

NOTE: The NBHS OBA does not endorse comments nor promotions made on this page, nor does it verify any included statements.

I've Lived Away – transcript of 2010 Annual Dinner speech

**Newcastle Boys' High School – 1906-1978
Annual Reunion Dinner, Newcastle City Hall**



2010 Guest Speaker – Russell Cheek

I've lived away from Newcastle for a long time. Last year was my first visit to this annual reunion. I thought – how marvellous this, how great to see everyone, to have memories stirred, enriched, expanded... to see people balder than me, and with thicker glasses.

Now, on this, my second visit, I'm DEEP in the deep end. I felt the tug of the leg-rope, and here I am, suddenly giving the speech myself.

It is, as they say in the book of euphemisms, an unexpected honour.

Now - if our chairman, John Beach, had waited just three days more for a certain announcement, he COULD have given this honour to a different Old Boy – who just happens to be Australian of the Year... Patrick MacGorry.

Ah - too late. I gave John the chance to renege, but graciously, and with the look of a man who had just given away the winning lotto ticket, he stuck to his word, and said “no – we'll get him next year. He'll be craving attention by then...”

So let me first apologise for NOT being Australian of the year.

Yes – Patrick has had a brilliant career in the field of mental illness,

Yes – he has helped countless people battle this scourge,

Yes – he has raised the profile of Mental Health in Australia, but:

Did he win Sale of the Century...? NO

Did he even win BHP High School Quiz...? I don't think so.

Has he brought optimism and hope to drunk people around the world with the Castanet Club? ... No, he hasn't – and I think HE would be the first to admit that.

When Cate Blanchett sees Patrick, does she kiss him on BOTH cheeks and say, “Oh...

Russell...!!”

No – his name is Patrick.

Good luck next year, Patrick – I'll blaze the trail – I will be Mark Renshaw to your Mark Cavendish. I will be your lead-out man, and see you get home, in the sprint to Paris.

So - I'm NOT Australian of the Year... what can I possibly offer tonight...?

It can only be - that I've lived a little outside the mould, an eclectic life of unusual choices:

Rather than tilling the furrow in the direction of the bank, I have always looked to follow the heart, to seek the uncharted uplands of the imagination.

I will call this speech – “The Life Eclectic”.

It's a gift to be able to give **this speech** – in the sense that - it has really put me on the spot.

As Teddy Roosevelt was fond of saying –

“If a man offers you a job, and you don't know how to do it – say YES straight away... and then LEARN - real quick...!”

This opportunity to speak comes only once.

None of us want to let our school-days go unheralded or unacknowledged. That's why we're here. Year by year we consolidate their meaning.

I remember Peter Hawkins saying to me on the 227 bus on the way to school in 2nd year – “It's my Dad's birthday. He is now closer to 100 than he is to nought.” How ancient that seemed then. How normal it seems now.

Let me set the scene:

Newcastle has grown older too. When I was at school, we were still - Steel City.

“TOOT!”

“It's... Four O'clock at the steelworks...!” What? ONLY at the steelworks? Steelworks in a different time-zone perhaps?

No, it WAS 4 O'clock all over Newcastle – but that whistle, echoed by every radio station, and every old biddie over every back fence, defined the passage of our Newcastle day – from afternoon into evening.

Fixed-wheel bicycles would scatter from BHP Mayfield all over town, as if escaping from an anthill flattened by a school-boy with a brick.

Down Maitland road they swarmed, alongside buses, which, as they plied down Beaumont St, spilt out their issue of freshly-showered and clean-clothed workmen. These would hang off the rear-platform poles of the double-deckers, before making their soft descent, bus still moving, their legs moving a bit too quickly, onto the tar road, and on... to home.

After the four o'clock whistle, everyone relaxed a little.... Except those men duty-bound for dogwatch later on, who just stirred on their afternoon pillows.

