

When I think of Lauries – when I think of the Black and the Gold – images come to mind – pictures. The old saying, “A picture paints a thousand words” – for I believe images show you the soul of a place, the heart of a place is reflected in HOW people relate to each other, how they approach one another, how they speak and look at one another. For those of you here present – the elders amongst us – who were at St. Laurence’s prior to 1980 many of the names I refer to will not mean too much to you. But – you too have your memories, your images – of Bernie Hampton, Paul McCrossin, Pius Brady, Evangelist McGelligott, Paul Gair, Columba Davy, Flavian Spillane and so many more.

I knew this was a very special place in late January 1991.

In my life I think I can only recall two, “Where were you when X or Y happened?” times; one was when Pope John Paul I died; I was playing tennis at St. Pat’s at Shorncliffe. When 9.11 happened I had just woken up for morning prayers at the Brothers community at Graceville. In my life I can recall probably between ten and twenty moments that deeply touched me; one of those was in late January 1991 when I stood in Brady Hall and heard you mob sing the College Song for the first time; I had goose bumps going down my spine – I will never forget it. I had never and have never heard a College song sung with such pride, such affection and such gusto. At one stage – while teaching at another Brisbane Christian Brothers school – I actually took four of the College Leaders over to a Lauries Assembly so they could hear what a real school song sounded like.

Unlike each of you – I am not an old boy. I only taught at Lauries for six years; nothing compared to Woody Forrester’s 30 plus, nothing compared to so many others; Brother Bon Sherriff, Brother Jon Hansen, John Moffat, John Pillas, John Cusack but like you I have so many memories; memories of the finest Christian Brothers school I have ever had the honour to teach in. Memories of boys climbing the Mater Hill and pausing at the statue of Our Lady, memories of making those paper streamer footy run throughs and driving them out to Runcorn on a Friday afternoon at 40 Km an hour so the wind would not tear it, Memories of Camps at Moogerah, Memories of Neil Eiby and Anzac Day – standing tall and proud and strong, Memories of Brother Bon Sherriff and the Edmund Rice Society, Memories of being one of the young Brothers asked to carry Brother Brady’s coffin down the steps of the chapel to the hearse with a courtyard full of Lauries boys and a guard of honour I’ll never forget, Memories of Damien Drew – his big heart and big smile – and the crowded Sunnybank Church after he had so tragically died at Staddie, Memories of Brother Michael Ryan and the First XV or Michael Wendt helping me coach the Mighty 7th XV and Paul Marks selling us out with a penalty in the last minute of the game against Ashgrove with us up 10 – 8 and Marksy found a scrum full arm penalty and we lost 11 – 10memories.

Recently I left Brisbane after teaching in and around Brisbane for 30 of my 35 years as a Christian Brother. On the morning I left for my new job in Melbourne the last people I spoke to were two Lauries old boys; Peter Fullagar – the 1975 College Captain and Conor Finn – a Senior of 1995. I had worked closely with these two remarkable men at Terrace; Peter as the Deputy Principal and Conor as the Dean of Mission. After breakfast and before I caught my plane – Conor wanted to give me a gift to remember my time in Brisbane by. Conor is one of my closest friends and last December I had the honour of being Master of Ceremonies at his wedding. Conor walked over to his car – reached in to a bag and brought out this. This is Conor’s Under 15 A Rugby jersey – he played in the First XV in both Year 11 and Year 12.

I ask myself – why – why would this jersey be so precious to Conor? Why would it be one of the most precious things he would want to give to someone he values highly??

What makes Lauries so special? I’m convinced that it is the quality of relationship – the feel of the place – the atmosphere of care and of respect – the level of friendship born and nurtured there. I have taught at pretty well every Christian Brothers school in Queensland and I can honestly say – that nothing and nowhere compares with Lauries. Some private schools are forever comparing themselves to other schools, others try to buy sporting premierships and others link their identity with a parade of OP 1’s.

But Lauries has always been happy to be itself and has so much to be proud of.

I spoke before of images –those images that reflect what a community is about. It was Longfellow I think who once said that we go forward on the shoulders of the giants who went before us. Lauries is by far the finest school I have ever taught in and I often reflect – why? What made it – what makes it so special?

When I think of Lauries – I have two photo albums of images in my head and heart; one of staff and one of students – and remarkably they have so much in common.

