

IX October 14th 2012)

(at FCGS)

My scholastic career started in Form 1A in September 1942. There were about 30 of us, most of us new, some few, like me, had slid in from the prep school. For some reason, surprisingly to me, my classmates selected me to be the head of the class, and I, in turn, chose Dickie Coolen to be my vice head. It was not long before some of the new boys decided that they were not going to take orders from the likes of me. They knew better and before long there was another election at which Mackerness was chosen for the position. I was a bit hurt at the time, but soon shrugged my shoulders and decided to watch, wait and see. By the time I got to the 5th Form in 1947, I was still watching, waiting and seeing, when Johnny Mescal pulled me from class and asked me to take over the Captaincy of Challoner House. I was stunned. I was no Tony Andrews or some of the other past Captains of renowned fame. I thought, - I'm going to have to call meetings and have discussions and heaven knows what else. But it was a great honour and I accepted. At the beginning, until I developed some confidence in myself, Johnny Mescal chaired these meetings, to my immense relief. However, I soon got the hang of things, and, from being a shy also ran, I became less shy and more assertive. I must admit that, initially, I did encounter some of the same recalcitrancy I had experienced in Form 1A. However, I learned that to get your team behind you, it needs patience, encouragement, cajoling, praise, and sometimes just plain sleight of hand. And, more important than nearly everything else, your fellow beings have to have the belief that you know what you are doing.

Actually, as House Captain there was not that much to do. Most of it involved selection of teams, and, having selected them, pep talks

My biggest disappointment was that I inherited the worst football and cricket teams of all the other Houses. My predecessors had excellent teams in both sports, and carried all before them, but they had all departed and I had to make do with what I had. So, to my disgust, we lost and lost

The funny thing was that in swimming we had an outstanding team. Trouble was that I did not swim!. I hated swimming and I hated anything to do with water, even drinking it. Of course I had to take the odd bath, but that was definitely it, and I did not linger longer than necessary. Also I never went into a swimming pool, even just to splash around, for fear that I might catch polio or some other wretched disease.

So when it came to the swimming competitions, which took place in the Finchley Municipal Pool, I went along rather as a lame duck. Nevertheless, as Captain of the House, I chased up and down the Pool urging my team members on to the winning post. I did so much chasing and yelling that, at the end of it, I was more exhausted than the swimmers. It was wonderful! - Challoner House had won a majority of the races and Johnny Mescal congratulated all of us as if we had won the Olympics.

We get to Speech Day. and I was proud as a peacock going up there to get our Swimming medals. That I had nothing to do with the winning of them was immaterial. What was of more importance was that Challoner House, our team, had won them.

After the summer of 1948 some of us ended up in the Lower 6th Form. Ostensibly, the idea was that we would be preparing ourselves for entrance into a University. Or may be we were holding back from joining the general work force for lack of knowing what persuasion to pursue.

At any rate, there we were in the lower 6th full of our new found prestige as prefects. I must say, looking back at it, we did not look like any Bredins, or Brays, or Wozniackis, or Plunketts, or Scutts, or Andrews, or Rombauts, but then, we did not attempt to, we were just ourselves and did what we thought was best for the School.

It was in the summer of our last term in the Lower 6th, when I was in the class room on my own. In come Peter Rombaut, Captain of the outgoing 1st X1 football team, and Arthur Wurr, its Secretary. They told me

that they had chosen Terry Mackerness to be Captain of the 1st X1 for the year 1949-1950 and would I take over from Arthur Wurr as Secretary. "What me?" I said, looking around to see if there was anyone else there. I thanked them profusely and gladly and with great pride accepted. I was so thrilled you would have thought I had been made Manager of Arsenal Football club!

Arthur Wurr was very gracious to me and took pains to hand over all his files and explained in some detail what the job entailed. This was real responsibility. Being House captain was great, but Secretary of the 1st X1 involved actually doing things. Arranging matches, arranging transportation, informing the players, working with Joe Linnane. writing reports, it was all wonderfully satisfying, and a good helping hand towards our exposure to the real life that was becoming more imminent daily.

The end of term arrived and with it the end of our scholastic career, But not quite! We still had our exam results to come and after about a month our nailbiting wait was a wait no longer. Bert Metcalfe called us back. This time he really did smile. We had all got through!