A life in Newcastle was not complete, unless a young lad had spent at least a couple of summers sweating his guts out behind a shovel in one of those heavy industries which kept our town alive.

“If you don't get down and study, son, you'll be doing this for the rest of your life!”

(I know, I know...! I know.)

With me, it worked. I felt the hot breath of the furnace. Didn't like it much.

But – like so many other things unpleasant at the time, I'm glad I did it.

Newcastle - not too big, not too small, JUST right. As a “Second City” – we have always deferred to Sydney, and have always supplied it with a great portion of its creative coal. This rattles down the gullet of Sydney, and is devoured whole, accepted, assimilated and claimed.

But as long as the art school and the uni are here, there will STILL be ferment in this town, always something happening: young bands, young artists, progressive ideas.

10 years before our school was built, Mark Twain said of Newcastle –

“It's one lo-o-o-ng street - with a hospital at one end, and a cee-me-tery at the other.”

He got us in one....

But I LOVE coming from this stretch-SECOND CITY, NSW, and I love to be here at the gathering of our old school.

Ours has been **a School** of fathers, sons, uncles. Cousins and brothers.

My Uncle Jack Cheek went to the old school on top of The Hill, my Dad, Trevor, who is here tonight, (Yay, Dad...!) was one of the first to the new one - on the flat of Waratah... along with that stalwart of the Dogwatch, my late Uncle Ross.

Dad was taught Maths by TOC, Tom O'Connor. For me, 30 yrs later, Toc was Deputy Head.

“What the ? You can't mean? But Dad.... He's been there 30 years!?”

“Ah... longer than that, son...”

This sense of continuity was both comforting and disconcerting.

But it did confirm the span of our history – and the tenor of our song:

“As they climbed up the hill in the morning.”

When we sang it as kids, it meant little to me... We had no hill.

But now, it is redolent with meaning.

Now, I can see the ghosts walking up Tyrell St ahead of us, banging their pots, laughing, joking, pissing around. Up to no good.

Now - we FEEL the passage of time, as we never could then.

Now - We ARE time.

Emotions are linked to the intangibles – SAY the words to our song – Nothing.

SING them - and we are struck by the deep pang of nostalgia which I know we all feel when we sing it tonight.

Because, for a few seconds, we are young again, as we sing of the boys older than us, who went to one World War, maybe 2... and of those fathers and uncles who have long ago, or more recently, left us.

We are also part of that proud stream.

But any one of us can only truly look at the school - through the prism of our own year.

Each school year is like a carriage on a train that snakes in front of, and behind us – we are all connected, but few pass from carriage to carriage.

I can only hope that those in the scores of other carriages might see tonight, via the misted window of my experience, what is also the landscape of their own.

At school **we** were a microcosm, a Petri dish - of relationships, hormones, choices. A culture of loud smells. We were pimply-faced, priapic kids, full of sarcasm, who did everything with guts and energy.

How to chose our new mates, our school-subjects – how to put a down-payment on our futures? We were all just whistling in the dark, but somehow we managed to find our own way through.

This was due in no small part to the already established culture of our school.

We were a selective school – but it seemed to me that we got used to this instantly – a high benchmark was demanded, and quickly became the norm.

We strove to do well in everything. We learnt ambition.

Secretly, I believe we had been selected - because our intelligence thinly concealed a superior standard of **humour**. Laughs were our hallmark and our currency – Our humour was intelligent, it took-no-prisoners and it was the gossamer thread that got us through the toughest times.

We were funny little buggers. Laconic, cynical, and sometimes cruel... to be sure, to be sure...

No personal development classes here, no counselling – just a lot of laughs together, which was incredibly sustaining. As Nietzsche said (and I paraphrase,) “If you stare too long into the abyss, eventually, it will stare back at you.” We lightened our lives.

These laughs should never be underestimated as a humanizing force, and one that built resilience in us, and its own brand of compassion.

No Australian child should (By 1990....!) ever be punished for making others laugh...!

