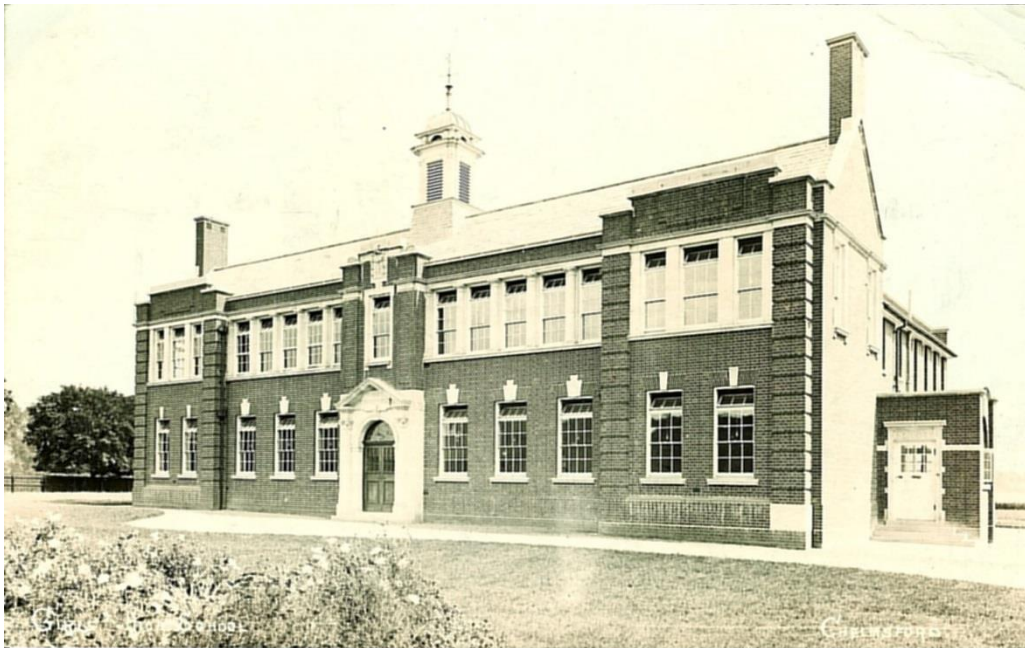


Friday 1st May 2020 - Community Assembly

Commemoration (Part III)



CHS 1907, the New Building

As you will know, Madame Gulliver is retiring at the end of this term, having given 35 years of exemplary service to CCHS. Given that we would normally have experienced our Commemoration Service during this week, I thought it was fitting that a colleague of Madame Gulliver's standing and service should provide our three assemblies this week. Each of the assemblies will have a different theme and focus. Please take some time to read each of them to appreciate and commemorate our School, as well to celebrate the fine work of such a long-serving member of staff.

Today, Mr Lawlor has asked me to share with you some of my personal journey and any 'pearls of wisdom'.

So how did I get to be at CCHS, teaching French and Russian for the last 35 years? My story starts at my own school, where I was a bit of a 'mouse' to be honest. I worked hard but didn't really shine in any way, and at one time, I was even bullied for being a good student, I did my homework on time and did not misbehave. But out of school I was completely different, my whole family were involved in local amateur theatre and I was in Chelmsford Young Generation from age 10 to 16. In fact, when I was in a couple of school productions, one teacher who watched the show, commented that he couldn't believe he was watching the same person that he saw on class.

Everything changed when I went into the sixth form and because of the influence of one teacher. He taught A level French, but he also invited 5 of us to have a go at Russian for fun, well, fun became an O level, which eventually became an A level and led to my chosen degree in French and Russian which in turn led to a year abroad spent partly in France and partly in the Soviet Union. The impact of this one teacher on the rest of my life, cannot be underestimated. I was the third in my family ever to go to university, after my cousin and brother. My grandparents had been in service at Danbury Palace and my mother left school at 13. It was always her great regret that she had not taken up her place at CCHS, because her mother thought it was better to get a job!

And so I ended up coming to CCHS one morning in May 1985 for my informal 'chat'. The moment I walked in through the big oak doors and along the front corridor with its tiled walls and the windows through to Room 6 with its old fashioned desks with lids, I felt as if I had found my home. As I mentioned on Monday I was employed to teach mainly French with some Drama, but Miss Brooks had a twinkle in her eye, when she said 'and then you have the Russian'. It was her opinion that it was a waste to have a teacher in the school who could teach a challenging subject like Russian and not make use of it and she was true to her word and the following year I had my first sixth form GCSE Russian group of 21 students!

