

To be read at the banquet of the St Jago Alumni Association (Toronto) on 4th June 2011

My dear Past Students,

It is a rare pleasure to speak to you thus. My wife and I were thrilled to be invited to the banquet as your honored guests. St. Jago was appropriately dubbed for the Victor Edwards Administration “The Golden Age of St. Jago High School” by past students and others.

When I entered Ravensworth on April 1, 1964 it was like the breath of fresh air, coming from an all boys school to a co-ed school. I immediately thought of how I could make an impact and improve the status of this institution. The summer before I went to St. Jago, I attended a seminar where I met a teacher who said to me “Guess who won the Jamaica Scholarship for boys” with a tone of disrespect. It was Augustus Grant, of St. Jago. I immediately took issue with her in defence of St. Jago although I was not yet on the staff. I came up with some ideas and passed them on to the Headmaster, Mr. OR Bell; some were implemented some were not and I vowed that if or when I became the head I would implement my ideas.

So when I was appointed headmaster January 1, 1977, I put my thoughts into actions, the first thing I did was to call the staff to a meeting and informed them of my new status. I reminded them in case they had forgotten that I was not the vice-principal anymore and that I was not Mr. Bell, although I admired the man. I was now the Principal and in charge (Head Nigger in charge) according to Morgan Freeman, that noted actor.

One of the things that agonized me was the way St. Jago students were seen on the streets any hour of the day. I decided that it had to change. So I invited the parents to a P.T.A meeting and told them of my intention to close the gate until 2:15 when school would have ended. It was meant to discourage late coming. A few parents, not many said that their children usually come home for lunch. I told them to give them a packed lunch. I even suggested some of the things that they could give them in their lunch kit; they could have pudding and milk just to name a few.

I then thought of a proper dining area for the students, so with the assistance of the P.T.A and Past Students, the dining room was built. I then introduced a breakfast programme which went very well. Students no longer had the excuse of coming late to school because they had to wait for breakfast at home. Students were now proud to sit in their lovely furnished dining room. In the same year for the first time, I hired a school nurse to care for the students’ health. I went back to the P.T.A and told them they had to raise more funds to build a sick bay and a nurse’s station. They co-operated with me and that was accomplished. Students were now able to relax in a peaceful and comfortable environment when they were ill. I also hired an extra member of the ancillary staff to care for these two new areas.

HIGHLIGHTS

Education

G.C.E (Ordinary Level) was replaced by CXC. G.C.E (Advanced Level) was replaced by Cape. The annual results were acceptable with the “A” Stream performing better than other streams.

Errol Eccles of the “A” streams passed 12 subjects with a number of distinctions in the annual G.C.E results. That was remarkable for the normal number of subjects by the brightest students were eight (8). He sat and passed 5 G.C.E. Advanced Level subjects. The average candidate sat 3 subjects. Later, he went on to win the Commonwealth Scholarship, another first in history of St. Jago.

The winning of scholarships flowed during the period. These included the Jamaica Scholarship, The Independence Scholarship, The Marcus Garvey Award and the Esso Scholarship was won by Roger Bulgin (invite Roger to stand for the applause of his peers). We broke new ground by winning the Rhodes scholarship for the first time (1981).

Sports

St. Jago attended the annual Penn Relays. Michael Williams won the Gatorade Trophy for his brilliant performance on the track. The year we won Boy’s Championship, St. Jago won most of the major relays by the boys. At the Los Angeles Olympics (1984) Gregory Meghoo ran an outstanding leg on the 4 x 100 relay for the Jamaica team to earn a silver medal while still a school boy to begin a generation of Olympians for St. Jago High School.

Did you know that at the World Games held in Beijing, China that eight (8) St. Jago athletes were on the Jamaican team? St. Jago won Boy’s Championship for the first time in 1987 and would have won for the next three years predictably, if the coach had not migrated to Jamaica College and encouraged the members of the St. Jago team to do the same, also members of the Penn Relays team absconded to pursue the American dream. I emphasized athletics and employed a new coach for the girls in the person of Carl March. That is why a group of past students came to visit me in my retirement and asked if I would mind naming the pavilion “The Victor Edwards Pavilion”. I agreed. The pavilion assumed a new importance as various names were suggested for the honour. The School Board was consulted and the Board members had other ideas. The chairman told me that my image was too large to be restricted to a mere pavilion. I have since written to the chairman telling him I had agreed to the proposal of the past students who visited. I told him it is a question of “honour - a gentleman should keep his word.

The matter is still unresolved. Perhaps you could add your voice as an association in favour of my choice.

Cricket: We were always feared in this sport.

Football: This is the only sports in which we failed to win a major Trophy. I warned the past students to desist from referring to St. Jago as a cricketing school. That was the old St. Jago.

Drama: The Drama Club was very much alive during my administration. Members invited luminaries such as Barbara Gloudon and Leonie Forbs to hold seminars for the constant renewal of the Club. The club successfully entered the annual Drama Festival. Wayne McDonald a former Head Boy, who was outstanding in this field, was asked to give the closing speech at the Festival on one occasion.

Debates: When RJR and the ministry of Education combined to have a debating competition among the high schools, Adrian Robinson, the Communication Consultant for RJR came to my office seeking help for the planning of the programme. I was compelled to point out the number

of so-called important institutions he had passed before reaching St. Jago High. His reply was “We know what to look for and where to find it”. That was a high compliment indeed. We went on to win the competition with the usual St. Jago regularity.

Essay Prize: Sophia Hibbert won an essay prize to India. She was in Third form. Another prize trip was won to New York. There were numerous awards in the Foreign Language Department, Spanish and French.

Cadet Corp: The cadets won the annual inspection regularly. The cadets of St. Jago introduced St. Catherine High School to this activity and established a unit there and trained the new recruits. St. Jago High had one of the few drum Corps associated with the unit on ceremonial occasions, the police were anxious to engage the services of the St. Jago High School Drum Corp.

Best High School: That erudite Professor Errol Miller, former Head of the Faculty of Education U.W.I conducted a research to determine the best high school in Jamaica 1989. St. Jago High School emerged as the best high school in Jamaica. He was and still is, a Calabar High School Past Student, so that this research was not as fraudulent one. “Best high School in the region” would sound better; but we will get there.

CONCLUSION: This status is achieved by multiplicity of activities and motivation in their execution. The New York Alumni Association inscribed on the plaque presented to me. “You were the wind beneath our wings.” What higher compliment could one desire? They were referring to my motivational qualities. St. Jago High School, you are the best of the best!!!

APPEAL: The school deserves your support. A past student is now the Principal as you all know I suggest each past student could begin by saving a dollar per day. You would be surprised at the amount accumulated at the end of the year.