THIS is what separated us from those other, lesser schools. Those kids - were just not funny.

In road-testing ourselves against each other, we prepared ourselves for the world.

As Jacques Lecoq, the Master of our School in Paris said to me much later – ‘L’Ecole, c’est vous....’ The school is YOU.

Thanks also, to the snail-mail imports of pop-culture magazines and the import-vinyl-record collection of generous rich-boy Robert Pryde, we learnt that there was a bigger, brighter world out there, and we wanted in.

George Bernard Shaw said that youth was wasted on the young.

I wish... I had wasted more of my youth. I was a slow starter, but made amends later on.

As Shaw also said – “Life can only be lived forward, but can only be understood - backwards”

I hope we are all understanding it better by now. ARE WE...? Well....?

“Hands up those boys who are not...?!”

“Ok - Hands up those boys who are.”

“Now – hands up all of you who have NOT had your hands up....!!”

“DOWN TO MY OFFICE, all of you... and Wait There...! Til I’ve finished. 4 of the best for you lot!”

Thank you very much.

Remember how time slowed down.... While we waited to get the cane.... The mind focused... on imminent pain. A strangely spiritual experience of hyper-awareness.

More than anything, I remember the **characters** that we were: stirrers, clowns, impostors, skitters and scammers.... In those days before drinks like “V” and Red Bull, we were powered only by Coca Cola. And we STILL got so much done...!

I love who we were in those days.

And it’s some of the tiny details and flashes of stupid-memory that I retain as clear as day.

In deference to “Keg” MacRae, our Latin teacher :-

At the time, the local soft-drink bottler was Slack’s Cordials. As soon as we had some Latin under our belt, they became – “Slackus Cordialus”,

And the cry of “Surf’s Up...!” was loosely translated as “Undo es magnus!” (Waves are big...)

The constant tinkling of Greensleeves heralded not Mr Whippy, but rather “Our Friend Shit-stick”.

Teachers’ nicknames sprang from an eternal fount of cruel wisdom:

Keg

Pink Panther

Fat Jack

Jockey Ross

Spot

Mumbles

Harry Hippo

Pinhead

Chrome Dome

Casper

Cats-eyes

Slops Mudford

Sniffs O’Donoghue

Frau Grau (Mr Grey, a German teacher...)

Fanny Jackson

And one of the underrated names: Theo Van der Veen was “Lippy” – an epithet which captured his aloof persona in a single brush-stroke.

No matter what their chosen subject, all Teachers were exhorted at some point to instigate a “Maths Debate”...

The Ironic nicknames we gave each other – like “Speedy” Walker. There were some kids you would look at and instantly see them as 60 yr olds. Speedy was one of these.

Paul Percy - Lubra Lips..... (unthinkable now, of course)

Short-arms-long-pockets, the control freaks, the anal retentives, the no-hoppers...

No-one was permitted to take themselves seriously.

And our **teachers**: Mr Abel was it? Who, while not missing a beat of the lesson, used to try to lob and land tiny bits of chalk up onto the highest, narrowest of picture rails. Surely a futile ambition.

But no – one day – just once - after years, he did it - the class erupted....!

Sure, the Berlin Wall may have fallen, but that chalk is still up there.

And the diminutive cabernossi, Jockey Ross, standing behind the bench, would roll 10 or 20 string-slim greyhounds before class, and stand them in a ragged-topped Golden Circle can. These would be sucked to ash before end of period.

At Boys' High, there would be at least one teacher who would find the best in you. I had a few:

John Allen, Jack Caldwell, John Robson, all propelled me into Sydney Uni.

The late, great Vic Rooney, with his theatrical schtick on the Ides of March, bursting into the room bristling with butter-knives, scaring the be-jesus out of not only Caesar, but us too.

A little bit of theatre went a long way.

One day, as he was coming back from a rolling sequence of Friday lunchtime beers, Vic stopped Rodney (Razz) Reay dead.

