

**GLENWOOD HIGH SCHOOL
JUNIOR SPEECH & PRIZEGIVING CEREMONY
22ND FEBRUARY 2018**

**GUEST SPEAKER
CHRISTOPHER SWIFT: GIBSON HOUSE PREFECT (1990)
ACCOMPLISHED ARTIST**

20 min Glenwood Awards speech

Thank you Mr. Jordan. Good morning. It's really a pleasure to be hear from Cape Town, I can finally have a bath without a neighbour reporting me to the Water Police! It's a real honour and privileged to be talking to a version of myself from almost 30 years ago when the world was young and I was a grasshopper.

30 years goes by in a streak! And as I'm sure a couple of the vetran's will agree it seems to speed up with each passing year. But it doesn't mean you can't jam pack every moment with all that life has to offer. Life is for the LIVING!

George Bernhard Shaw said, "Youth is wasted on the young". **YOUTH IS WASTED ON THE YOUNG.**

What he meant was, **When you are young, you don't realise yet how precious and SPECIAL TIME is....**(much Like how we used to feel about water in the Cape), You have an abundance of it! Your whole life lies before you. Yet!, many of you can't wait to get passed the frustration and awkwardness of this stage. But in reality, It's a fantastic age to be, **IN** a fantastic AGE! Right now **there are so many more options for you than there are limits!**

We are living in the most exciting time that ever there was in human history. A South African is putting rockets up into space and then landing them back on the very same spot they took off from! Maybe we've overcooked our progress globally, but life in South Africa is still in a special age of access, affordability, opportunity. South Africa by world standards is relatively unexploited and unpopulated! And even in the South African landscape, you lot in Durbs have got a good grip on what's important for a happy and sustainable lifestyle. Land of the Sharks, warm oceans, baggies, bountiful rain; Home of Warren Whitely & Chad Le Cloux.

When I was sitting where you are now, I had **No idea** what or where I'd be in the future. All I knew is that I'd give of my best in everything I did.

I've tasted the adrenaline in my saliva before jumping out a plane, or off a bridge or down a grade 5 rapid. I've enjoyed the reward of an early morning wake up to catch a sunrise over the Navada desert, Tanzanian Serengeti, Natal Drakensburg or the Marlboro Sounds in New Zealand. I've braved the Olympic half pipe with my snowboard in Vermont, Killington and experienced minus 30 degrees temperature. I've paraglided near the battlefield of Hastings in England on my maiden solo flight. My lungs have burnt holding my breath clinging to a giant Sea Turtal in the Madagascan coral reef. I've raced across the Golden Gate bridge at 2 in the morning. I've watched countless sunsets in spectacular settings like Morocco, Melbourne, Edinburgh, Yosemite, the Florida Keys, Tijauna and Lagos. I've completed ultra marathons and epic mountain and road bike races. And I crapped myself when a whale breached infront of me in Natures Valley and stayed with me for the longest 3 minutes of my life.

In my business career I've sometimes chosen, sometimes been forced to re-invent myself multiple times to keep up with my interests and because things change. I've pushed shopping carts and flared bottles behind a bar, I've had a go at starting a food trailer franchise and have invented a bread tag promotional thingymagig, I studied Graphic Design and then Fine Art 15 years later, I worked in advertising both here and abroad. I've co-founded 5 small start up companies and one Trust. Our animation company in London took advantage of a small window that opened due to the advance in technological processing power and on another occasion we turned a pile of scrap metal into precious metal – and on both accounts it was because I was available to seeing things differently from the conventional world. You see, growing up in SA gives us a unique perspective on the world and we are able to see opportunities where other people might see hopelessness. In fact the golden thread in all of my artwork is about finding or salvaging the best of a bad situation. Hope is a powerful agent for positive change.

All this uncomfortable boasting is in an effort to create context to who this stranger is before you. So if you'll indulge me further I'd like to impart 5 anecdotes of reflection of my time at Glenwood and the years that have followed:

1. Don't judge a book by it's cover:

By the time I started Grade 9 at Glenwood, it was my 11th school. That's just how things were in my early life, jobs, marriages and blended families had us settle and uproot in new towns all over South Africa, from Vereeniging, to Vanderbyl Park, Cape Town, Glencoe, Newcastle, Pinetown, Scotburgh, Ladysmith, Jhb... We really did get to see the country!!!

The years at this school were my stability... my sanity, my island in a moving sea, my chance to make my own decisions within the limits and framework of boarding school and high school. From this rock I was able to build a future. This is the place where I sourced my pride. This is the tradition from where I gleaned my confidence to mix with equal comfort with Porpers and Lords.

This school isn't for everyone!! It's impossible to create a 'one size fits all' school especially in such a fast developing era of individuation and self importance. I don't say that negatively, I'm a great believer of finding ones unique voice, unique talents, gifts or passions... However, those passions and talents are God given gifts to be developed and shared and celebrated like we are doing here today, but **they're not the thing that the earth revolves around**. We need a healthy perspective when it comes to our individuation. We also need to understand where that special talent fits into the bigger more glorious picture.

So you might be surprised or intimidated at first by school traditions, but my advise is to stick with it, give it the benefit of the doubt. In a very short time you will transition in this space from a boy to a man and in years to come, those traditions that separate this school from another will be the identity and memory you cleave to. And because you've endured them and celebrated them you will have a sense of ownership around this school.

