



# HERSCHEL SENIOR SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

No. 10 – 24 June 2022

## OUR DUTY OF CARE

*There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the water. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.* (Desmond Tutu)

South African icon and leader, Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu made this statement. My niece, Jess, shared it with me recently and this got me thinking about our duty of care, as teachers and parents and of how fundamental this is for the promotion of a healthy society. More specifically it is critical to consider the role of schools in embedding principles that support intentional learning, understanding and values that lead us towards becoming a more socially cohesive and just society; one in which we are upstream providing guidance, safety and certainty to counter the pervasive uncertainty, injustice, trauma and disconnect of the current times.

I have referred to *The Pandemic is a Portal* (written by Arundhati Roy and published in the Financial Times in April 2020) in two previous communications. In this essay Roy argues that the pandemic presents us with an unparalleled opportunity to re-imagine our future – and she implores us to act on this. In her words: *Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred,*

*our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.*

The boldened lines are inspiring! It is time to imagine another world – another version of South Africa – for our students and we need to be prepared to fight for this! This positivity is visionary and while it may seem out of reach with the world currently in a state of chaos, war, humanitarian crises, climate change challenges, inequity and political instability, I want to suggest that our duty of care to this next generation of young people in South Africa demands of us support, belief and action that will see them equipped with the skills, confidence and collective intent required to improve society and more specifically to create opportunities that drive change and open up possibilities for a sustainable future. I have seen in Gen Z a growing social awareness, a desire for equity and access, creativity, flexibility, collaboration; less concern with materialism and more concern with wanting to live in a just society and to secure their future by looking at sustainable practices. There is a discernible shift and we need to tap into this and to encourage this view and the skills, creativity and means with which to equip students to make a difference and to drive change. This is a massive undertaking given the extent and complexity of change required, but small changes made with care and deliberation land with impact and where there is impact, there is increased awareness and further change.

Since schools are microcosms of society, (to greater or lesser degrees depending on a number of factors such as geographical location, parent/student body, resources, state/independent membership, governance and leadership), a number of the critical conflicts and tensions fall back into the school space and provide us with an opportunity to engage directly with the challenges, inequity and unevenness of society. With respect to the education of girls, these factors, together with the intersectionality that patriarchy, power, privilege, personal identity and varying cultural traditions (requiring nuanced discussion and understanding) bring to further intensify this arena, remind us that we have a duty of care to protect, nurture, grow and equip our students so that they are able to flourish. We need all stakeholders to agree to participate in creating a warm, inclusive and safe environment for all students.

The Herschel family needs to pull together and to commit to creating and supporting a school that truly understands what duty of care is. Teamwork begins by building trust and this can only happen when we create opportunities to get to know each other so that we foster trust at Herschel. It is this culture of growth that we need to place at the heart of what we do and much of this has to do with HOW we go about doing things. If we are going to create a vibrant community culture we need all stakeholders and all committees, including the Herschel Preparatory and Senior School Executive Teams, the school Manco Team, the Herschel Council, the Preparatory Parents Association (PA) and the House Representatives Committee in the senior school, to be diverse think tanks in order to create a rich, support base for Herschel. Simultaneously we need to strive for academic, sporting, cultural and musical excellence and to strengthen our students' sense of self, self-worth and identity through meaningful community and environmental engagement.

On a personal note, it is frustrating when people outside of Herschel comment with great alacrity on “woke culture” and sometimes misrepresent the school’s efforts to consult and learn from a diverse range of resources and professionals about how to become better at recognising blind spots, ensuring equal participation and belonging, prefacing respect, dignity and equality and focusing on learning, unlearning, relearning and growth that takes all members of the community forward. The focus on ‘school capture’ in some social media posts refers to Critical Race Theory as a hidden curriculum in schools working actively towards some sort of ‘school capture’. Since Herschel has been mentioned in some of these posts, I would like to reassure the Herschel community that we are not in the practice of supporting any sort of capture, but rather, focusing on our social and ethical responsibility to educate our students to be socially aware and to equip them with the language and nuance which will assist towards nation building and a more cohesive society. This is the responsibility of School Management and Council and we have been setting up structures to support transformation across all areas of operation. To address racism at a systemic level, systems need to be revisited and reconfigured to ensure equal access, consistency and transparency – all of which leads to accountability. I do not believe that accountability can be ‘outsourced’.