“Listen son...! Reay...! Tell me - Are_you_the_full_quid...?!”

Razz: “Well sir, I reckon I’m about 17and 6 worth....?!”

Vale Vic.

I did have one year taught by Charlie Goffett – a bit longer would have been nice.

“J’habite a Hamilton”... *(repeat several times with different emphasis, etc. Then mime “not being able to continue without durrie-in-mouth.”)*

I already KNEW I lived in Hamilton, but was happy to have my co-ordinates regularly confirmed by Charlie.

I pity those kids who DIDN’T live in Hamilton... they will be embarrassing themselves to this day all over the Francophone world....

I know Charlie would have loved to hear my own stories of living in Paris....

I majored in French and German – I took German because of my love of the language and my serendipitous proficiency in it.

You can imagine my surprise to find that some had taken it for a different reason: their passion for the quality of German WW2 machinery. They wanted to be able to identify and buy correct spare parts in future years. They had presciently anticipated the advent of Amazon.

In **My School Year**, I was the chameleon – like Woody Allen’s character, Zelig, I would change my shape to fit in with whichever group I needed to. I became the stowaway, skulking in the cargo, between sub-cultures.

Like a Meerkat, I would pop up wherever there was something interesting going on. I didn’t like missing out - on anything.

I never missed ONE lunchtime cricket game

I raced slot cars with the nerdy kids.

I played euchre with the card sharks.

I loved music, played in the School Orchestra, and hung out at Tyrells records.

I learnt to play bass guitar. With no amplifier this was a solitary journey - Like farting the National Anthem through the keyhole, it was very clever, but of no tangible advantage to anyone.

As William Blake said – “without contraries, there is no progression” – I did my bit -

I spanned the gulf between nerd and sport – clarinet and the cricket team.

I played a handful of games for the First XI. I was a ring-in amongst true talent, amongst them, **Gary Gilmore**, the greatest all-rounder God ever shoveled Guts into. Actually, I believe God has shoveled some NEW guts... in there recently. Especially around the liver area... Go you Gus....!

I am so thankful to have played in the company of greatness. From my present vantage point on the couch, I can still know how it feels to play with the likes of a Glenn McGrath, or an Adam Gilchrist. Gus was an amalgum of both.

Believe me - I don't let people forget I played with him. No statute of limitations on bragging rights.

In our ritual lunchtime games at school, Gus was a freak. Blessed with the miracle of timing, a gift by whose bounty I remained blissfully untroubled, he would, with no more than a broken piece of paling, command the tennis ball heavenwards, over the giant fig tree, over the metalwork sheds... a timeless moment where the ball seemed to hang in the air long past the trajectory to which it was entitled.

“Oh, didn’t quite get onto that one, Gus...” would come the laconic cry.

I stood close to him whenever I could, but no skill transferred by osmosis. I was an average player – well-motivated, but like Hamlet – “fat, and scant of breath” ... I scored many centuries of the mind, against the greatest bowlers of our generation.

Years later, in the formative days of our band, the Castanet Club, The Sandman - Steve Abbott - and I, lived in a house on the very top of Newcastle Hill. Every afternoon we would go across to the old school, and roll the arm over. It was then - that the ghosts of the old boys came and whispered to us:

“Stick electrical tape onto one side of the tennis ball...!”

We obeyed the voices, and lo – the ball did swing - prodigiously in both directions.

The wisdom of the old boys. Whenever a visiting band would come and play at the Castanet Club , we challenged them to a match. Thanks to our uncanny control of the swinging ball, we never lost.

But – at school, and on Saturdays, the sound of the six-stitcher was king ... fizzing through the air like a viper.

At school, a similar sound emanated from The Sunny Boy, the pyramid-shaped ice block that was part of our culture. Opening the Sunny Boy was akin to solving Fermat's Last Theorem. You were lucky if you solved the puzzle before it melted.

Once all the sugar had been sucked out, there remained a disappointing lump of ice.

