



Ellie Paine

THOMAS'S CLAPHAM CLASS OF 2011

Last July, Thomas's Clapham was delighted to welcome guest speaker and alumna, Ellie Paine, to the Year 8 Leavers' Celebration. Ellie left Thomas's in 2011 and went on to King's Canterbury before studying Modern Languages at the University of Cambridge. From there she joined the UK Civil Service Fast Stream on their Leadership Development Programme. Ellie has worked on employment, environmental and housing policy and is currently Senior Private Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister. The School Prize is awarded to a pupil who has maintained high academic standards, has participated fully in the broad curriculum and has been kind to others. Ellie received the cup in 2011 and it has now become an established tradition that a former recipient of this prestigious prize is invited back to present it to the next worthy winner. Ellie had three pieces of advice for the departing pupils...

YEAR 8 CELEBRATION SPEECH

It is a joy and a privilege to be here today to mark and celebrate this moment with you. And it is an honour to be returning – in spirit if not location – to Thomas's Clapham, where I spent nine years, from the ages of four to 13.

I remember just how big a moment this is. Change is coming for many of you – if you're in Year 8 or Year 6 and you're heading to your senior school in September, or if you're in Year 5 or Year 7 and those choices and changes lie ahead.

For all of you, things will feel different next year. You'll be that much older, you'll be learning new things and you'll be starting a new chapter with a different perspective.

This is the time to reflect on how far you've come and where you might be going next.

You'll be feeling a range of emotions. Maybe you're feeling excited, a little apprehensive, scared even. Thirteen years ago, in summer 2011, I felt the same.

I was sitting where you are sitting now, feeling reflective. Happy to be through exam season, proud of the progress I had made and looking forward to the next stage, but also pretty terrified. I couldn't quite believe that my time at Thomas' had come to an end.

Teachers, parents, friends and older siblings kept trying to tell me what senior school would be like. But they, and I, had no idea what

it would really feel like to turn up for my first day. To look around and for everyone to be older than me, wiser, more comfortable and to feel suddenly very, very small. But also to feel like I was on the brink of something exciting.

The thing about life is that those experiences just keep on coming. Over and over you are plunged into the deep end, drag yourself to the surface and learn to swim, only for it to happen again. In the words of Miley Cyrus, there is always going to be another mountain.

I felt the same when turning up for my first day at university and when starting work as a civil servant. My job at the moment is to advise the Government on its policy decisions and it's a privilege to feel

like I'm working towards something bigger than myself every day. But it can feel like the deep end too.

You can't avoid being challenged. And it is important to remember that it's a positive thing. It means you're trying to do something difficult, that you're out of your comfort zone, that you're learning.

In these moments, I often find myself thinking about lessons I learnt at Thomas's, from the fantastic teachers at this school, the experiences I had and the friends I made.

And no, I don't just mean lessons from Miss Froud on tectonic plate boundaries, though that knowledge has been so hammered into my brain that I don't think I could forget it if I tried.

THE FIRST IS: 1. LEAN ON THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU

A friend recently sent me a cartoon from a book called 'Big Panda and Tiny Dragon'. The cartoon is of, you guessed it, a tiny dragon sitting on the back of a big panda. The panda says to the dragon: "What is more important, the journey or the destination?" ... "The company," replies the tiny dragon.

At Thomas's, you are in great company. You are surrounded by people who want the best for you and who will bring out the best in you – your teachers, your parents, your friends.

When I look back on my time at Thomas's, it is the people I remember above all else. The advice of inspirational teachers and the funny memories of my friends. This community of people has helped you grow into the person you are today and it can help you through whatever comes next. And it's a community you will always be a part of. Some friends you will stay in touch with and those friendships will be particularly close because you shared this first stage of life together.

Some you'll fall out of contact with, until you bump into each other at university, or work, or at a reunion carefully organised by Miss Stewart-Morgan. And you'll always have your memories of Thomas' in common.

If you're facing a challenge, or need some advice, draw on the fantastic community around you. There is almost nothing you can experience in life that someone else hasn't already been through. Lean on the people around you and it will feel easier.

THE SECOND IS: 2. DON'T COMPARE, BE INSPIRED

Comparison is the thief of joy. I think U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt said this first, but I'm taking credit for it now.

When I was at Thomas's, every week I would dutifully go and check the board outside Mrs Velasco's office, keeping my fingers crossed and hoping that some miracle had happened and that she had seen the potential within me, of which I had given little evidence. That she had somehow overlooked my inability to catch, or run at any convincing speed and promoted me into a higher netball team. Needless to say, I was often disappointed.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with wanting to be better. But, you can't let looking over at the other pitches and wishing you were there instead stop you from fully enjoying the game you are playing. That's the difference between comparison and inspiration and it's just a difference of perspective. There will always be people who are better than you at what you are doing. If you don't think there are, then there are probably people who are better at being modest.

Don't spend so much time comparing your performance to theirs that you lose sight of your own progress. Be inspired by others, try and be better, but always make sure you are striving upwards, rather than putting yourself down.

AND THE THIRD AND FINAL ONE IS: 3. REMEMBER THE HOW AND THE WHY

Today is all about milestones. Finishing another year, passing your exams, or winning a prize. It would be easy to look back at your time at Thomas's so far and to just focus on those milestones. But how and why you do things matters just as much as what you do.

Just as important as winning a prize today is how you receive it, or taking the time to say congratulations to a friend who has, even if you have not. And just as important as passing your exams is thanking your teacher for the cracking revision guide that helped you pass them.

Finishing another year isn't just about ticking milestones off a check list, it's about what you're learning and the person you're becoming along the way.

This goes for the future as well. If you're feeling overwhelmed by the milestones you want to hit next year and the things you want to achieve, think about how you're approaching them and why.

Focus on your attitude and approach to each day, to each interaction with another person, to each thing you do and remember your overarching purpose, your why. And if you can only remember one thing from what I have said this afternoon, the common thread which ties all three together is to be kind to others, but also to yourself, and to enjoy every day.

Enjoy every lesson which inspires you, every match you play whatever team you're in, every performance, every break time with your friends. Enjoy all your achievements but also all your experiences. And of course, like the tiny dragon, the company.

I wish you all the best for the next chapter and I look forward to seeing the difference you make.