At the recent SAHISA Conference in Queberha, I discussed approaches to transformation with several school heads. It was valuable to hear first-hand some of the successes and failures experienced and to know that this is a critical area of focus for Independent School heads across the country. Some schools have appointed transformation officers or deputies, while others have operationalised the process, addressing it internally and using a variety of approaches and interventions to facilitate the process.

There are, for instance, crucial narratives which white South Africans do not qualify to enter into and so it has been important to consult with experts who can speak with authority through their blackness and experience within the South African context. Each person has a fundamental right to self-representation and the respect and dignity that accompanies this is a very important part of nation building.

Recently I re-read the Student Transformation Mission document (published in 2020). This contains thoughtful student feedback, provides some diagnostics with respect to inequity (how this has looked and felt at Herschel) and serves as an inspiration for our primary focus as an educational space – our duty of care. If we get this right, all of our students will flourish. They will also have the courage to be imperfect: *"Those who have a strong sense of love and belonging have the courage to be imperfect."* (Brene Brown). Brown's work on vulnerability is well documented and is central to supporting authenticity; our ultimate wish for each student who passes through Herschel. In independent girls' schools we are aware of performance anxiety, perfectionism and pressure intersecting in ways that can be damaging to self-esteem and wellbeing. As a collective, we need to support holistic, wholesome development and growth.

Some readers might see this version of Herschel as a pipe dream and there will be those who are sceptical about the degree of change that is possible, but I want to assure you that this is what we want our students to experience at Herschel. I believe that this needs to be stated clearly upfront so that there is clarity with respect to what sort of school community we are building. I know that if we can get this right the by-product will be happiness, success, achievement, excellence, collaboration, celebration, wholeness and a phenomenal education which sees

students leave empowered and equipped to make a difference because they will have learnt, seen and felt the power of this! Our move to the IEB provides wonderful impetus from a curriculum perspective supporting important 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning skills for a rapidly changing world and developing independent thinking and higher order problem-solving skills. Strategically we are looking at stepping up the use of technology while focusing on the interpersonal skills so important in an increasingly technological world; developing those spaces on the campus which require reimagining and repurposing; developing leadership and advocacy skills and producing creative, confident, adaptive, socially conscious and caring young women who take the school motto 'learning to make a difference' out into the wider world with them. We cannot do this without the full support of the Herschel community.

We have clear channels of communication in place for academic and pastoral matters, starting with tutors, and where something falls outside of these parameters, I am always happy to meet in person. Our partnership with you is critical to building social cohesion within the Herschel community and I believe in an open-door policy. If there is a matter you would like to discuss, or should you wish to participate in initiatives and conversations, please contact me. I can only act on what I know and address issues that are brought directly to my attention. Carpark talk can be destructive and divisive, causing uncertainty which really does not benefit any of us.

The world has changed irrevocably, and we have to ensure that we prepare our students for their world and for the changes that will continue to unfold as technology evolves. Let's work together towards change and growth – for all of our sakes, but most essentially out of a shared duty of care for our students/your daughters and their future.

In the short space of time that I have been at Herschel I have seen and felt the potential that it has to become an incredible space in which all students thrive as they discover what and who they want to be and realise the impact that each of them can have on making this and the wider world a better place. Our recent cultural assembly illustrated this beautifully! It was inspiring!

***Hope is a passion for the possible! Hope has a cost. Hope is not comfortable or easy. Hope requires personal risk. It is not about the right attitude. Hope is not about peace of mind. Hope is action. Hope is doing something. (Chris Hedges)***

Wishing you all a happy and healthy holiday break with your families and friends. Take care and to those travelling, safe travels!