We go forward on the shoulders of the giants who have gone before us. I would like to suggest to you tonight that Lauries has had more than its fair share of giants among its staff; giants of compassion, giants of care and concern, giants of real practical care for those in need, giants of professional teaching excellence, giants who gave 110% and asked the same back, giants who deeply believed in each and every boy that they worked with;

Lauries is a great school because of Paul Forrester; Woody is probably the finest teacher I have ever known. He deliberately asked for the lowest classes to teach – the ordinary maths boys were his speciality – Woody gave and gave and gave – a man's man – but a man who – while tough – deeply, profoundly believed in each and every boy that came before him – especially the rough and tough, the kid doing it hard, the kid whose parents had just split up, the kid whose dad had not had work for months, the kid getting bullied, the kid that other teachers may have dismissedthis kid – Woody had time for, this kid Woody made feel special, this kid Woody helped believe in themselves – this kid Woody always, and I mean always had time for.

Giants? Giants are not all big and strong! A giant among men was a skinny, whimpy, pious – apparent failure as a teacher. One of Lauries greatest men was a Christian Brother who only ever taught Year 9 and sometimes 10, who was sometimes seen to be a hopeless teacher, a terrible sporting coach – yet few would be more respected in this community than Brother Bon Sherrif. I once sat at the back of the chapel and heard him say, "Boys, if I don't challenge you – I insult you." And challenge Lauries boys Bon did – Bon had Lauries boys working with OPAL; One people of Australia League – tutoring young Aboriginal kids, taking food parcels to Aboriginal families that had not eaten for days, after school care and weekend games years before we had even heard of Marbo, long before it had become politically correct to say nice things about our Indigenous Brothers and sisters – Bon had Lauries boys visiting the blind hostel in Stephens Road, the homeless down at Vinney de Paul – long before any of these things were trendy – Bon did them because he deeply believed in the presence of Christ in each and every person that he met – and that included each and every Lauries boy – he would reverence the boys he met – he would treat them with such respect. Yet – in terms of University Degrees, in terms of great sporting legends, in terms of being a Principal or anything like that Bon was a failure – worse still – he – year after year after year – did the totally un-manly thing of asking boys to bring along flowers – yes – flowers for his statue of Our Lady and his floral carpet down at Garden City in honour of Mary the mother of Jesus – and yet – he just expected his Lauries boys to do all of this and more – because he believed in them – deeply so.

St. Laurence's College has had its bad teachers just as you are not all saints; sure Lauries teachers have failed, have been unjust, have abused kids, have done all of this – for they are not perfect – for these failures I as a Christian Brother am sorry but ... despite all of their failures I am convinced that Lauries is the great school that it is because of the humble service, the total giving, the generosity of so many of its staff;

I have countless images of crazy Steve Grundy – standing behind the footy posts during the First XV games, teaching kids ball room dancing, conducting CLAG camps, driving kids to excursions, running musicals, leadership camps and coaching – whether it be track and field, swimming or what ever

It probably could not have been swimming for he would have to get past Pat O'Neil; another humble man, a man who gave and gave and gave and never asked anything in return – a man who looked out for the kids left out, a man who had special time for the kid who was doing it tough, a man who expected and achieved greatness; but never, never for himself – always for the boys.

While the Principals of other private schools would never be seen dead getting their hands dirty; men like Tom Kruger – taught the lowest classes, took the lowest footy teams, worked 70 hour weeks and still – week after week – found time – just to talk to kids in the yard, to pick roses from the Brothers gardens and give each and every secretary a fresh rose on a Monday morning, drive buses to Runcorn or to Moogerah. I will never, to the day I die – forget Tom Kruger the day they found Anthony Lesczynski dead in the Brisbane river a week or so after schoolies week; Tom's deep compassion for the family, his ability to just be there and sit there with the family in their grief – true Brotherhood.

I truly believe it has been men like John Nash, Noel Mather and Neil Eiby who have helped cement this special Lauries spirit. John was a man who knew his own fragility deeply and yet lived the last 25 years of his life for the young men of the Black and Gold. John, like Woody, like Tom Kruger, like Bon Sherriff had time especially for the unimportant bloke. Some schools make legends out of their elite and their halls are adorned with photos of Prime Ministers and Archbishops, Australian Rugby Captains and heads of industry – but the Neil Eiby's of this world – had time, made time for all the kids at Lauries – and if anything – made special time for the apparently unimportant. It has been my experience that many other so called 'elite private schools' – while wonderful schools – have an undercurrent of preference for the elite, for the top, for those who will go far because of natural ability.

Lauries has made great men out of ordinary blokes by instilling in them a self belief, a courage, a determination and a true humility that says that true greatness lies in facing your fears, using your gifts to the full and giving – giving in such a way that you leave this world a better place for all – and especially for the poor and the have nots.

