

Tena koutou katoa. Tena hoki koe , Ben, mo to karakia whakatuwhera. Otiira ki te tangata whenua o tenei rohe, ki te marae o Pipitea, ka nui te mihi.

Talofa lava, Malo e lelei, Ni sa bula vinaka, Kia Orana

I would like to greet the Chair, Mr. Justice Miller, and the Trustees of Wellington Girls College, the Foundation, the Principal Julia Davidson, to give greetings and thanks to Ben Ngaia for the opening prayer, as well as Pipitea Marae for their support. I also greet the Honorable Minister, Honorable Member of Parliament, the Chancellor of the University and deputy Mayor, other distinguished guests, teachers, my own whanau including the old friends from my year who have come today - and most importantly you, the girls. This speech is for you. I am delighted that you chose the name Pipitea for the building, a name that grounds it perfectly in the history and geography of this place, your place. I feel deeply honoured to be here today.

First, I want to congratulate all those associated with this splendid building - those who imagined it, designed it, financed and built it. You all did a tremendous job. I particularly like the curved wall facing the entrance, the lovely floating roof, and the way the building fits in so elegantly on a rather awkward and constrained site - yet gives space for the entry plaza. I am sure the Pipitea Block will create a strong identity for the College in the built environment of Wellington.

I toured it a few months ago, and saw the impressive new facilities for technology, media and the arts, and the flexible approach that has been taken to teaching spaces; as well as to space for you to relax. Most important that. This building offers opportunities that the standard classrooms of the past never could.

There's something more about this building. Beyond wood and glass and mortar, beyond its physical presence, it expresses the commitment of this school to the best in education for girls. This commitment has a long history. It may sound bland now, but the historians among you will know just how radical and dangerous this idea was once – and in some countries, still is. It can be hard to understand, here in New Zealand now, how very difficult, if not impossible, it was - not so very long ago - for a girl to get a serious education. Even when a few free places were established at Wellington Girls, early last century, it was compulsory for the girls who held them to be taught laundry. They were typecast.

Even in my time, we had to take nutrition instead of physics – for physics, we had to travel across town to Wellington College. And attitudes were slow to change. A somewhat older friend

of mine wanted to be a doctor – but her father said: all the money will have to go to educate your brothers, my dear. You can always *marry* a doctor.

In many of the less developed countries I have worked in, education for girls was the best investment the country could have made but this was anathema to those in power. It will be many years before the girls in those countries come as far as we have. But even now, there is still ethnic and gender prejudice in our society, and we have not yet achieved equal pay for women in the workplace. There are still battles to fight and I hope you will help to win them.

We have the advantage that we can build on the victories of the past. The advent of free, high quality state schools for girls was revolutionary – not only for us personally but for society as a whole – and I like to think that the Pipitea Block celebrates that revolution in all our lives as well as expressing the school's continuing commitment to the best education for girls.

Looking back to the past reminds me of some of my experiences here, and I hope you will forgive me if I share a few.

I know that it can be all too easy to see one's schooldays through a rosy glow, especially if – like me - you're looking back over 50 years, but I can sincerely say it wasn't all rosy. In fact when I was in year 9 I had a painful experience with my Latin teacher, Miss Wright. She was a woman deeply – indeed I should say passionately - committed to her subject. In particular she adored the Gracchi brothers, who pushed for reforms in the days of the Roman Republic and were both murdered for their efforts. This was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> c BC. Fast forward to the middle of the 20thc , and Miss Wright genuinely mourned their deaths. The younger brother, Gaius Gracchus, had had a price put on his head, she told us: the man who killed him would receive his skull filled with

gold. I put my hand up. But, Miss Wright, I said, his skull was all bone, not much space for brains, so the reward wasn't all that generous. Next moment I was hit by flying pieces of chalk, as she shouted, with real deep emotion: "you are talking about the man I love". I had to be very careful in Latin after that.

That happened not long after I started here, in a very cold and very draughty prefab. I know you have had your share of those too, and I am sure your teachers are equally committed to their subjects, but not, perhaps, in quite the same way.

As a student here, I could not have imagined a building like this. But this place, this school, gave me the wide world. In year 9 I was going to be a palaeontologist and tell the secrets of pre-historic bones. By the next year, I was going to be a great actress. Later still I wanted to read Classics at Oxford – that didn't happen either. I acted with much more enthusiasm than skill in the Drama Club, played hockey, and was very pleased - but tried not to show it - when I earned the golden letters of the A team on my blazer, and I *loved* the Special Choir.

And athletics. Barry Rait (the only one of my teachers who is here today) somehow persuaded this skinny weakling to go in for sprint hurdling, high-jump, discus, throwing the javelin, and even putting the shot. He did his best to make me into an athlete - and Barry - it's definitely not your fault that it didn't work.

But it wasn't all good. Wellington Girls' then was a stratified, elitist place, rigorously streamed, with very little contact between the girls in home science, commercial, languages, science, or what was mysteriously called the "general" stream. These streams turned into labels for life. Not the labels of the laundry girls, but not too far away from them. Not too many girls expected

– or were expected - to go to university or into careers. It was also very hierarchical. Discipline was strict, and sometimes humiliating.

I am delighted to know what an open, bubbling vigorous place the school is now, socially integrated, with no streaming to label you before you have had a chance to find your own way, with every opportunity to participate in the life of the school, whether through sport or drama or dance – and I know your hip-hop group is brilliant, I've seen it – to develop leadership skills and create your own educational path. And the results of all this freedom and openness are fantastic. Even more than in the past, this is a top school, not only in the Wellington region. It is in the top echelon nationwide.

But does all this –what you are doing now, what we did in my time - have anything to do with what you will do next? In my time, though women's opportunities were more limited, our lives went in countless different directions, and your lives will too. Then, as now, the great teachers here stimulated us, provoked us to use our minds and enjoy a challenge. They gave us the perspective on the past and the resources in ourselves that we all need to be able to draw on when things go wrong. They helped us appreciate the formality and order of the elements in the Periodic Table, or the polynomial in maths, to love art and theatre and music, to want to understand the lives of others and make a difference if we could. And to be original: to work with others but to be ourselves, to contribute each in our own way. Which leads me to the school motto.

Lumen Accipe et Imperti

We all know the motto - but there's something in particular about it that I'd like to mention. The Latin scholars here will know that this challenge - to receive the light and pass it on - is addressed to you in the singular form of the verb, not the plural, to the singular and unique person you are, not to the group as a whole. So it's a personal message to you. It is something you can do in your own way. There is no prescription, there are no rules – how you do it is up to you. But the challenge is to use your talents to pass on the benefits of what you have lived through here, learned here, what you have enjoyed and want to share. To think for yourself, and to contribute in your own personal way whether you work with others or you work alone. This building is beautifully designed to help you do that, and I hope you will use it as your launching pad.

I wish you all a happy, exciting and rewarding future, and

I have great pleasure in declaring the Pipitea Block open.