The Sunnyboy, did however, become the perfect vehicle for the disappointment coded in its genes.

For those with strong arms – Gus, Wilco, Razz and others, it took the form of a perfect projectile, and could be thrown at surprising velocity through the air.

More often than not, the projectile would FIZZ just past you, and shatter on the wall inches away, spraying the victim with a cold ice-storm, and the chilling knowledge that you had just missed... being seriously stung.

Like an early suburban version of the Hadron collider - if it hit you, it would definitely - rattle your atoms.

The playground would stop as one, and applaud the spectacle. A communal moment.

I should add - much of the tuckshop fare from Ben and Mrs Ben WAS a disappointment. You would watch a new boy walk away from the tuckshop with his first ever hot-dog. After he bit into it, you would hear a sound as if he'd just witnessed a double fault at Wimbledon. "Oh...."

Of course, anything I say about my experience of school is bound to be awash in the psychedelia of **the social context** – it was the 19-60s...!

The era of social upheaval and world-wide ferment, whose like we will never see again –

The decade that began with Kumbaya, ended with Sympathy for the Devil.

What a time to be alive. What a time to be at high school.

Sorry, all you others out there, but chronologically, we scored the big one...!

– The Beatles, The Stones, Hair the Musical – Carnaby street, Apple, Swinging London, Cream, Dylan, 2001 A Space Odyssey... Woodstock...! Jimmy Hendrix, (*sing riff of "Highway Chile"*) - Pop culture....!

I learnt quickly that I loved music, literature, film, acting, art, humour, repartee, dialogue - the play of languages.

Once discovered, this genie was no longer for the bottle.

We grew our hair. To this day, Col Taylor should have the Legion d'Honneur for showing us the way - to Boldly Go....

We also wore paisley... (??!!)

Which chemical changed the world most? The Contraceptive Pill, or LSD.

We grew up with both, used only the one. But we were in the mood to try anything once - except incest or folk-dancing.

We fronted each other over Vietnam. We shiver at the echoes today – the useless invasion of Iraq. History repeats.

The horrors of Apartheid in a far land – the Sharpeville Massacre. These things were brought close, and made demands on our personal morality. Where did WE stand?

How we actually managed to finish High School without being engulfed by this maelstrom, I'll never know.

ANY teenager of any era is biologically impelled to disappoint their parents.

In our era, we were also CULTURALLY impelled to disappoint.

Double jeopardy for our poor parents.

It must have been so hard for them - to take on board this seismic shift – when the wider world invaded their own loungerooms.

I'm sure we have made it up to them since – now that we no longer frequent the demos, nor “climb up the hill in the morning.”

Suddenly, too quickly, it was all ending. On muck-up day, Trev Sorensen and the nerd herd finally repaid our years of faith in them. Their smoke bomb snaked like a Steven King novel, right through the whole science block.

Buoyed by his triumph and wanting to consolidate, mild-mannered Trevor, now badly off the leash, stormed like a Banshee through the school, emergency flare in hand.

The school was evacuated. Even the science teachers were secretly impressed and asked for his formula. So they should have – Trevor ended up being a top aerospace engineer for NASA in the United States...

So we dispersed into the world.

Like Patrick White's Voss, the arcane symbolism of whose journey was SO hammered into us by John Robson, I too had eaten of the Witchety grub.

I was on my way, away from school, away from Newcastle, sporting a back-pack of data and moral fibre. These of course, all spilled out, and into Uni life, which soaked them up like blood on sand.

SO BEGAN the LIFE ECLECTIC

I had been overwhelmed by the 60s, & I knew what interested me. At Sydney Uni, I gravitated to the interesting people – those in acting, writing, music, politics. I found my people, and they were not... in the German department.

Nevertheless, I did graduate with an Hons degree in German Literature.... and Share-houses. Plus a couple of years' French.

After Uni, people use to ask my Dad – “Oh, What’s Russ up to these days? What – Doctor is he? Specialist? Lawyer? Oh, he was **very** good at school...”