As I talk – I'm sure each and every one of you have your own memories – your own stories – and sure – I'm sure there are those among you who have bad stories too – I'm a Christian Brother – I've heard so many sad stories of men who did not treat students with the care and respect that Edmund Rice and Jesus would have expected ...but while those sad stories exist – I truly believe that what makes Lauries great is that it has been blest with so many strong men, humble men, giving and generous men – but most of all men who lived totally for you – for the boys who wore the Black and Gold and so in this great community there is a tradition of care, a tradition of humility, a tradition of generosity, a tradition of looking out for each other, a tradition of being there for one another.

My work takes me mostly these days to areas of Social Justice. I think I can say that I would know the Social Justice field in Australia – especially from a Catholic Church point of view – as well as anyone in Australia. Bon Sheeriff, Tom Kruger, Steve Grundy, Paul Forrester, Neil Eiby, Brother McElligot, Brother Brady, Stu Tasker, Micky Spillane, Bernie Hampton, Noel Mather, John Moffatt, Pat O'Neill and so many would be – are so proud of what Lauries men are doing today;

It was Sir William Dean the former Governor General of Australia who often said that you can judge the quality of any nation, any school, any community by how it treats its weakest members. If that is true – then Lauries is a great school. Something in its culture has produced young alumni – young old boys – who today – in all sorts of places and all sorts of ways are making a difference.

Conor Finn today oversees Brisbane's biggest school based outreach to homeless men and has pioneered the Christian Brothers outreach to East Timor and has worked extensively with refugee children from Milpera State High School – he has been helped extensively by Tyone Mandrusiak.

Brian Garrone is considered to be Australia's leading practitioner at linking Social Justice and schools.

Brian and Christian Weatherley helped found Edmund Rice Camps here in Queensland – camps for kids from very poor families.

Chris Mee – 1992 College Captain and so many others from Lauries have worked on Edmund Rice Camps and in the Brothers Big Brother scheme – providing a 'big brother' who small boys from families where there is physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

John Burton founded Edmund Rice Camps in South Africa and leaves later this year to do a Masters in Law – specialising in youth justice in Sydney.

Paul Zlatovic was one of the founders of the Eddie's Van – a van that provides coffee, soup, warm clothing and friendship to so many of the city's homeless.

Sean Fitzgibbon has volunteered with Aboriginal kids in the Northern Territory, has travelled the length and breadth of Africa supporting Australian Edmund Rice volunteers there and Luke Baker, in addition to his work on Edmund Rice Camps, Edmund Rice mentoring – now works in Social Justice and community development in Logan City.

St. Laurence's College has provided old boy lawyers to assist Legal Aide and old boy Brother Michael Talty works with street kids up at Deception Bay while old boy Brother Marty Sanderson conducts a drop in centre for Aboriginal Youth in Cherbourg and Murgon.

I could go on;

I began tonight by remembering powerful scenes; if I had to recall one moment in time that made me proud to be a Christian Brother, made me proud of St. Laurence's – it was on an Edmund Rice Camp – there was a boy on the camp who was down syndrome. The school Vice Captain of St. Laurence's from the previous year was on the same camp and was his buddy. At one stage the children and their buddies were attempting to do the flying fox. The young boy was terrified but at the same time wanted to do the flying fox. The young Lauries old boy coaxed him over close to the pole. He then said, "Let's just step onto the first rung of the ladder – I'll be beside you." They did. Then he coaxed him up about a meter off the ground – the Lauries old boy beside him. Then another meter, then another. Finally they sat – side by side on the platform – high in the air. All the time the Lauries old boy consoled and affirmed the young down syndrome boy; "You'll be OK, I'm beside you." Finally – strapped up with a double harness – they leapt off the platform and travelled down the flying fox. The young lad laughed and hugged and jumped around in pride and excitement. If we can live our lives in such a way that we bring joy – that kind of joy to the lonely and the weak ones, the lost and the forgotten ones – then this school is truly a Gospel school – one that Edmund Rice and yes – Jesus – would be proud of.

My challenge to you tonight – stay involved with Lauries – ensure it remains a great school – challenge it to be a truly Gospel school, challenge it to be – what it has been for so many over the years – a place of welcome, a place of acceptance, a place that makes a difference – stay involved with Lauries – get involved with it – expect it and demand that it be – like a beacon on a hill on a dark night – a light of compassion for the hurting, a place of justice, a place that Edmund Rice would be so proud of.

Yes, I will never forget the look on that down syndrome boys face. The look on that boys face – of pride, of achievement the look on the Laurie's old boys' face – of love, compassion, respect and care That is what Lauries in all about – yes,

Cheer when the Black and Gold, calls forth the brave and bold, just like the men of old – just like those I've mentioned tonight – and God willing – just like they will still be doing – when you and I are Oh so old.

God bless and thank you.