



Leavers' Dinner Student Address

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I'm known for being the kid that likes to draw dragons. In fact, the first thing people said to me when they heard I was doing this speech was, "you should talk about dragons – I bet you'll talk about dragons – are you going to talk about dragons?" So here you go, my speech about dragons.

What is it about dragons that are so great? The wings? The lair? The fire? All of the above, but also, dragons are a great metaphor for the formative experiences of our life. High school has provided us plenty of learning opportunities both in the classroom and out. These are the challenges and successes on our journey that have shape us, our personalities, our life skills, and prepare us for what waits for us beyond our small version of the world at St Andrew's College.

The first thing to know about dragons is even though they may appear scary they aren't necessarily bad. At first glance you might see scales, sharp teeth, claws, all the things your typical scary dragon has, but each one serves a purpose.

The first dragon I remember meeting at St Andrew's college is a rather embarrassing story. Year 7, freshly immigrated from the United States, with only a few friends. I was still adjusting to the kiwi ways of life, y'know, jump jam, no hat no play, learning the proper dust to milk ratio of milo-tween life in as known it in New Zealand. Miss Morrison offered me a space in the Spelling Bee. She told me I could join if I was comfortable with it, and while my gut instincts were screaming no, my mom, in typical mom fashion was like "do it! It'll be great and you're so good at spelling".

I agreed. The Spelling Bee day came, and we all lined up in front of the class. It was finally my turn, my first word... peloton. Peloton – I had absolutely no clue how to spell peloton. I knew it had something to do with bikes but that was about it. Obviously, I spelled it wrong, and I completely lost it. Straight up ugly crying in front of the whole year group from all the pent-up fear that exactly this would happen. I was mortified. I learned a few things from that dragon. One: I'll never talk in front of a crowd ever again. We can see how that worked out. Two: shedding tears doesn't end in judgement, in fact, I'd encourage you to shed tears when you need to. Cry freely. When you're happy, sad, laughing so hard it hurts, honestly, just let it out – it's cathartic. Maybe even tonight as we say our farewells to favourite friends, and teachers. And... three: Peloton P E L O T O N

Cut to Year 9 – I made it into speech semi-finals. Dragon one had been following me around for a couple of years now and dragons aren't easy to ignore. I was still scared from my earlier awful attempts at doing anything in front of the year group. I remember sitting in the front row of the old theatre watching other kids walk up like it was the easiest thing in the world. Needless to say I wished I had said no. It finally got to my turn.

If I had stood up at that moment and walked onto the stage, I guarantee it would've been a repeat of Year 7 waterfall of tears. The funny thing about dragons though, they've got your back when you



most need them – the fire alarm went off. Everyone evacuated and I had a tiny little breakdown outside with my friends. This strange gift, probably from the Science block, gave me time to clear my head. Soon, the theatre filled again, and I delivered my speech. I didn't win that day, but that didn't matter, because I didn't ugly cry in front of everyone. This dragon taught me that when you're nervous or intimidated about something, you just gotta let go a little bit. Have that little breakdown so you can move forward. It's ok to feel nervous, scared, emotional – but don't let it stop you. Do the thing. Do all the things. You will get through it.

There would be a third dragon that year, that many of you know have met in your own way – the audition dragon... maybe it was a tryout or an exam, but for me it was Year 9 choir auditions. That day, for many of us, was the first audition we'd ever attended. We were all very scared – you could practically smell the fear. Mr Botting, not to be confused with the dragon in this portion of the story, called us into the room one by one, we put on brave faces and marched in alone. On my turn, I went in and sang the most god-awful version of the School Song you'll ever hear. When I was done, he just said “see you on Tuesday.” I was ecstatic to say the least, and I wasn't the only one. Production auditions later that year went about the same. In the end, you're probably not the only one freaking out. The bonds created with others during challenging or stressful shared experiences tend to be pretty strong. That was a scary dragon, but it paid off, because of the amazing group of friends I got out of it.

My final dragon was the toughest one but has also done me the most good. It taught me life can be confusing, after hanging out with that mysterious dragon for a while, it has become one of my most important.

I had spent my whole life dreaming of being a scientist of some sort. When I was seven my mom made the most epic lemon marine biologist cake, complete with an actual marine biologist doll that looked like me and a tiny dolphin on top. Needless to say, my parents were stoked about getting a scientist child. Through Year 12 I was in all of the Science courses.

At the time I thought Art was just a hobby that I did when I was bored – I remember thinking during Year 12 that it would be impossible to pursue any sort of art career ever, even if I wanted to, because what would everyone say? I was worried about disappointing others. The thing is, no one ever told me I couldn't pursue a design career, I was the one who convinced myself I couldn't. It took me a while to work that out, but in the end I learned that:

1. Dreams and goals can change, even when you've had them since you were little and they showed up on a cake.
2. You can have as many dreams as you want, and you can change them at any time...
3. The only person stopping you from pursuing your dreams is yourself. When I realised this, that dragon shrank so small it could fit in my pocket.

We have all run into our fair share of dragons throughout our lives – and there are many more to come – these were just a few of mine. Some dragons teach us to laugh at ourselves and others teach us to get back up again. We learn something from each one – so we shouldn't shy away from them. Dragons prepare us for the future, they add to our character. They are life skills. Learning to fail, making friends, making new dreams, and spelling useless words like peloton.



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At the risk of sounding like a mobile game ad, build your army of dragons – because these skills will be with you forever. Take them with you into the world as you move beyond the comfort of St Andrew's College, wherever you go and down your chosen path.