

The Fast Lane Society

Eton College, 18th March 2008

I was delighted to receive the invitation from your society's Keeper, Yiannis Vassilakis. His charm and eloquence were quite remarkable. I am only sorry that I couldn't make it down here to see you before now.

I have to say it's a little daunting to be given the floor again at this great school, especially as a foreigner.

Although, having lived in this country for over thirty years with my family, it has become a home away from home.

You have kindly given me carte blanche to talk about whatever I want.

Well, a cautionary tale from a great Old Etonian, Anthony Powell, tells me that I must, at least, avoid being boring. In *A Dance to the Music of Time*, the infamous Widmerpool takes the opportunity to speak at the annual old boys' dinner of his house at Eton.

He is so long-winded, boring and pompous that he causes his old housemaster to suffer a stroke at the table. God forbid that I do something similar tonight, having managed to avoid it the last time I was here.

But Widmerpool must be an exception: I have always admired the high spirits and intelligence of Etonians. Some of the nicest and cleverest people I have known came here, not to mention my Godson Prince William and his brother, Prince Harry, who couldn't have enjoyed it more.

Nineteen years ago, I was prompted to deliberate on what it is like to be born a Royal? A question I am still often asked, the answer to which, -dare I say matures over time? It is now in late teens, anyway...

My instinctive response echoes Shylock, in the *Merchant of Venice*. Yes, we too are warmed and cooled by the same Winter and Summer as a commoner. We too bleed when you prick us and laugh when you tickle us. The difference everybody is looking for, is that our senses are often drowned, our affections masked, in order to fully devote ourselves to service.

There are countless examples of what some view as sacrifice that Royals have had to make; the greatest of which in my experience, is to forgo one's own country to avoid bloodshed. It is our unquestionable duty and one for which we train all our lives; one of the secrets being, not to look at what you are losing but what is best for the nation.

The abiding lesson of my own upbringing was that I should serve others.

Service was drummed into me virtually from birth so that I might, in time, grow up to contribute something to my fellow man.

I have heard about the many ways in which the school encourages you to engage with the world around you. I am particularly delighted that the school gives you the opportunity to help others in the local community less fortunate than yourselves.

In my mind, it is one of the most valuable, lasting lessons education can offer.

My staunch belief in a comprehensive educational system urged my wife and

me and members of the Greek community to set up the Hellenic College in London, where our children were also educated. Later on, we made the school a member of the Round Square Association, of which I am Patron and President.

Round Square, is a global affiliation of some 60+ schools that spans six continents. Other Patrons of Round Square include The Duke of York, Nelson Mandela and until recently, Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

The schools strive to encourage greater understanding between young people in different countries. Pupils go on international exchanges, help with community projects both at home and in developing countries overseas, and are given a real breadth of opportunities.

One of the significant changes we witness in these students, is that they become more confident and outward-looking; they exercise the ability to communicate and collaborate on projects with people from different backgrounds and empathize with those in need around the world.

We are all part of this world, and we must participate in the solutions to the problems that surround us.

My involvement in education started as a selfless effort to enhance the application of Dr Kurt Hahn's philosophy in schooling. This philosophy and the criteria a school must meet to join Round Square can be summarized though the acronym 'IDEALS'.

I stands for International understanding

D for Democracy

E for Environment

A for Adventure

L for Leadership, and

S for Service

Frankly, I get much more out of it than I could ever offer.

So, I had to turn elsewhere. The opportunity came, as they often do, after an ordeal...

My Family and I decided to end a difficult chapter in our dealings with the then Greek government on a positive note. A long-winded court case in the European Court of Human Rights, regarding ownership of my family properties in Greece resulted in a bitter victory, when I was vindicated but was paid compensation instead of my family house being returned.

The money given, quickly materialized into the Anna-Maria Foundation, whose purpose is to help communities in Greece suffering from the effects of natural disasters, of which, sadly, there are still too many. I have thus been able to re-discover Greece and its people through the work we do and the various projects we undertake around the country.

More importantly, we have been given the chance to witness the devastating effects that our living habits and practices have had on nature. In all the discourses that have taken place, in all the research carried out, one does not truly grasp the abnormality of what we have all brought about, until it presents itself in the form of a dried river where water was once abundant, a flooded plain in the middle of summer, or indeed, snow on the Parthenon.

Alas, in our first steps as a charitable Foundation, we could only doctor some of the

wounds as there were –and are - so many. There was no time or resources to prevent, -only to plaster and hope. Now, I only hope that people everywhere feel this desperation; it is only then that one realizes that the remedy is in our hands. Not just our collective embrace, but in each moment, in every action, in our hands.

To be able to put our efforts to use in our own country has been a gratifying opportunity for my Family and myself. In fact, the past five years, have been, -and continue to be-, an incredible journey for us. After thirty-six years, with just a few hours visit for my Mother's funeral in 1981 and a short, interrupted summer visit in 1993, we have at least and at last been able to show our children their country, to visit our most beloved spots, as well as the most remote little villages, to blend with the people with whom we share a passion for our homeland and treasure every moment.