So there I was at the age of 23, barely older than the 17 year olds I found myself teaching. On my first day, I wore a pale yellow blouse and a navy V neck jumper, very like the school uniform. That was a big mistake as no one realised I was a teacher! There were no lockers and students kept their books in the desks in their form rooms. Every girl in Year 7 was issued with a hymn book which had to be taken to assembly, which was every day and there was always a hymn to start the day. Of course, at that time, there were only 3 forms, C, H and S so the whole school could fit in the Hall every day for assembly. When G house was introduced as the fourth form, I was the year 7 Form teacher and so automatically became Head of House as well, and oversaw the introduction of the 4 house system as it progressed through school.

Another thing that has not really changed fundamentally is the strong focus on pastoral care. The systems have become much more robust, but from the very start, the role of Form tutor was very important in ensuring the well-being of students. I was a Form teacher to year 7 for thirteen years; I was Mrs Cross' year 7 form teacher (I also taught French to Miss Pocock and Miss Stone by the way!) I have since seen three sets of students through from year 8 to year 11. One particular memory from the early years is when only three weeks into term in September, a girl in my year 7 form suddenly had to have a long term absence involving serious surgery. I visited her in hospital and again at her home once she was recovering. The difficulty was how she would reintegrate into the class, as she had not had time to get to know everyone. She wanted them to know what had happened to her, so that there would not be awkwardness on her return as, from their point of view, she had just suddenly

disappeared. She suggested that she write her story which I then read to the class over a period of days in Form time, it was very emotional for us all. Another issue was that that she would need to wear a hat on her return. The Form suggested that on that day they would all wear hats so that she did not feel different. What a lovely solution and a superb example of the caring, thoughtful nature of CCHS students throughout the years and I am happy to say that I am still in touch with this young woman who is a successful landscape designer.

My highlights of my time at CCHS are too numerous to mention, but Staff Panto's have to be high up there along with the sheer joy of teaching my classes, those moments when a student says 'Oh, I get it!' or 'This is really fun!' or 'I'm so glad I chose French/Russian'. It is probably not well known that I also produced two school musicals, a rock nativity called Follow the Star and A Christmas Carol (featuring Mrs Cross as the Ghost of Xmas Past!) Also I have had the privilege of working with some very kind and generous people, wonderfully talented, caring colleagues, who have supported me at critical times and with whom I have been able to share humour and laughs.

So, I started my time at CCHS as Miss Hughes and finish as Mme Gulliver. In order to avoid getting stuck in a rut, I took on new challenges, created trips to Northern France, Brittany and Normandy, and cultural trips to French plays in London. I also took students 6 times to Moscow and St Petersburg, instilling in them my own love of the country and its culture. At one point, when life was not turning out quite as I had hoped, the Head teacher at the time, Mrs McCabe, offered me some advice. When the book of your life is not going the way you expect, turn the page and write a new book. This encouraged me to study for an MA in Educational Management and I threw myself into study and research into teaching and learning. Eventually this gave me the impetus and experience to achieve promotion to Head of French and subsequently Head of Languages. I heard on the radio recently someone say that a 'journey' is when you pack your case and go somewhere nice, whereas 'experience' is what you get when you don't get what you were hoping for. In the end I got it all.

So what is my final 'pearl of wisdom?' I took the job at CCHS because it felt right. I really wanted to teach French and Russian, but took a risk when offered the chance to teach Drama. I love France and all things French, but Russian has been the passion of my life and I have sent generations of students away sharing my love of the language and the culture. I am glad to have made a difference to a multitude of students over the years. I do feel sad that recently, although students have shown interest in Russian, they tended to worry that it would be too difficult or impact on their progress in other subjects, rather than being up for the challenge. We all need to take risks and follow our hearts at times and to accept that life does not always go according to plan, but to slightly misquote the *'Desiderata'*, 'no doubt the universe will unfold as it should'

Make the most of every opportunity, and don't take this amazing place for granted. It is easy to be dismissive of the familiar and imagine that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, but I cannot imagine a better place to learn, work and flourish.

And so I am retiring, leaving the place that feels like my second home. It feels a bit scary, but I am looking forward to daytime dance classes, learning to draw, having time to read, learning sign language, spending time with my family (and Cosette the dog) and lunching with the very large community of retired CCHS staff who meet periodically on Thursdays!

'One family unbroken'

Madame Gulliver