



Newsletter

The first term is well under way and the girls are busy and enthusiastically engaged. Last Tuesday we celebrated the 200th anniversary of Charles Dickens' birthday. We started the Dickens' Assembly with a beautiful hymn written by Charles Dickens and then the Grade 6 girls shared an amusing poem by Ron Rubin about Oliver Twist. The Grade 3 girls, all dressed up as Oliver, presented poems and music from the well-known musical by the same name. It was a charming celebration. The Grade 3s later sampled 'gruel' and were photographed enjoying their porridge without the peas and saveloy sausage. Thank you to Mrs Warner and Mrs Rait for their work behind the scenes.

St Katharine's School
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The Grade 6 girls left for their camp early on Monday morning. Mrs Hampton and Mrs Frame are accompanying them and excitement was running high. The Grade 6s have almost completed the Life Skills Course with Mrs Lefson who has been most complimentary about their level of participation and their open approach. The Grade 5s will also be going on their environmental tour soon. Miss Blackburn and Ms Hartmann will be keeping them company.

Mr Brett Nicolson, the master in charge of pastoral care at St John's Prep School, gave an excellent presentation around parenting the online generation. The information presented was informative, practical and in some instances quite frightening. He strongly urged parents to resist giving children under the age of 13, access to internet enabled phones. He motivated for careful preparation and a good set of skills to manage the impact of having ready, easy and constant contact with others. Mr Nicholson made a very encouraging observation. In his view, tried and tested parenting principles remain the same even though the playing field has changed: fair, reasonable boundaries should be placed in a firm and loving manner and need to operate within the security of a happy and stable home.

Jo Hamilton, an educational psychologist who often works with our girls and staff, gave a thought-provoking workshop this week. Her presentation centred on changes in parenting styles and managing the pressures that these changes have placed on



the teaching staff and the manner in which we approach and think about our partnerships with each other. There was much to think about and absorb. What was clear is that the role of the teacher is no longer restricted to teaching and growing children in the classroom. The role of the teacher also necessitates listening, counselling, advising, holding, and sustaining not just the girls, but in some instances, their families too. This can be a daunting task especially if you are already stretched and there are 26 children all needing attention and care.

Auckland Park, The Ridge, Salvazione and St Katharine's are planning to share a combined evening on March 16. "Zulu Fireside Tales" will be held at The Ridge with Grades 5, 6 and 7 girls participating. It will involve bringing a picnic basket and your family to support our girls and the other children taking part. A R20.00 entrance fee will be payable at the gate. The swimming and tennis teams have already enjoyed several fixtures each with pleasing results. Those girls and families who were among the thousands participating in the Midmar Mile report a successful weekend and I congratulated several of the swimmers in Assembly. Hannah Judge, who is only in Grade 2, swam her first mile with her family and Maya Fleischer swam across twice!

You may have noticed an Open Day scheduled for 8 March. This is a new addition to the school calendar and is intended for prospective parents and, in particular, parents who are looking at St Katharine's for Grade 0 2014 and 2015. The morning will run from 8.30 – 10.30 and will be a relatively normal day for most of the girls.

Mrs Salmon has become aware of a need for information and exposure to the school earlier in the process than was requested previously. Offering every interested parent a personal interview when they are looking two or even three years in advance of the Grade 0 year, has become excessively time consuming. We are hoping that this morning will allow these families a chance to gain some insight into how we operate and what makes this such a special place.

We are not going to advertise the open day in the press and are rather going to focus on the families whose names are already on our list and the feeder nursery schools. Security and a manageable number of people on campus were the key motivation for the decision not to advertise in the newspapers. This will mean, we hope, a smaller number of visitors who are keen and interested.

We will continue to interview prospective Grade 0 families early in the year as this provides a very personal opportunity to get to know each other just before a decision needs to be made.

Please note that the Ballet Concert will not take place on the weekend indicated in the calendar but on 30 and 31 March.

Over the last few weeks, I have come across several mentions of unhappiness (the occasional as opposed to continuous sadness) being a healthy part of our existence. Jo Hamilton in her presentation to the staff spoke about how often we as parents, feel compelled to fix our children's unhappiness immediately. It is worth asking the following questions of ourselves: Why are we so uncomfortable waiting for the unhappy, angry or distressed responses to just rest within our children for a while? Why are we reluctant to allow for processing or to allow for time to give perspective to the unhappy incident?



I was reminded of an extract in a book written by Dr Robert Evans, an educational expert, who came to South Africa in 2010. In *Family Matters – How Schools can cope with the Crises in Childrearing* (Jossey-Bass 2004), Dr Evans noted that the most significant lessons learnt in life are often those taught by pain or disappointment. He urges us, both parents and educators, not to remove these learning opportunities from our children or to resist the temptation to make the path ahead too easy because it robs them of an adequate preparation for life.

Dr Deiner, a past editor for the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and the *Journal of Happiness Studies* speaks about the compulsion for change that exists in human beings who aren't entirely satisfied with their lot in life. "You need negative emotions, including sadness, to direct your thinking." Much is accomplished by those in a negative mood. Some studies have demonstrated that these individuals are more analytical, more critical and more innovative.

Half term starts on Thursday 23 at 10.30 and it is hard to believe that we are already heading towards to the autumn solstice but it can be felt in the evening air. For those families who are new to the school, a reminder that there is no supervision for the girls after 11.30 on Thursday. Please remember to collect your daughter by this time before the school is closed for the weekend.

We have sent Ms Warner on her way, laden with baby gifts and we await news of the safe delivery of her little girl in the next week or two. We have welcomed Mrs Versfeld who has begun teaching the Grade 6 and 7 girls and she has quickly settled into the St Katharine's routine. We congratulate the Scott family who welcomed baby Jake Thomas into the world last Tuesday morning, weighing in at 3, 8 kilograms.

The Grade 7 girls put together a most successful Valentines' Day market on Friday and great fun was had by all. School attire was a riot of pink, red and white, worn with many kinds of hair accessories, stockings, socks of every description and shoes that amazed. We were impressed by the single Grade 1 who simply did not understand why dressing in pink was necessary or even required. This convention made no sense to her at all. She came to school in her blue dress and wore it without hesitation or embarrassment. Isn't that remarkable?



Mandy Mitchley