The agenda suggested to me for tonight was simply to draw on my experiences. Not as simple as it first sounds.

But the idea for the invitation was probably to draw on more didactic experiences.

It seems to me that the cycles that life creates for us and we create in life, are always full of such examples. The current cycle for me, which started as I mentioned with our return to our homeland, is encompassed in the greater cycle of Family.

My wife, Anne-Marie, is the youngest daughter of the late King Frederick of Denmark. We were married when she was eighteen and I was twenty-four.

We have five children, all of whom, I am proud to say, contribute to the work of our family's charities.

My first child, our daughter, Alexia taught in an inner-city school after graduating from university. I never saw her in action as she would not allow me to visit because none of the students nor their parents knew anything of her background. She has also taught children with Down's Syndrome in Spain.

Pavlos, our second and eldest son, studied at Georgetown in the United States, before attending Sandhurst and spending a few years in the British army. He now works in business and his fifth child will be born in July.

Then there is Nikolaos, our second son, who after he graduated from Brown University, did a spell in the British army. He then worked in TV News production in the US, came back to work in the City as well as being an invaluable asset at my private office.

And there are our youngest children, Theodora, who also graduated from Brown in the States and got her Masters degree in London in Classical Acting, and Philippos, who is graduating from Georgetown this forthcoming May.

In total we have eight, and soon to be nine, grandchildren.

Just before the birth of Pavlos, one of the most painful chapters in my life culminated, when the colonels staged a coup and my effort to overthrow them failed. The night of the coup, the months of secretly planning the counter-attack, the constant danger that my wife and children were in, the balancing act of leading a country in turmoil, of not knowing who to trust, can make titles for many speeches.

The ultimate lesson, after years of pondering every moment, every decision made, is to have a clear awareness of your set of values. And then stick to them no matter what.

These are formed at a young age, and I was fortunate to have had great learning experiences. One of which, was participating in the 1960 Olympic Games and winning the Gold medal for sailing, in the Dragon class. The experience was in fact so stimulating, that I am still actively involved as a member of the International Olympic Committee and of the International Sailing Federation of which I am President of Honour.

This year is the 60th anniversary of the London Olympics. But it is also, of course, an Olympic Games year.

This year's games promise to be fascinating, not just for sporting reasons, but because they will also provide a glimpse of China emerging as an economic powerhouse and hopefully opening up China in many respects.

With so many terrible things happening in the world, it's an appropriate time to remind ourselves that the Olympic Games are the only international symbol the world truly recognizes. They stand for unity, freedom and above all peace. And I hope that we might, at last, start to see the realization of these ideals.

In the ancient times, Olympia was considered a sacred place, while a truce – ekehiria - was initiated during the Games. All conflicts among the ancient Greek cities stopped. What a wonderful idea. This concept of ekehiria, the greek word for truce, is now accepted by the United Nations and promoted by the International Olympic family. We want this to spread and be accepted by every nation in today's troubled world.

In my competitive sporting days, I learned the value of teamwork and hours of hard work, training and concentration. But I have also learnt the significance of another of the main principles of the Olympic movement: that participation is more important than personal gain.

Aristotle said: "At the Olympic Games, it is not the finest and the strongest men who are crowned, but they who enter the lists."

In other words, to be an Olympic athlete is to be an Olympic winner.

My parents, to whom I owe so much, instilled the sense of Kingship, the notion of sacrifice-without-it-feeling-as-sacrifice, which I talked about earlier.

The gist of this concept came in what was the most powerful speech I have ever heard. It was the speech my father made after I had sworn the oath of allegiance to him as Commander-in-Chief when I came of age at 18:

"Remember always it is preferable that the King should suffer than that the suffering should fall on the people and the country".

It is this advice that prompted me to go into exile some years later, and thus determined the course of my life, and the story of modern Greece. I have always followed it as best I can.

In more amusing circumstances, he taught me the importance of diplomacy.

While still Crown Prince I was challenged to a game of chess by President Tito of Yugoslavia who was our guest one summer.

I found myself in a winning position in the third and deciding game. My father nudged me under the table to make sure I understood I was expected to lose.

Now, the lesson of losing in order to win something greater is not easy for a proud

young man –or woman I am sure-, to take in (digest). But it was in fact this surrender of the game and of my ego that has carried me through some of the toughest negotiations I have had to undertake. To bow the head and lower your weapon is often much more powerful and effective than charging on. And if you listen closely, the voice inside you will be cheering for you, and this is the only cheer you need in life.

Thank you for giving me the chance to have another glimpse of your beautiful and distinguished school, and I wish you all the best for the future.

I hope, and am sure, that you know how lucky you are to come here.