

## **JORDANHILL SCHOOL PRIZEGIVING 25 June 2018**

Good afternoon everyone and thank you. It's a great pleasure to be here, and a privilege.

But firstly, congratulations to all you prize-winners. Not forgetting your mums and dads, who've no doubt been through it too, and of course there's the skill, and endurance, of the teaching staff.

Above all I want to congratulate all of you, for being a part of one of Scotland's most successful schools.

It's been a long time since I attended a Jordanhill school prize-giving. 50 years in fact. Half a century. I've attended many other kinds of prize-giving. In the film industry we do them all the time.

But in this instance I did wonder why the Rector had singled me out. That used to mean I was in some kind of trouble, but on this occasion he was inviting me to present the prizes, and say a few words, presumably to the wise.

Which was delightful, but slightly odd, because I wasn't exactly your ideal pupil. I was certainly not academically gifted.

I did manage to get a clutch of O Grades and Highers. I was made a prefect and got a wee yellow badge to show for it. I did sing in the school opera, and played rugby passably well (when I chose not to forget my kit at home).

But I don't remember winning any prizes, or earning many high marks. For me prize-giving was the day before we were set free for the holidays.

So what would Dr Thomson expect me to say?

Well, back then I thought education was something I had to do because my mum and dad wanted it. I never really realised it was actually for me; for my benefit.

English and Art were my favourite subjects because I loved telling stories. Mathematics, and chemistry didn't stand much of a chance with me I'm afraid. I just wanted to make films.

But Jordanhill gave me something very valuable indeed. Something I only began to appreciate a long time after I had left the school.

You see this school gave me self-belief, and self-discipline. It didn't give up on me, or reject me, or bully me. It steered me, and nurtured me. It gave me an environment within which I was encouraged to think, for myself.

It gave me a respect for the idea of learning as a thing in itself. It taught me to be curious, and interested, and to enquire beyond the obvious, even if there seemed to be no immediate benefit. It helped me realise that listening is the better half of discussion. If you don't listen, you won't learn. To my advantage, that lesson has lasted all my life, and is with me still.

The Greek philosopher, Socrates (who by the way never wrote anything down) famously said, “An unexamined life is not worth living”

Our education prepares us for life; for a life that’s worth living. Self-examination gives us the chance to be fulfilled; to have a life that we might actually be able to enjoy.

For me it was the cinema, and that was it. I wanted to be right there in that world, up on the big screen, somehow. An impossible dream.

People used to say, “What are you going to do when you grow up”, and I’d say, “I’m going to make films”.

And then they’d say, “But what about a job? Nobody makes films in Glasgow. How are you going to make a living?”

No one at Jordanhill ever said that. Or anything like it.

On the other hand, The Scottish Education Department refused to give me a grant to go to film school in London saying that, “film was not an academic subject”.

Still I persisted. I worked as a bus conductor for a year and saved up enough money to go to film school without a grant. It was tough.

For several years I had to work my way through film school, but I went on, and miraculously enough, managed to end up making a living.

And now, I’ve made many successful films; worked all over the world, with amazing, talented people; famous and powerful people – some of whom were even quite nice.

And won many prizes, Oscars and BAFTAs among them.

But you’ve got to be tough to make films. It’s essentially a business where you have to deal with adversity head on.

You have to be very determined, very forceful on the one hand, and very intuitive and receptive on the other. It’s a battleground between art and money. It’s that seeming contradiction in terms - a creative industry.

As it happened, coming from the streets of Glasgow was a good start. I was prepared for anything. After the Glasgow buses I was well set up to cope with the nonsense of Hollywood.

Like the buses, Hollywood is not for sissies. It’s a highly competitive environment, but I found I could work there, getting the best out of difficult, insecure, brilliant artists, whilst keeping the psychopathic studio bosses at bay.

I found I could walk the delicate path between creativity and commerce, and above all, was able to “keep the heid”.

I was able to achieve things I could only ever have dreamed of when I was at school.

So what can I tell you?

I guess I just want to let you know that you're already doing ok.

Whether you're winning a prize today, or not, you're in the right place, and you're on the right track.

And for those of you who are leaving this term, you are embarking on your own personal movie; a fantastic, frustrating, fabulous, superhero adventure.

Throughout which, your education will protect you, and extend you, and the sheer joy of learning will hopefully continue throughout your lives, whatever careers you choose to follow.

To finish, I'd just like to share some wee bits of advice that have helped me over the years:

1. Never be late. Always be on time, or even – God forbid – be early.
2. Whatever you do, try to follow your passions. If you enjoy doing something, you'll do it well. And if you do it well, you'll reap the rewards.
3. Always remember that you exist to help others, and not the other way around.
4. Understand that luck isn't handed out like lollipops. The harder you work, the luckier you get.
5. Have courage. It's not easy overcoming your fears, but mother nature almost always rewards human courage – sometimes in unexpected ways. Nothing worthwhile is achieved without courage.
6. Above all, keep walking forward. I've made every mistake in the book. I've failed, many, many times, but when I fell flat on my face, I got straight back up again, and kept on walking forward.

Once again, well done to you all.

Enjoy today, and the long Scottish summer ahead of us.

And thank you very much.

Iain Smith