Warm regards

Heather

## LONG SERVICE AWARDS

This week we celebrated our Long Service Awards Ceremony. Congratulations and thank you to all these staff for their service to Herschel. A special mention must be made of Mrs Helen Botha, who has been at Herschel for 40 years!!

### 10 Year Awards

Bongani Sopam  
Sonja Bräsler

### 15 Year Awards

Nicky Karstens  
Nkosoxolo Mde  
Norman Solomans

### 20 Year Awards

Debbie Main  
Debbie Griffiths  
Corinne Levitt  
Janey Buffkins  
Grace Taillard

### 25 Year Awards

Linda Cowie  
Silvana Scarola

### 40 Year Award

Helen Botha



## UCT MATHEMATICS COMPETITION

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of May Herschel took part in the annual UCT Mathematics Competition. Over 400 invitations were sent out to schools throughout the Western Cape. Each school is able to enter five individuals and five pairs per grade, and over 7500 students took part in the competition this year.

The top participants in the UCT Competition are then invited to take part in a second round, the UCT Invitational Mathematics Challenge. In this challenge there are two levels: Juniors (Grades 8 and 9) and Seniors (Grades 10, 11 and 12). This round was held at the UCT campus on Saturday, 18 June.

Congratulations to the following students who were placed in the top 20 individuals or top 5 pairs in their respective grades in the first round of the competition and consequently were invited to take part in the UCT Mathematics Challenge. This is an incredible achievement and we look forward to seeing how you all did in this round.

### Grade 8

Gabriella Stodel  
Simone de la Harpe  
Tara Mae Varney

### Grade 9

Carla Lampe

### Grade 10

Kiera Howard  
Leah Josi

### Grade 12

Juliette Roux



(Left to right: Carla Lampe, Kiera Howard, Gabriella Stodel and Tara Mae Varney. Other students were absent for the photo)

Last week was *Science Café* time again!

This time we were very fortunate to have as our guest speaker, Associate Professor Sheetal Silal. Professor Silal is currently employed in the UCT Statistics department and has on-going research into Malaria vaccinations as well being on the President's advisory team during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (all those statistics and predictions during the presidents speeches – that was her and her team!)

Professor Silal spoke to an appreciative crowd of students, parents and teachers about her experiences, mathematical modelling, big data analysis, machine learning and how Mathematics and Science can work together.



## FAREWELL REV. MARK LONG

Reverend Mark Long conducted his last Eucharist at Herschel this morning before leaving for the UK where he will be taking up a position in the UK where he and Dawn will be with their family. Our gratitude to Mark for his calm, wise insights, and incredible commitment to his role as the Archbishop's representative on Council.



## GRADE 9 DESIGN

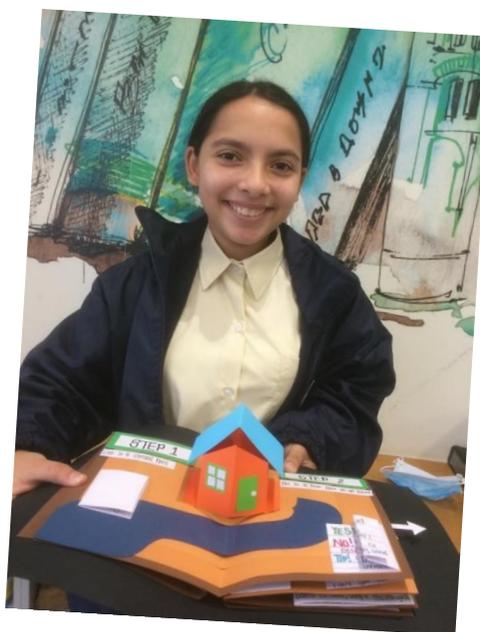
The Grade 9 Design students have spent the past semester learning and experiencing Environmental Design and, in particular – Interior Design. They imagined and created their fantasy teenage bedroom and en-suite interior designs. Ground plans, ratios, measurements, and miniature furniture were created and constructed into spectacular scale models showcasing their concepts and colourful ideas.



