

Dear Parents

It's been an immense privilege to be part of the team who made Bishops Epic 2017 happen. It was wonderful to celebrate with the whole grade yesterday and to close Epic off in such a fitting and appropriate way. I am sure you are all delighted to have your son/s home again. They have grown in stature, independence and confidence and I'm sure you will observe much more as you see the subtle and sometimes not so subtle changes that have come about in your son due to the process that such an experience is designed to produce. I am also most grateful to Guy Pearson for not only being there but for also giving a lift to our Chaplain, Terry Wilke and my wife. Terry has played such an important part in Epic over the years and his active input is going to be sorely missed in the coming years.

I mentioned at yesterday's gathering that this year offered a number of challenges. The first was water, the second was the restricted access to the mountains and the third was managing this particular year group. We expected the boys to respond to the process and to do so positively and constructively – we put measures in place to ensure groups were mixed up thoroughly and, despite a couple of the usual issues, we are incredibly proud of this group of boys. Cream rises to the top and this was evident in every group. I know I speak on behalf of the teaching staff when I say that we firmly believe that the next two years will see some wonderful changes in these boys. Therefore, to say it was fun for the Epic staff to be involved with your son is an understatement. We find this to be an amazingly enriching experience and along with those who have enjoyed the Exchange programme, we know our Grade 11 group for next year is going to be strong. We find the timing of Epic (and exchange) perfect for this grade – boys are ready to face the challenges that such experiences offer and to see them mature from the start of Grade 10 to where they are now, is an amazing metamorphosis!

I know you are enjoying the stories, the pictures and the fact that your son is now home again. The stench of dirty socks is probably still hanging in the air and can you believe those grubby shirts and scuffed boots! These boys (and staff) have experienced something special; something that will always be with them. I'd like to think that his roots have grown deeper because of Epic. As parents we have no complete picture of how experiences affect our children but he has found friends in people he never knew he could befriend (and vice versa); he has found strength and encouragement from those who he thought might need that strength and encouragement. It has been deeply moving to see how this 2017 group has responded to the 16 days. My hope is that the Cederberg in particular will be remembered with fondness and that you will be urged to go there as a family and experience the beauty of the place – perhaps not 'roughing' it as he did though!

This was a very busy Epic – both from the medical perspective and the fact that a number of groups battled with the concept of a solo hike resulting in them needing more help than we might have expected. The mumps bug hit three of the group and two were able to return. We also had one lad going home due to glandular fever. There were too many cases of diarrhoea and vomiting and we think the majority of cases were due to poor hygiene (something we will have to address more vigorously next year). Other injuries were some twisted ankles, a ruptured ear drum, a badly bruised hip and one lad needing stitches to his knee. I'm most grateful to WildMedix who prepare our boys thoroughly and I think their work goes a long way in terms of minimising medical issues.

I'm sure that on chatting to your son/s you will pick up on things that we could improve upon for next year. Whilst we can't always implement all ideas, it is always refreshing to get different perspectives and at least enter into a discussion with some of the more pertinent points made.

It always amazes me that the two to three hours spent at the schools we work in, is one of the highlights for the boys – we hear this at Tribal Councils. Our involvement at Elizabethfontein is particularly special. You might recall that Michael Beckurts who did his Epic last year, made greeting cards that have been for sale from the School Shop. So far R35 000 has been raised and, along with a contribution from the school, Elizabethfontein Primary will be able to open a Grade R classroom next year. A Wendy House is being built and we are also putting funds together to fit out the classroom. In addition to this, it was such a treat to see the difference the paving made as well as the new jungle gym donated by the Hooper family. At Grootkloof Primary, Jeremy Stewart donated the rubber surfacing under the jungle gym we put up last year and your sons sanded and varnished the structure as part of their community service.

The matric yearbook often sees boys saying Epic is the best thing they have done at Bishops. It is good to hear that but we must also remember that Epic is a concentrated activity in terms of time. Pretty much everything else we do at school takes place over a year, or a season. What Epic allows us to see is how the 'machine' at Bishops works. Epic would not happen if it were not for our admin department. Included in this wonderful group of people is Sebastian Stemmett who does brilliant work with arranging the transport and doing a myriad of other things. Special thanks must also go to Tyrone Adams who sorted out the paving, erection of jungle gym and the work at Jamaka. In addition to this, he gave some useful instruction on using knives, jack hammers and gourmet cooking!

We are so fortunate to have staff who take on aspects of Epic with the passion they do (cycling, skiing, hiking, counselling, schools work, liaison with parents etc). We must also remember that those who do Epic still have their marking, planning for next year and report load to juggle and there are some who take up the slack left by those who are on Epic. We also rely on a number of OD's, retired staff, volunteers and then some who supply their professional services (WildMedix, SailPro and Teamwork through Innovation headed up by Peter Statham and his crew).

It would be great to collect all the photos and compile them in some form or other – clearly a job for next year but why not send these through to me tomorrow when your son comes to school for final assembly and carol service?

We are fortunate to have supportive parents and I'd like to thank the mums who collated all the material for the crafts for the school and in addition all of you who made contributions towards these. We're grateful to Hermann and Irene Boeddinghaus for letting me clock up 3000 km in their Land Cruiser. Toyota Claremont gave us use of a Fortuner and Ford Mekor in Claremont loaned us a vehicle for a day to allow a staff member to come back for a meeting.

I do trust that the holidays will be enjoyed to the full. To those who celebrate Christmas, may it be blessed and meaningful for you and your families.

Kind regards

Graham