Dad would go strangely silent.... “Oh – is that the time...? Sorry - gotta run.”

He could not bring himself to say “Oh, Russ ... uh... got his jaw broken at the last demo, he plays music with hippies, Oh, I didn’t tell you that? He’s actually a clown – he um, lives in a commune... mmm... on an old chook farm...

But – he IS the only one of his tribe with an Honours Degree!”

What we WERE doing, of course, was developing, in our own organic way, what turned out to be the seminal Australian children’s theatre company, **Pipi Storm Children’s Circus**.

We started working with indigenous kids around Eveleigh St, the “Block”, and at the “Settlement”, in Sydney. I love to say that if I walked down those streets on any midnight, I would still hold a diplomatic passport uncommon for the white man in history.

We then toured shows and workshops to isolated communities all over Australia. I saw my whole country and brought celebration and education to isolated, disadvantaged kids, both white and black. It was great. Dad loved it, and caught up with us in many outback locations, scalding himself opening over-cooked radiators more than once.

But - I wanted to be better at what I did. I used the kudos and savings from this hard yakka to get myself to **Paris**, and I was accepted into the famous Ecole Jacques Lecoq theatre school.

I lived in Paris for three years. School taught me who I was, and Paris made an indelible mark.

I then performed in Italian in Italy, German in Germany, returned to Paris and formed a theatre company, Double Take, with people more talented than I. We toured in Paris, Holland, and then finally, Australia. The brand of theatre, commonly inspired by the masters, Jacques Lecoq and Phillippe Gaulier, was exciting, and people, in turn, were excited by it.

The latter included a few exceptional people in Newcastle, who were just starting their own theatrical band and club – I directed a show for them, and they invited me to repatriate to Newcastle and be part of the excellent adventure, that became – the **CASTANET CLUB**

Newcastle was still a steel town. It was also an artistic Blast Furnace, where the precious metal was separated from the slag by audiences who demanded either: “Shit, or get off the pot”.

This earthy ethos of “Second City” was the crucible for our band, and why we became a cult hit wherever we went: we had a generosity of spirit, born of Newcastle.

It felt like we were the Beatles. We were contrarians - embracing dagginess, we united whole crowds into friendly tribes.

When I watch our Castanet Club film today, I can't believe the creativity, vitality, and discipline of what we did – to remain so focused for so long with a large band of disparate n'er-do-wells. The politics necessary to keep us together for 8 yrs were a lesson for ANY corporate consultancy to follow...

Except we never made any money.

As Shakespeare said: "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

We dogged it - JUST before the fortune kicked in...

We had thought the ebullient spirit of this band immortal, but we had, indeed, come to the end of our time in the sun.

We still get a lot of goodwill from aging Generation X-ers, who ask: "Castanet Club..! When is the reunion tour...?"

It's not so much US that they want to see again, but the world they loved when they were young – which we exemplified, magnified and mirrored back to them.

In the years following the Castanet Club, I **acted** in a number of main-stage productions with the Sydney Theatre Company, and was lucky enough to be in memorable shows with great directors - like Neil Armfield and Barry Kosky, and journeyman actors like Geoff Rush and David Wenham...

During this time, I also did something else strangely excellent.

Dad still says: "Ah, you made yr mark, Son."

Well, really, the mark is not much more than a compass scratch in a wooden school desk, but it IS a rare one.

I DID win - **Sale of the Century....!** On the tele. The large wad of Money, the cars, the kitsch, everything.

I was on a high for 6 months – I was the suburb king. People had been WILLING me to win, through their teles, in their loungerooms.

I had practiced for this, by winning BHP High School quiz in 5th form at school. At the time, I thought this would get me more girls - but strangely, I only got the ones with glasses.

I was hunting amongst my own tribe - in the valley of the nerds.

By the time that 8th and final programme of Sale was in the can, the hideous pressure, the stakes and the victory, made it the closest I will ever get to Playing for Australia...

