

DAD WAS RIGHT !

Ngā mihi nui kia koutou. Kia ora whanau.

Some of you boys will recognise me from last year – and will be thinking “Oh no, not this guy again. Can’t we just get our prizes, jump off the wharf and leave?”

But some of you are thinking “Who’s this guy? I hope he’s not going to delay me getting my prize, jumping off the wharf and leaving.”

I am the chair of the school's trustees. The trustees are a bit like Mr Pitman’s boss. (Even though Mrs Pitman is Mr Pitman’s real boss.)

But today I’m not going to talk about what we’ve been doing as trustees. Instead, I want to talk – particularly to the Year 8’s - about Minecraft. First, though, I want to tell you a story about my dad and me.

When I was a student here at Wellesley, we moved to a new house which Mum and Dad had extensively renovated. Well, actually, they were still renovating when we moved in.

One weekend I was under the house with Dad as he renovated. And to keep me occupied he had let me smash up bits of wood with a small axe. (I think actually it was a crafty way of getting more kindling for the fire.) And I was having a ball, smashing up all this wood - so much so that I announced to Dad that, when I grew up, I was going to be a demolition man.

“Really?” said Dad. “I think you’ll find that making things is a lot harder than breaking things – but also a lot more rewarding.”

I was a bit deflated after that. A bit less proud of my ability to smash things. But, even though my father has totally forgotten about it, I’ve always remembered that brief conversation. Because Dad was right. (Dads are always right!) Making things is a lot harder than breaking things, but it’s also a lot more rewarding.

So now I want to talk about Minecraft. Most of you will be familiar with Minecraft – and in some cases obsessed by it. For those who don’t know, Minecraft is a game for PC’s and tablets in which players build things - often incredibly complex worlds - using tools and resources they find and mine in the game.

Those of you who have played Minecraft will know that making a building or a world takes a lot more effort, a lot more time, than smashing it up.

But you’ll also know that it is a lot more rewarding, when you step back and admire the incredible, unique things you’ve built, all by yourself, entirely from scratch.

Of course, it’s not completely from scratch. You start with a few basic tools and resources. But to build those extraordinary worlds you need more tools – which you have to make; and more resources – which you have to mine, using the tools you’ve made.

And here's the thing: life is a bit like Minecraft. When you start, you only have a few tools and resources. You have to work to get the tools and the resources you need to build the life you want.

Obviously there are differences between Minecraft and life. You don't get scary things like ghosts and walking skeletons in real life. You don't get Mr G or Mr Ranchod in Minecraft.

In life, you can't build a multi-story building without spending several years and several truckloads of money applying for building consent and resource consent. And – most importantly – in real life you only get one life.

But there are many similarities, too. The world – your life – is what you make it. To make it truly rewarding takes time and effort and dedication. And the better your tools, the more resources you have, the more rewarding a life you can make. If you have the right tools, and you know how to use them properly, you can build for yourself a life as unique and as amazing – and yes, Dad, as rewarding – as it is possible to be.

And, just like in Minecraft, expertise starts with mastering the basics. It is the basic tools which are the most important ones.

Now when I talk about resources, I am not talking about money. And when I talk about tools, I am not talking about the ones Dad let me use. The tools I'm talking about are ones you cannot wander down to the store and buy. They're ones you have to be shown, and which you have to choose to pick up and learn how to use properly.

They're things like resilience and grit, self-respect, compassion, risk-taking, self-control, optimism, having an enquiring mind, understanding yourself and others, being confident, being spiritual, being passionate, being honest, being yourself.

And, as you prepare to move on to build the next exciting part of your life, you might pause and reflect on how lucky you have been to attend Wellesley, where so many tools have been given to you. A place which has welcomed you and nurtured you and given you a safe and happy environment in which to learn how to use all those tools.

There's a word for a place like that, where you can learn life's important lessons safely and well. The word is whanau. And that's what Wellesley is. It's:

- volunteers on camps and at Artbourne and galas;
- members of the Parents Association fund-raising and organising functions;
- members of the Foundation working to secure Wellesley's future and to fund scholarships so more boys can join the whanau;
- the board of trustees doing the unglamorous work of keeping an eye on the school today while planning for tomorrow;
- the Masterplanning committee giving hours of their time to formulate the next 15 years' worth of development of Wellesley's buildings and grounds;
- the visiting artist in residence;

- your parents and caregivers, making sacrifices for you to be here and helping you get the best out of your time here;
- you, playing cricket in the nets or rugby on Williams Park or tag on the outer quad, going on camps, putting on shows, making art, building robots, getting merit cards and gold cards (and sometimes red cards), having lunch at the Pav, hating cross-country, playing music, taking bets on how old Mr G really is, doing independent enquiry, delivering speeches, jumping off the wharf, playing chess, doing athletics, sitting quietly lost in a book, walking in the bush, getting dirty in the playground, doing Tournament of the Minds, exploring on the beach ... and even doing some learning in class;
- the administrative staff who kept the school running smoothly and happily and looking great;
- and – last but most definitely not least – the talented and dedicated teaching staff, who patiently, day in day out, pass on to you the skills, the knowledge, the values – the tools – which will be your foundation as you go on and build your lives.

Yes, Wellesley is a whanau. And whanau is where all the best foundational tools are found. Whether it's a father gently explaining that making is much more rewarding than breaking, or a Wellesley teacher gently helping you develop respect and empathy, perseverance for personal bests, and risk taking in learning, you learn it best when you learn it from family.

Now, when you're a member of a family, you're a member for life. You may think that you're about to leave Wellesley for good. But even if you never come back to the curve of the bay, you won't ever really leave Wellesley. Because Wellesley will never really leave you. It will always be in your heart.

However, I hope you do come back. Because when you come back to Wellesley, you give back to Wellesley.

When the boys still here see you come back on old boys' day, you help teach them about loyalty and about respect and about celebrating who you are. When the teachers see you come back you remind them of how special it is to touch so many boys' lives in such a positive way. And when other people see so many old boys so keen to come back, it tells them that this is a special place to which maybe they should send their sons, too.

But most importantly, when you come back, you'll meet old school friends and you'll reminisce about wharf jumping or the West Coast trip or how Mr Pitman never lost his Australian accent, and you'll remind each other of all the tools you were given here.

Because, as a song your parents will know goes, you can check out but you can never leave. We're all part of the Wellesley whanau. And we should never forget how fortunate that makes us.

Last year I closed with a lovely whakatauki which could have been written for Wellesley, nestled here in the bush. And I like it so much, I'm going to close with it again:

Ko te manu kai miro, nōna te ngahere. Ko te manu kai mātauranga, nōna te ao.

The bird that eats the miro berry has the forest. The bird that eats of knowledge has the world.

Boys, you have eaten your fill of knowledge here. The tools you've acquired give each of you the foundation on which to build whatever amazing, inventive, unique, special and rewarding life you want.

So enjoy the rest of the prize giving, enjoy jumping off the wharf in your uniform, enjoy heading off from Days Bay no longer a Wellesley student. But remember that you will always be a part of the wonderful whanau that is Wellesley, and Wellesley will always be a part of you.

I wish all of you a warm and happy Christmas and an exciting 2018.

Kia ora, whanau.