



News and views from the School

Twice termly: Issue no 20



Letter from the Editor

In April, The School in Malta hosted its second highly successful international event studying the words of Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Ficino. The theme was 'Meet Marsilio and St. Paul in Malta'. With 81 participants, many have commented on the stimulating study, interesting expeditions, delightful Jesuit retreat centre, and how wonderful it was to be in such good company.

The Wellington School recently celebrated the centenary of its grand building, acquired from the Salvation Army in 1982. To mark the occasion, there were speeches, mementoes, tea and, of course, music from the Salvation Army

band. It was a splendid occasion to celebrate this gracious and sturdy building which, for 100 years, has withstood the earthquakes that shake Wellington.

Here in Leicestershire, UK, at Nanpantan Hall, used for residential courses, a labyrinth built on the lawn was completed. Students can enjoy a meditative walk through the labyrinth. Unlike a maze, walking a labyrinth is a reflective experience, a journey to a central still point, mirrored in one's own being.

Do you have an interesting story about how you came to the School? Tell me about it at editor@seslondon.org.



Go to Schoolinsight for additional material, back issues and sign up form.

Christine Lambie, editor

Martin Kettle, senior student in London, was an investment banker in the City of London. 10 years ago, he made a bold career move, resigning his job as



a highly successful banker. He continues to run the youth programme in the School. In the photo, Martin stands outside the front door of St James Junior Schools.

From Banking to Teaching Martin Kettle, London

I had started out in the City with a job at the then-esteemed stockbroker Phillips & Drew in 1981. Most of their employees seemed to have been drawn from Oxford or Cambridge University, which was rather daunting for a Comprehensive School educated lad. Especially one who had spent most of his formative years interested in soccer and who had just returned from having spent 2 ½ years travelling the globe with a backpack.

It was the very beginning of the globalisation of financial markets and to add to the excitement, overseas Investment Banks began their 'invasion' of London. So after a couple of moves, I found myself at Lehman Brothers, starting their newly-formed Fixed Income Department. They had 150 employees in Europe at the time. When I left them 18 years later, it had grown to 3,000.

Lehman Brothers

I loved it there. I loved the job. The people were great, both colleagues and clients alike. The work was invigorating and there was rarely a dull moment as we all worked together in an attempt to second-guess which direction financial markets were heading. There was international travel, eating in the best restaurants, attending the best concerts and sporting events - the highlight being helicoptering clients into the centre of the track at Silverstone for the British Grand Prix. And yes, I drove a Porsche. Everything was justified if business was good or had potential; every day was impacted by domestic or world events. We were on the cutting edge of not only business but life itself – or so it felt.

The only real misery came on 9/11 when, from our trading floor in London, we all watched in horror as the Twin Towers collapsed. Our New York office, full of close friends, people I spoke with numerous times every day, was literally across the street. They all survived but only just.

Question

Winding forward to December 2002, and having spent 22 years in the investment Banking world, a question arose in my mind in a most positive way: 'What do you want to do with the rest of your life?'

There was an increasing feeling that our four children, aged between 4 and 12 at that time, were growing up, to some extent, without me. My beloved wife once said at a dinner party, without any rancour, that it was like being a single parent, I was out or travelling so much. I left every day before the children awoke and was often home late from drinks or dinners (or Philosophy group!).

Furthermore, banking was changing. Computers seemed to be taking over; Lehman had become huge and the intimacy that had been so enticing was disappearing. What was once a family atmosphere became more like a battery farm – all of us in our little work stations, striving away under artificial light, constant air conditioning, no open windows and food provided on site. There was no need to leave the building from dawn until dusk. Work was becoming soulless.

I began to reflect on what I really valued. Running the youth programme, the weekly meetings and residentials were stimulating and dynamic. I loved them. Young vibrant people on the cusp of setting out into the world of work or university education, full of idealism, forthright, demanding and also full of deep,

meaningful questions. They clearly valued and benefitted from the philosophy in a very practical way – as I had. It was very rewarding being a conduit for this and this work seemed, in many ways, more worthwhile. I also began considering many friends who taught – most of them at St James. Probably what I envied most was the opportunity to work starting from rest; where they paused regularly throughout their day, surrounded not only by like-minded colleagues but like-minded parents too. This was in sharp contrast to the open-plan office where I plied my trade – and in 2002 it began to seem more appealing to be a teacher than a banker.

