

**Your Excellency, Headmaster, distinguished guests, Georgians old and new (and particularly the 1960's brigade!), ladies and gentlemen:**

It is an honour to be asked to address you on this historic evening and I need hardly add that it is a poignant and somewhat emotional evening for me personally. As one of the golden oldies of the student body, one does expect the current generation of students to be somewhat more youthful than oneself but it is a little disconcerting to find you are landed with more years and grey hairs than almost the entire teaching staff not to mention the Headmaster!

I would like to pay a brief tribute to my father Geoffrey Sunley, whose name is indelibly linked to the wonderful institution that is St George's. He is often referred to as the father of the school and I have to say up front that this is not the case. All credit for this must go to Howard Scott, who had the vision to see the opportunity for a British school in Rome and found St George's in 1958, and it would only be right and proper to acknowledge this. My father came on board as headmaster in 1960 at the time when the school moved from Via Lucullo to the Villa Grazioli and those of us who travelled down memory lane during our visit there this morning have countless recollections of that amazing building during that time of "La Dolce Vita" when the school started to really stretch its wings. Who can forget the school plays in the hall with its massive stone staircase and fireplace, the rabbit warren of classrooms and mysterious stairs, the maze of passages in the basement and the kitchen with Ersilia presiding over it in formidable fashion, the huge stone foot outside the main entrance and the supreme coincidence of the painting of St George and the dragon that watched over us from the façade of the building? Those were happy but often challenging days for my father as the school grew exponentially and life for him became a perennial quest to manage that growth and find additional space and resources to accommodate it. In this, as in so many other things, he found his rock of support in the form of my mother Kate whose unfailing commitment as organiser of school plays, riding lessons and fundraising events and as unpaid general St George's factotum sustained him through that uncertain but enormously fulfilling period.

Without doubt however, my father's bravest and most difficult task was to take a vast leap of faith and move the school to La Storta in 1968. His action has been appropriately referred to by Bryn Jenkins as "visionary but unilateral" - it personified his stubborn conviction to do what he knew was best for the school even when this meant flying in the face of major opposition, and we have to thank that same stubborn conviction and occasionally bloody-minded disrespect for convention for where we are now. The early days of La Storta also hold many memories as we slowly but surely bedded into our new surroundings, became part of the community and, above all, were able to start putting down firm and secure roots and establishing the first of the superb facilities that the school enjoys today with the confidence of a more stable home beneath our feet that then became a permanent one with the purchase of the La Storta site a few years later.

For my father and indeed for our family, the new found stability came to an abrupt end in 1971 with the sudden and unexpected death of my mother. I think that only then did my father realise the degree to which he had depended on her during what had been eleven years of hugely satisfying but immensely demanding blood, sweat and sometimes tears. Her death hit him badly and it was not surprising that he

relinquished the headmastership later that year under emotional and controversial circumstances. 1971 was not a good year for the Sunley family but my father slowly got his life back into order and lived a varied and interesting life in Italy, Africa and the UK until he died in 1988 after a period of progressively deteriorating health.

My father remained enormously proud of St George's and would be delighted to see what has happened to the school since his death. He had a passion for education, viewed it from a thoroughly international perspective and, as one who frankly was not unduly enamoured of the land of his birth, always saw his objective in life as achieving something in one of the other countries that he loved – and he certainly managed to do this here. Those of you who knew him personally will also have known that he was spectacularly multi-lingual and very much a European many years ahead of his time. I think I can say with confidence that, while he was not the founder of St George's, his efforts and those of my mother in those monumental eleven years provided the massive and solid foundation of what it is today.

Mio padre riconosceva anche l'importanza della combinazione di un sistema educativo internazionale con la magnifica cultura italiana. Mio padre era entusiasta dell'Italia e del popolo italiano e ha sempre riconosciuto che siamo estremamente fortunati nel trovarci qui nella città più bella del mondo. Vorrei ringraziare a nome suo l'Italia, la città di Roma e particolarmente la gente di La Storta per averci ospitati per tutti questi anni. Lo so che nel 1968 quando siamo inizialmente arrivati qui, è stata per loro una sorpresa completamente inaspettata - una massa di stranieri improvvisamente arrivati nella tranquilla borgata di La Storta! Ma a poco a poco ci siamo conosciuti meglio e, col passar del tempo, la scuola è diventata una parte integrante della vita di La Storta e anche della vita di Roma. Questo è ciò che voleva mio padre quando la scuola si trasferì qui, perciò – grazie Italia, grazie Roma, grazie La Storta!

In concluding, I would like to thank all those of you who helped my father personally both during and after his tenure as headmaster. Time does not permit me to name them all but special thanks must go to Bryn Jenkins and Sue Harris who helped him through difficult times and were always there when he needed them. Then I would like to thank all of you who continued to build the school into what it is now and have taken it from very much a work-in-progress situation in 1971 to its current status as one of the pre-eminent schools of its type in the world. Particular thanks go to all the headmasters and a special tribute to Nick Johnson, who I was fortunate to meet during a visit here 2 years ago. I was shocked and saddened to hear of his death as he struck me as exactly the type of visionary leader of whom my father would have approved. But to end on a happier note, I think my father would be immensely satisfied with everything he could see now and is probably looking down on us at this moment with an understandably satisfied and perhaps slightly smug look on his face, a large glass of wine in one hand and a revoltingly smelly cigar in the other, thoroughly approving of tonight's proceedings!

Ladies and gentlemen, can I therefore ask you to rise and drink a toast to the memories of Geoffrey and Kate Sunley.