The **Grade 10 History class** celebrated the end of exams and the first 6 months of IEB with a dress-up breakfast. Red coats, tax collectors, queens, peasants, ladies and a Madame Defarge arrived from the American and French revolutions as well as a pirate from the days of exploration around the Caribbean.



The **Grade 8 Journey Through Time to the Anthropocene** elective class embarked on a Pop-Up books project. The project included researching any topic that has been covered or even mentioned in this elective class. The information was then simplified into 4 to 8 pages of pop-ups, sliding and flapping appendages and other creative effects to tell the story of their research topic. There were some fabulous creations produced after hours and hours of dedicated work. Topics included space, fossilisation, evolution, the Anthropocene and changing environments.



The **Grade 9 *Economics of Happiness*** elective classes have been learning about sustainability, sustainable development and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their final project this semester was learning about how creating a food garden can help towards achieving some of the SDGs. Here they are gardening at school in rain and sun to start a food garden at Herschel.



*'One of us is Lying'* is a play scripted and produced by the **Grade 8 *'From the page to the stage'*** elective. The students in the class chose the novel by Karen McManus to adapt and stage for their semester practical. Each student, in addition to acting, took on a major production portfolio - director, stage manager, lighting, sound, marketing, set, props, costume, makeup, to bring the show to life.



# HERSCHEL WINTER DINNER



After the 1996 elections and the release of Nelson Mandela, my husband and I were excited to return to South Africa from London. And yet, it was with a certain amount of heartache, as I had so enjoyed our 20 years there; being a member of one of London's top choirs, travelling with world class conductors and soloists, training as an art therapist and working with children in Middlesex Hospital.

I found myself in the role of a farmer's wife running the family farm, Diemersfontein, as 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Sonnenbergs.

I felt cut off from all I had enjoyed in London and without purpose until, out of the blue, an opportunity arose to start a school on our farm and thus be able to offer a good education to the local children.

It is said that it takes a village to raise a child, and it certainly took the community of like-minded people to start a school. With the help of dedicated teachers, an excellent headmaster and a core of committed parents, Wellington Prep and Wellington College came into being.



Old Herschelians, parents, scholars and friends  
are invited to attend the

## HERSCHEL WINTER DINNER

hosted by the OLD HERSCHELIAN ASSOCIATION  
on Wednesday 17 August 2022 in the Mary Jagger Hall  
18h30 for 19h00

Our guest speaker this year is

**SUSAN SONNENBERG**

and her inspiring talk is entitled:

### FINDING PURPOSE

Cost: R260 for a 3-course meal. Wine and soft drinks included.

*NB: Please indicate if you would like a vegetarian meal*

RSVP: oha@herschel.org.za before 1 August 2022

**Banking details: Standard Bank, Claremont**

**Name: Old Herschelian Association**

**Account number: 07 187 902 1**

**Please email proof of payment to oha@herschel.org.za**



## Prayers at the end of Term 2 2022

Lord as we end this term, coinciding with the lifting of Covid restrictions in the country there is much celebration to be had. However, let us not forget those who suffered enormously during the pandemic, especially those who lost loved ones. In a moment of silence let's bring those people, as well as those who suffer the effects of long Covid, into our minds.

Let us also not forget how so many school students around the country have also suffered in terms of massive gaps in learning. So when we are not happy, possibly with our results this term for whatever reason, let us keep perspective and appreciate that as Herschel students and teachers we were so privileged to be able to have very little actual disruption to our teaching and learning over this period.

Lord forgive us when we do lose perspective and open our eyes to the real suffering of those who share the same country as us. We think of families where the breadwinner no longer has a job, where families have fallen apart as a result of stress....and we thank you for so much that we have.

We give thanks for the almost 'normality' of this term, being able to sit together in the theatre, being able to sing together, being able to perform on stage, being able to run around the astro or the netball court, being able to learn face to face with teachers and friends. Let us **never** ever take any of these things, or our good health, for granted.

We pray for the whole Herschel community as we come to this holiday time. Grant us Lord a real time of physical, emotional, mental rest and rejuvenation so we can return next term more at peace with ourselves and in harmony with those around us.

In your name we pray these things

Amen