Time to move

An overwhelming feeling grew that whilst philosophy could be practised at any time and in any situation, why not choose the most propitious circumstances? Why not change professions? It wasn't too late. If I was to make the move, it was now or never. I was nearly 45. Any longer and, I reasoned, teaching jobs would be harder to come by, more so as I had decided to study full-time for 3 years, for a degree in Theology & Religious Studies first, and then take a one-year PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education), the minimum entry requirement for UK teachers. By the time I was fully trained, I would be 48.

Risk

It was a huge gamble. Although I discussed my plans with the head teachers at St James, no job could be promised in four years time. Who knew what the future held? Given that my decision was taken with a view to working at St James, my plans could end in tears! Nevertheless, as a close confidant said at the time, "What's life without a gamble?" And so I rolled the dice...

My employers, Lehman Brothers, colleagues and clients went out of their way to be supportive for which I am forever grateful. It also meant moving house and downsizing - and no more exotic holidays. Whilst we wouldn't be destitute, life would be different.

Teaching

I have now been teaching at St James for 7 years. Currently, I teach a class of 11 year-old boys who I have cared for since they were 8. In comparison with life as an investment banker, what has surprised me the most is how emotionally tiring teaching is. The universal belief seemed to be that working in the intense atmosphere of a 'hot-house' trading floor from 7am until 6pm was the pinnacle of hard work and not for the faint-hearted. Not so! Looking after boisterous primary school boys is more demanding than I ever imagined. If you allow for risk assessments, trip planning, marking, meetings etc, the days can be long and the emotional energy demanded is immense.

However, the rewards are great. A teacher's influence at such tender ages is extraordinary – and quite humbling. Often parents ask the teacher to speak with their child because, they say, 'He listens to you' or 'He will do whatever you say!' (If only this worked with my own children...) Then there is the child's mischievous nature, the humour, the energy; the amazing observations; their brightness and their affection. And of course there is the unique atmosphere that St James engenders. Visitors comment on it all the time. This is fostered, I am sure, by the constant reference to stillness, the cultivation of the finest virtues and a loving staff that is like family. It is indeed a special place to work – as I had hoped it would be.

So, whilst I look back on my 'City years' with great affection, teaching does feel intrinsically more worthwhile than banking. It is enormously satisfying and I have absolutely no regrets – even less so, given the turmoil in the financial markets, particularly the Lehmans 'crash' five years after I left. It has turned out to be a fortuitous decision in many ways.

Now Read More

Peter Fennell's fascinating submission for the Wolfson Economics Prize 2014

Peter Fennell is a long-standing student in the School in London. He was interested in the question posed by the Wolfson Prize: "How would you deliver a new Garden City which is visionary, economically viable, and popular?"

For Peter, this was an opportunity to combine his studies of economics in the School and his profession as an architect. Read his fascinating submission



which combines visionary design with a revolutionary economic model at [PFennell](#).



Some years ago, in 1988, Cathy and her son spent one month in Palermo, Sicily, serving at Mother Teresa's mission. She cared for gypsy and Mafia children and beggars.

Working with Mother Teresa Catherine Galea, Malta

I actually believed that I was going out to do something useful and give my time and lose some ego - when in fact voluntary work is so rewarding, so unexpectedly blissful. Any payment for this would ruin it. The mystery is in having links with the spiritual - love is the natural in between.

Mother Teresa had various start-up centers where her order, the Missionaries of Charity, served 'the poorest of the poor, loving till it hurt' in various parts of the world - including one in Palermo - a few miles away from Malta. Here, the college where I worked as an art and drama teacher organized voluntary social experience trips to this centre for 6th formers and staff in the (precious) summer holidays. In 1988 I joined and so did my eldest son - then aged 9. Neither of us really knew what it would be like.

