

Start of Year Assembly Sept 2021

Welcome to you all. I hope that you had a wonderfully relaxing and refreshing break. To those who join us for the first time today, whether in the Thirds, the Fourths, or the Sixth Form, I offer the warmest welcome. I hope you will have a wonderful time in the years ahead, and I am sure you will bring fresh talent and enthusiasm to the school.

There is little doubt that last year ranks as one of our most challenging, but also one of our best ever. We took on the pandemic and found new ways to teach, learn and have fun. When we could finally get back to fixtures, we hit the heights in sport; despite the cancellation of public exams the GCSE and A-level results were superb and place us amongst the best schools in the country. This gives us a tremendous springboard from which to approach the year ahead. We will take the best of the new ways of working and add them to our tried and tested experiences. We should be proud of all that we have achieved, and be excited about what we will do next.

I thought we could begin the year with a true story that may offer something to think about, and perhaps will inspire. It concerns a man who is quite famous in his native Australia, but is less well known here. He is called Cliff Young.

Every year, Australia holds the world's most gruelling ultra-marathon. It is a 544 mile endurance race from Sydney to Melbourne. The race takes five days to complete and is normally only attempted by world-class athletes who train specially for the event. These athletes are super fit, typically less than 30 years old and backed by large companies such as Nike.

In 1983, a man named Cliff Young showed up at the start of this race. Cliff was 61 years old. Instead of sports kit and running shoes, he wore overalls and work boots. To everyone's shock, Cliff wasn't a spectator. He was there to run.

The press and other athletes questioned Cliff. They told him that he was crazy, that there's no way he could finish the race. Cliff told them that he could. He told them that he grew up on a farm where they couldn't afford horses or tractors, and he'd have to go out and round up the sheep himself. There were 2,000 sheep on 2,000 acres. Sometimes he would have to work with those sheep for two or three days, running non-stop.

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