



# Leavers' Dinner Student Address

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## Chapter Six – The Journey

The year is 2012, at 3.30pm on a Tuesday afternoon. Spots of sunlight pepper the overcast sky, the clouds whirling in the northwest wind. Betrayal blackens my heart as my comrade's voice echoes in my mind "I cannot go with you. You will have to make this journey alone". I clear my head; I can't get distracted by the past but must carry out their dying wish and take our treasure home. I take a deep breath, calming my heart as I approach... the river. 50 metres wide and as far as the eye could see, a torrent of water crashes past jagged rocks and ginormous boulders spitting sticks and pebbles like bullets. Worst of all, deep beneath the unrelenting

rush were crocodiles and hippos and the Kraken, all poised to strike at any sign of movement. An island of bountiful fruits stands like a beacon of hope in this pure chaos.

Despair starts creeping into my consciousness, a parasite only the brave may conquer. "What if I slip on the rocks? What if I get ambushed by the taniwha? What if it's impossible?" Without my colleagues by my side, this crossing seems even more daunting. But I know that I cannot give up here. I hold my treasure tighter. I look right, look left and look right again, before leaping into oblivion.

## Chapter Six – The Reality

That was the story of my first time crossing Papanui Road alone. My fallen comrades were my mum and brother driving to football practice and the treasure a crunchy bar won from a Reading Plus competition. I'm happy to say that I did indeed make it home, but the treasure got lost in my stomach along the way. What thrilled me most on my epic adventure, however, was the realization that I could cross the road on my own.

I've always admired the challenges that book characters face in their stories. When Harry Potter was our age, he defeated Voldemort, ending the war against muggles. And for you, parents, Frodo Baggins was around your age when he destroyed the Ring of Power. But the struggles that every main character has to battle are the same as the ones we must overcome, just seen through a different, maybe more realistic lens. Much like these characters, we've had a lot of help from our own Dumbledores or Samwise Gamgees, but there are some things that we have just had to do ourselves.

I've been at St Andrew's College for my entire school life. Tonight, I want to reflect on three challenges from my school days that have been pivotal moments in my journey towards independence. These are the times when I've thought, "I can do this myself."



## Chapter 13 – The Mission

0800 on the dot. The last of the mechanics adjust the spaceship as the taxi pulls me towards the runway. "This is Major Tom to Ground Control, ready for take-off. Over." I call through the radio. "Roger Major Tom, this is Ground Control. You are clear for take-off. You may experience some turbulence on the initial ascent but then clear skies ahead. Lift-off is in 10..." My heart races as the engine starts to whirl, panic setting in. Soon I'll be floating around in my tin can far above the moon. All alone. "5..." A low rumbling echoes across the runway. No communication once I'm in the sky, what if there's an emergency? A ringing in my ears starts "3..." My seat shakes violently, buttons and alarms screeching and beeping all around me. I need a good thing to say when I land. One small step for woman, one giant leap for man-woman-people-kind doesn't really work. "2..." As a tumultuous roar bursts from the engine, I close my eyes tight, knuckles white against the armrests. One small step for me please – nope that doesn't work either "1... TAKE-OFF!" Ground Control yells as the plane lifts into the air, careering towards the sparkling night sky off to Mars.

## Chapter 13 – The Truth

When I travelled by plane when I was little, I used to hold my mum's hand for take-off and landing. Partially because I was young but mostly, I think because Mum got airsick. So, the first time I took off on an airplane without my parents when I was 13, it was quite scary. The idea that I might be lost forever while my parents helped my brother move into his dorm room in Wellington was terrifying, and listening to *Space Oddity* by David Bowie did not help my nerves. Despite this, a windy Wellington hour later, I was home safe.

I remember specifically the feeling of something more than just accomplishment. Although my parents bought and paid for the ticket and my Grandma picked me up from the airport afterwards, I had made it. That flight I did it alone. I realised during that flight that I did not need to rely on my parents as much, nor anyone else for that matter. That I could be free to talk to whoever I wanted, travel wherever I wanted, and do whatever I wanted without having to hold their hand. The plane was no Weasley's flying car or Gandalf's giant eagle, but it was a challenge, nonetheless. That feeling is the spark of independence.

## Chapter 16 – The Race

Tyre pressure, check. Wing mirrors, check. Engine, check. Conditions are steady, no rain, no sun blind, slight wind, perfect. "Speed. I am speed". The words of the fastest driver in the world repeat over and over in my mind. "Faster than fast. Quicker than quick". Thunderous cheers and horns from the crowd in the high stands deafen me. I rev the car, the engine growling with anticipation. But then I see him. The fastest driver on earth. How could I ever compete against such a legend like him? Before I can even think the starting lights blink red, red, red... "Go!". I slam down on the accelerator. Ferraris, McLarens, Porsches, all left eating my dust. But alas, he had gotten a lead on me. Left, right, left again. The racecourse's windy path had us battling for first place. A long stretch drags out in front of us and we both streak ahead. 80km, 100km, 150km per hour zooming down the track neck and neck as we hurdle towards our final turn of the race. This is it, my chance. The words of Doc Hudson come to me in a moment of inspiration "Turn right, go left". Everything seems to slow as I slam on my break and spin my wheel right. We look at each other as I overtake him, in his eyes I see the realisation of defeat. I drift across the finish line having beaten the fastest car in the world- Lightning McQueen.



## Chapter 18 – The Destination

I've always had trouble with speeding when I'm driving. Luckily when I sat my restricted, I did not take the advice from a cartoon car but instead from my driving instructor and ended up passing my test and passing my full a year later – not to brag. The need for speed was particularly difficult to stifle as both examiners were extremely dull. But being used to my dad's rants on the economy, I managed to stay awake and only slightly over the speed limit.

The chapters I shared with you tonight are moments in my life when I suddenly realised that I had grown up. Birthdays never felt all that special to me, but these subtle yet significant stages in my life are the ones that I remember best. I'm sure you all remember similar moments in your lives. These moments can be scary – not Azkaban or Mordor scary, but scary in the way all change is scary. These are the moments that I have thought "I just did that myself".

Having said that, during this journey I've also realised that I could never have done these challenges completely on my own. Unlike Harry Potter and Bilbo Baggins, I have parents, and they have been the best parents I could have ever asked for. They've helped me in so many ways from paying this school's tuition fees for 13 years, to cooking me meals and teaching me how to cook meals every day for my entire life. And my brother is cool as well, I guess. My teachers too have been a huge support throughout my school life. A big thanks to Mr Kerrison who has had to put up with me in tutor for the past five years, and to Mr Ruge for giving me the opportunity to speak tonight and for helping me piece this speech together. Also to Mrs Leighton for shaping this truly amazing school into what it is today; I'm very glad you have decided to leave with us, rather than before us. Though I'm sure Mr Wilson will be a great Rector, you will be sorely missed. And finally, to my friends and all of us in Year 13. Whether you joined me in chapters five, 14 or 18, we are all here at the end of our school life together. I can proudly say that we have all made it.

Like all good book endings, I will leave you tonight with a teaser of the next chapter which I hope we will be able to share together.

## Chapter 28 – The Reunion