Although, when I think of pressure – I DO think of what the great Keith Miller used to say – "Playing for Australia – that's a doddle – looking around in yr Spitfire, and seeing a Messerschmitt up yr arse – THAT'S pressure."

I had also been **directing** theatre shows for ages – then, a few years ago I was asked to be guest director for our great cultural beacon, Circus Oz, and created with them a totally new show that toured the world for two years. It was often described as one of their best ever – Critics may say that... I, of course, could not comment.

One of my great joys has been working with young people, and helping them to be better than me. I'm the accidental mentor - becoming something to them that I never had for myself, guiding them into performances they never knew they could achieve. Some of them have gone on to do great things in the world.

And I can see my young self in their ambitions, and they are our hope for the future - decent, funny, caring young human beings.

This work now extends to the corporate world, where I work for a company traveling over Australia, NZ and often to Europe and USA, doing crazy, theatrical experiments with top execs of big companies. This helps them in turn, to know who they are, and in the long haul, become better corporate citizens.....

I've recently been working with legendary rock band, the Hoodoo Gurus. For their latest album, they have made a series of 6 videos in which I play their life-coach, satirizing a lot of the exact same stuff I do in real life. I love the irony of this. Art imitates job.

So that's me - I HAVE negotiated a bumpy road less travelled.

Note to self - must now put up warning sign to those who follow: "Caution – Bridge out. Learn to swim..."

Australia now is a mightily different place to when any of us were at school:

When half the workforce was unionised, and our economy tariff-protected.

Women have now risen, Trade unions declined.

Blue-collar jobs vanish.

Ethnic groups are accepted.

We have an incredibly higher level of education

We are a more dynamic place – we are richer.

We live in the global village of the Internet and instant global tv.

We have lived through interesting times.

But – now that we are more prosperous, we also take ourselves more seriously.

Down at the bottom of the alphabet, gen x, gen y, unless they are very much on guard, are being distracted - by a barrage of celebrity fluff and commercial marketing to which we were never subject - from remembering where we all came from.

The corporatisation and commodification of modern Australia make our National Character less colourful, and our culture more subject to the dulling damp blanket of OH & S...

It's little wonder we look upon our own school years with such affection.

Let us not forget the buds of our characters – who we were - intelligent, funny - we tried everything, we loved each other, hated each other, laughed our heads off, cried our guts out.

We were, as Chairman Mao would say – or – WOULD have said, if he had known us – “Little bundles of life”

Would we live them all again, these amazing days of up and downs...??

I don't know....!

But – what I DO know is - I did come out of Boys' High – brimming with optimism.

That alone is a great legacy from a memorable school.

In closing - Some of you might remember the character played by Rutger Hauer: Roy Batty the “Replicant”, in the film Blade Runner. With his final breath atop a tall building, he utters:

“I have seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships - on fire - off the shoulder of Orion. I watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tanhauser Gate. All of these things will be lost in time, like tears in rain...”

We will NOT... let the school, nor old Newcastle, become lost in time.

And for us - As Goethe would say – “Freedom and life belong only to those who wake up and create it anew every single day.”

That's nice, but it CAN get tiring.

Sometimes we DO need the disco-nap, we NEED the flippers to do complete the 20 laps.

And we DO need the motorized bicycle to get us up the Col de Tormalet in our own personal Tour de France.

Let me leave you with the following exhortations:

RAGE against the machine,

FIGHT against alzheimers,

TAKE the Lipex,

Rage, rage, rage, against the dying of the light,

CHEAT at golf, (why not?)

WEAR the hairpiece,

ENDORSE Ashley and Martin,

TAKE the Viagra,

GET the navel piercing,

EMBRACE the wrinkled tattoo....!

Do NOT go gently into that good night!

Rah rah rah, here we STILL are, NHS best - by - far! Now - and Always....!

Thankyou all, goodnight.