And if there are some of you in this assembly of a thousand who feel they don't fit in, or who's talents and passions may lie outside the conventional, some boys who have an interesting past already, **or** some boys who think their past or current is not interesting enough, or some boys who haven't worked out what they're good at

yet...**I recognise you.** Because you were my friends at Glenwood. Take it from a freakish guy who was awarded the Art Prize and the Religious Education prize but who also lead the Green Machine into battle RIGHT!? If you're different, Don't fight it, embrace it, become it, be proud of it, don't be different by opposition, find out your value within.

I learnt recently that the condition of ADD (Attention Defecit Disorder) or ADHD is a gene for survival. That one guy sitting around the fire in the cave, was the first guy to notice the sabre tooth tiger and could raise the alarm whilst his clan were engrossed in a camp fire story. I don't know if it's true, but I like the analogy. The world needs all types. The optimist invented the plane. The pessimist invented the parachute! Both are very necessary!

So, please don't judge a book by it's cover. There's so much you **cant** know right now!

2. Humility

My father attended Glenwood! Played for the infamous and legendary 1964 side. I think Mr. Maher was a young master at Glenwood at the time? Well, it was arguably one of the most successful rugby teams before the modern era. My dad, 'Cat' Swift (they all had nicknames in those days) played Natal Schools and went on to play a few games for Natal before joining the parabats in Bloemfontein.

I had big boots to fill when I got here and I'd be lying if I didn't admit that being nominated First Team Rugby captain at 17 was by far my proudest accolade of my short career till that stage....But ecstasy soon turned to agony as I became the proud Captain of possibly Glenwood's ALL TIME worst performing 1st XV EVER!!!

I'd been the captain of a winning streak team for 4 years and all of a sudden when we got to the big leagues we flopped. Teams we'd taken 100 points off only 2 years before were now beating us. We peaked too early! Relied on Super Stars who weren't there come Matric. Even our most guaranteed win against a co-ed school, Port Natal was fraught with disaster. Their 1st XV coach had died on the Wednesday. We just couldn't catch a break. And in a Japan Vs Springbok type calamity and the chanting of "Hierdie een is vir die Coach!" in a deluge of rain, we were the first and probably last Green Machine ever to loose against Port Natal! It was devastating.

Each week and each loss that passed we thought things would change for the better...and all season long they just didn't. I kid you not, that set of circumstance haunted me for years. I had nightmares about it! I realised that I'd been carrying around the embarrassment and dishonour of our entire school. Our only concilation was that our one win was against the best side of that year, and we did it on Old Boys Day!

My folks lived in Joburg at the time and my dad came down to support as many games as he could. I thought I'd see the disappointment in his eye, but he said he couldn't be prouder, not to worry about the results, know that I gave it my all and that one day I'd be thankful for the humility!

A few years after school I played club rugby and then for the London Tribes in the UK which I did for 6 years. On debut I scored a hatrick of tries. I've got to tell you, it tasted **1,000 times** sweeter than humility!!!... I'm just kidding, but it did feel good to win. There is honour and happiness in victory as there is respect and wisdom in

humility. Both are appropriate. CS Lewis writes, “**Being humble is not thinking less of one’s self but thinking of one’s self less.**”

3. Make mistakes

Make mistakes!?! That sounds strange, what’s the catch? I don’t mean on purpose. What I mean is don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Believe me, please please believe me...It is easier to make mistakes NOW. This is the time in your life where you get to try things, feel things out, put your own spin on something. It’s good to learn from the experts, from books, youtube, Google...but the person who will learn quickest is the individual who puts these learnings to the test, tries them out, figures them out for himself.

It’s easy to imagine, good schooling, whether it be private education or what you have here, is expensive...almost elite. The costs are high and the expectations are higher. It’s natural to succumb to the fear of not getting it right, not performing, not achieving, what if I don’t...? The closer you get to Matric, the more serious it becomes because that normally has a bearing on what comes after school, studies, university, professional sport, earning and eventually supporting a family, paying taxes and then dying!!! I’m being dramatic of course, but can you see how quickly things can escalate. Don’t worry about the so called fail. **Multiple fails are the secret to success.** I’m not talking about being a loser or a victim, I’m talking about trying your best always in everything you do AND not being too attached to getting it wrong (or getting it right for that matter).

Resisting the chance to fail is to resist the chance to succeed.

4. Stay curious!

Curiosity comes naturally to your stage of life and as we get older we slowly allow limits and complacencies to turn off the fires in our life. Keep them burning, keep them alive, feed them valuable content. Stay curious and get going. Don’t live someone else’s life. Dare to have your own dreams and go out and get them. **If you aim for the stars and you fall short, you’ll still land on the moon.**

5. Don’t eat yellow snow

For those who will go onto ski or snow board...don’t eat yellow snow!

So in closing, I have 2 things left to say:

To all those gifted and/or dedicated boys who are receiving awards today...Congratulations! You deserve it. It didn’t come easy, even if you made it look easy from the outside. Enjoy this moment on stage, save the memory for the next time you need to dig deep.

And to all those gifted an/ or dedicated boys who are not receiving awards today...Keep trying, keep persevering, keep striving – your reward will appear.

Thank you.