Palermo was once a very affluent and beautiful city but had become ruined through inequalities of wealth and increasing crime. Government housing was insufficient and squatters inhabited many of the palatial derelict houses. The Sisters were given an old house where they offered space in their convent to the neglected, the poorest of the poor from the area. They also hosted a summer school for children aged 4-14 to keep them off the streets and learn how to pray, play, eat and swim together as well as receive examples of a truer way of living.

Besides preparing the activities and caring for the children, any visiting co-workers like us also attended to the resident elderly, helped prepare meals, shared in the necessary housework and joined in with the singing and prayers of our visiting group as well as that of the sisters. It was the first time that most of us went to church in shorts and t-shirts. It was also humbling and wonderful to have our own thin singing drowned out by the thunderous, active singing, dancing and clapping of the south Italian children and gypsies who presented such a whole-hearted, exuberant example of lifting up their voices in prayer.

Early morning

The sweet chanting of the nuns at their early morning prayers got me happily out of my bed in the early morning - a simple mattress on the floor alongside the rest of the female young students. The international nuns sat in rows on the floor of laid-out sheets in a small makeshift private chapel. They sang their prayers, said the rosary in English and then meditated for half an hour in front of Christ crucified, alongside the

message, 'I thirst'.

My son did not come to the sisters' early morning prayers - because he enjoyed the late night games on the roof, out of the oppressive heat - a good time to play as well as let off steam. After the initial shock of the difference between the comforts of home and the starkness of the dilapidated building (of which he was far more expressive than the rest of us) he also acted as altar boy and joined in with the rest of the activities.

Practicalities

The greatest material luxury was the makeshift washing facilities - the plastic 'vasca' or basins of water that were carried up for each of us in the bathrooms (without running water or electricity but with a loo, wash-hand basin and bath). A plastic jug and facecloth enabled us to wash ourselves (using soap & shampoo brought from home) in the early evening after a hard days' work. We were nevertheless just as refreshed as we could have been anywhere else. It would not have made sense for us to be living in more comfortable conditions than either the nuns who had even fewer privileges than we did or the beggars who came to the door to receive care or water and food.

Daily work

Those who came for these handouts could only do so at a specified time and were turned away if they tried to get a double portion or came at any odd time. There was kindness but there were boundaries and measures to be learned. No beggar could disrupt the order of the house; they could only come at the prescribed time to the high security door and gate. Also, only genuinely researched cases were given shelter in the actual home. The older women were delighted when we played music to those inclined to dance or when we engineered them a win at makeshift bingo.

It was hard work in a simple existence. Laundry was done in a kind of stone cave with a water pipe that was connected to the well, before being hung out on lines on the flat roof. Many of the visiting observers could not fathom the ancient household methods or the strict observances meted out to the community. When the sister in charge reported to Mother Teresa the challenges and demands of meeting such a busy day, Mother replied that more time for more prayer was needed. We did find that the peace and quiet of the retreating times made up for the more challenging times with some of the Mafia or gypsy children.

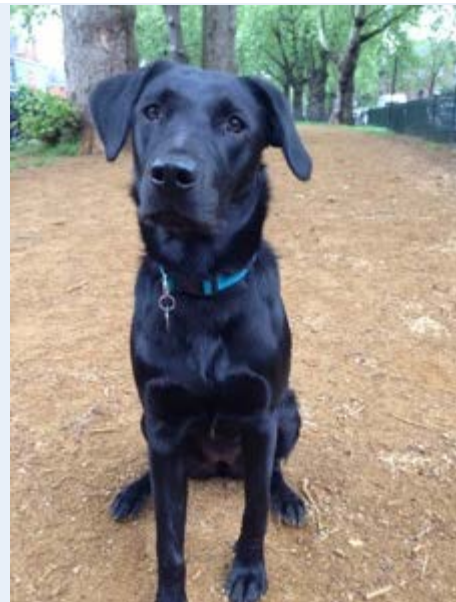
The children were collected by all the co-workers as we walked throughout the streets and returned with the children holding hands in pairs. They settled down with songs and prayers until it was time for crafts, or time to wash hands before lunch. Lunch was prepared in huge pots and ladled out to the children by the co-workers and older children as we formed a chain and passed bowl by bowl until everyone was served. The cutlery was handed out later and no one began until the prayers were said.

