

**Speech of Dr. Harsha Perera
Chief Guest at the
Annual Inter House Swimming Meet**

Head Master Rev. Fr Mark Bilimoria, Rev Fr Harold Goodchild, Manager Administration Mr. Ananda Gallearachie, Section heads, Master –in –charge of sports, Master in charge of Swimming, Organizing committee, Members of the Staff, Dear parents, Distinguished guests and most importantly, young Thomians who are waiting to hear the starting whistle. It is my pleasure to be present here today. Being invited to be the Chief Guest at the Annual Swimming Meet of one's Alma Mater must be one of the high points of any person's life. My wife and I feel honored by the invitation you have extended us to be your Chief Guest at the STC Guru Annual Inter House Swimming Meet. We thank you most sincerely for affording us this privilege and opportunity to join you in your annual "water" celebration. I was a student here many years ago and indeed it's a great honor as an Old Boy to come on an occasion like this and witness the growth and expansion of the College that is dear and near to my heart specially this swimming pool in which I was sailing in supreme command.

Dear Young Thomians permit me to recall my good old days at STC Guru. I still remember way back in 1981 as an 11-year old child, stepping in to the Chapman dormitory with my father and mother carrying a big trunk which was very much unfamiliar to a kid at that age. As a boy who went away to boarding school at the age of eleven I had absolutely no confidence in myself, had absolutely no security in my personal life. I was not even man enough to miss home and admit it. When I went to sleep the first night in my hostel I was grateful that there weren't any thorns in my pillow.

I was interested in studies but I was not the calibre of a person who would burn the midnight oil, rather I liked listening to what the teachers said. My first class teacher at STC Guru was Mr. Pathiraja, a tough gentleman in his early fifties, with a bald head and large forehead. We all knew he had a gigantic brain which was working beneath his forehead. Class rooms at STC Guru were flourishing with giants in the field of education. They were versatile educationists. W. Sumanapala, J de.S Jayasinghe and Mr. Bandusena were some of them. Then arrived the golden era of STC Guru – The appointment of Mr. Patrick Gunawardhana as the Headmaster. I sincerely believe STC Guru was at its peak in the class room as well as in the field of Sports under his leadership.

My dear Teachers and Parents I hail from a middle class family where both my parents were government servants. They were not swimming in money but took a decision to send me to STC Guru slashing expenses of comfort. I wasn't strong enough to get away being bullied at the beginning. But STC Guru was maintaining good conduct and discipline. Teachers who were appointed to maintain discipline at school were working round the clock armed with the T-56 always - The cane. All the activities at STC Guru were conducted according to a strict time table.

My teachers didn't take much notice of me, my classmates didn't notice me either. Whether in sports or in extra-curricular activities and in all other activities. I was an ordinary pupil at the beginning but I didn't allow it to last long, as I had a strong dream and will behind me.

I found a sense of self worth, I discovered something I was good at, I found my place and made a Himalayan effort to keep that position at STC Guru. Suddenly I noticed everything started to go well. I was doing well in the class. But always PLAYED BY THE RULES. This would imply not taking shortcuts, no favoritism, not hitting below the belt or when your opponent is on the ground, and at all times being prepared to accept defeat with good grace and all that the word sportsmanship' evokes.

“After school” time at STC Guru was unmatched. We enjoyed a sense of freedom until Simon rang the bath bell at 5.30pm. There were no alternatives other than getting involved in extracurricular activities as all the dormitories were kept locked during “games time”. I was not good at any kind of sports activities in the early period of my good old days at the STC Guru.

Two periods per week of the routine school time table were allocated for swimming. I was hydrophobic and hadn't acquired the simple technique in swimming – floating. I was thrown to the shallow end of the pool which permitted influx of few liters of water towards my stomach and blocked the air passage . I was almost drowned. That was 1981. By 1985 I was proud enough to carry the college flag as the Caption of the STC Guru swimming team.

This is what I learnt from STC Guru, keep your ambition alive, don't allow a drop in your will power and always keep your head down and concentrate on hard work until you reach the target. Those are some of the precious "materials" I harvested from STC Guru, endorsed with ESTO PERPETUA. All of those set me a strong platform and became the corner stone of my success as an undergraduate and post graduate level as well as national and international achievements.

There was one great personality behind the success of most of the Guru Thomians, who stood right around us like the Great Wall of China which had protected the powerful Asian pacific nation from invading nomads. He was the "father" to all the Guru Thomians. He is non other than Rev Fr Harold Goodchild.

Honestly he was the person who played the crucial role behind the scene for me to take the path way to secure a place in a state University to study medicine. I must express my deep sense of appreciation to him. Thank you very much Father. I am here just because of the brave decisions you took way back in the 1980's

Do extra curricular activities matter?

Absolutely, and often dramatically, extra curricular activities provide an outlet for creativity and can be the core of how a child attains self esteem. Considerable percentages of children lose interest in school, especially if they aren't doing well in their classes. Extra curricular activities can often provide the boost of success, the affirmation that 'yes, you can succeed!' at a critical time for many kids, helping them to stay interested in school and providing an incentive for them to succeed in their classes.

Research carried out in the West and East support that teens who are involved in extracurricular activities actually do better than their non-involved peers in a number of areas. Most studies show that students who are involved in extracurricular activities excel above their peers academically as well.

Other benefits include having a sense of team spirit and belonging, personal pride and an understanding of the value of fair play, an increased sense of

honesty and trustworthiness, and, importantly, the prevention of drug and substance abuse. The study states ‘Repeated records of high school students across the United States have shown that those students who become heavily involved in extracurricular activities tend to be model students.

To the past and present teachers of this school, I must express my deep sense of appreciation and admiration for the work you people are doing. It’s a well known fact that few people become teachers out of choice. We have left our treasures in your hands and we trust you completely that you will help find their direction, the manner that you extended towards the Thomians in the past.

To the parents, I’m really not qualified to say anything on child psychology but you may give them your love, but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies, but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams. You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you for life moves not backward.

To the young Thomians always remember the sunshine and flowers forget the rain and weeds. Try to become a versatile personality, a student capable of doing many things competently. In short it is for the **all - rounder**; the students who shines both in the class room and on the sports field.

Also remember that a good student can make even a bad teacher look good.

I believe all of us here; to a greater or lesser extent have a role to play on behalf of our beautiful island in regard to sustainability of the peace and her development. I have not the slightest doubt under the leadership of the current Head Master and Manager Administration that St Thomas’ College Gurutalawa will continue to bring forth men of the highest calibre to fulfill those tasks.

Thomians Young and Thomians old

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