help them and their children. And I did.

I cut all ties with the man and I started talking to other charities in Tanzania to gain their advice. I realised I couldn't do this on my own so I partnered with an American registered charity called Rise Africa in Tanzania. They suggested the most amazing lady to help run the school, a lady called Penina, who had been sponsored to go to school and teaching college by an English family.

We set up a bank account and Penina and members of the school parent's committee became signatories. When I got back to the UK, with the help from a small group of trustees including some Kimbolton parents, we completed all the red tape to register Rise Africa UK as charity in the UK. Rise Africa UK was born!

That was 6 years ago, and we are now making a significant difference to the lives of 80 children in Tanzania. Most are now sponsored into private English speaking schools, with art, computer and sport lessons and they have a wealth of resources. We have just launched a new project this year, building chicken houses and providing chickens to families so they can earn an income through selling the produce in the local market.

Penina has been working with me ever since and is now managing all the projects in Tanzania. And every penny has since been accounted for.

I could not have succeeded without the huge support network I have around me. A large number of Kimbolton students and parents play a huge part in Rise Africa UK. Art4Africa, The Andy King Football tournament. meals for wheels. Fizz and Fashion and various cricket matches are just a few of the fund

raising events held locally. And we have about 30 kimbolton families sponsoring individual children in Tanzania.

I am so grateful for everyone's help. These 80 children would not be in school, let alone receiving a good quality education without your support. We are giving them that "Good start in life" that we all know is so important. So Thank you

If anyone would like to sponsor a child to go to school in Tanzania, or would like to donate a chicken, please grab me after this presentation or grab a leaflet on your way out.

So what have I been up to since university?

I have continued to run the charity since day one and always in my free time.

I graduated with a 2:1 and applied to a number of different graduate schemes. I managed to get onto the one I really wanted with the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK working in the Education team. After two years working in the Government, I felt trapped working at a desk all day, I felt I couldn't make a real difference working for such a large organisation and I didn't want my career to be limited to working for the Government for the rest of my life. I knew I wanted to change career but I also knew that I could never earn a salary by working for the charity full time, as it's so important to me that 100% of funds raised are spent in Tanzania benefiting the children.

And then an opportunity arose that I couldn't ignore. My best friend from Uni was working as a safari lodge manager in Tanzania and mentioned there was a management position opening at one of the lodges. I applied straight away, and I got the job!

It was a totally new experience working in hospitality amongst wild animals, sleeping to lions roaring and walking to work past herds of elephants trumpeting at me, all whilst being a manager and so having to keep my cool in front of guests. I learnt that I really enjoyed working with people, I enjoyed the management side as much as providing guests with great experience.

So I am now back from two years working in Tanzania and will be moving to New Zealand in September to manage a boutique lodge there. And I will still continue to manage the charity.

So as you can see my career has changed direction quite a few times! But nowadays people change their career paths a lot, unlike our parents who would usually work for just one company for most of their working life.

Working in something you're passionate about will fulfil you in so many ways. So I encourage you to do what you love and don't be afraid to do something different. I really believe you will be much happier, and more successful, in the long run.

So I just want to leave you with a quote from the film, Benjamin Button,:

"For what it's worth: it's never too late or, in my case, too early to be whoever you want to be. You can change or stay the same. We can make the best or the worst of it. I hope you make the best of it. And I hope you see things that startle you. I hope you feel things you never felt before. I hope you meet people with a different point of view. I hope you live a life you're proud of. If you find that you're not, I hope you have the courage to start all over again."

Thank you for listening and have a great afternoon in the sun!