It was actually after arriving back home that all of us spoke about and felt the strength of the experience. Most of us never actually met Mother Teresa but her fragrance and influence were ubiquitous just as now, even after her death. My son had agreed to come on the adventure, to live simply for a few weeks and get together to help others. Though what became more and more evident was an unspeakable gentle sense of joy and peace experienced by many of us who went along, receiving more unexpected gifts than we could ever have imagined - none of them material.

Lily is the labrador puppy who lives with Donald Lambie, the leader of the School and his wife, the editor. Many people asked for more from Lily, so here she is again.

Letter from Lily

Sometimes I think my owners are linguistically challenged. For long periods every day, all I hear from them is 'Stay, Come and Heel'. How BORING is that? I know those two have lots of words. And what I'd like to hear are words like Slipper, Lunch and Ball. But no, it's just heel-heel-heel ad nauseam. Actually we dogs are very stoical. Just as well. As you know, the founder of stoicism was Zeno – he probably



had a dog and learnt it all from his canine companion. Not that anyone would credit the dog . . .

Spring is almost unbearably exciting for a puppy like me - all those new smells and sounds. My latest favourite game is running into the area marked 'No dogs. £1000 fine'. My owners frantically explain how that represents a lot of dog food. But what do I care? Life is good. Very good.

Love from Lily



Spiritual Centres Uluru - a slow tingle

Roslyn Dunn is a long-standing student in the Sydney School. She writes about the impact of Uluru (Ayers Rock), the huge red sandstone monolith in the centre of Australia. The photo shows Roslyn and her husband Michael at sunrise at Uluru.

When I first visited Uluru at the age of 15 we simply camped beside the rock. I was immediately impressed by its ancient presence, beauty and constantly changing colour and mood. After walking around it and learning about the different caves, the rock art and formations we went to visit Kata Tjuta (meaning many heads) 32 km west. Here we walked The Valley of the Winds, a rough track through the huge mounds.

It was extremely beautiful, awesome in its own way and although very hot, the overwhelming sense was of a sacred, untouched land. As I walked my mind became still and I felt the sacredness of the earth; I was connected with everything, with eternity.

Uluru was created over 600 million years ago; it originally sat at the bottom of a sea, but today stands 348m above the ground. The surface is made up of valleys, ridges, caves and strange shapes that were created through erosion over millions of years. What's the attraction? The first amazing feature of Uluru is the changing colours: in the early dawn light it glows red and bright, through the day the colours dull in the intense sun light, and in the evening it becomes purple at sunset. It is a mighty presence.

To go to the Red Centre is to begin to understand the significance of this vast land. It is the heartbeat of our nation and visiting the Outback provides a fresh way of seeing Australia, fascinating and beautiful.

Reader Feedback - one long letter

Thank you very much the informative newsletter. I particularly



enjoyed the write-up of Neville Wortman. When I was around 27 (now 54) I was feeling rather stupid and vulnerable after having being rejected by a lady. (May God bless her!). After the rejection I signed up for a Dale Carnegie course where I discovered the power of speech. At the end of every session there was a prize for the [best] speaker.

It was a 12-week course and at the end of 10 weeks there was still no prize for me. I so wanted to win something to bolster my self-esteem. In the 11th week we had to speak about a goal that one wanted to achieve. I chose to talk about my first 42 km marathon that I wanted to do. The passion and conviction with which I spoke won me a book prize which I still treasure to this day. . .

*After a few years the confidence that I drew from the Carnegie course started to fade; I was looking for something more. That's when I noticed an advert for the School. I went along. Hearing the sound of truth, I realized that just sitting in the group was a form of public speaking. This provided me with a much-needed impulse that I was looking for. The confidence that arose from the classes oozed out into my many many years of running, making me a much stronger person from within and outside. Many thanks and good wishes, **Johannesburg***

Thanks for reading

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Please keep that feedback coming. I need all your suggestions of personal stories, insights, links, articles, cartoons, video clips – anything that will be of interest to our philosophy community. Do you know someone in the School who has an interesting story to tell? E-mail me at: editor@seslondon.org. Thanks again for reading, CL

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