

Thomas Davison-Aitkins' Thanksgiving Service Reminiscence Speech, March 24, 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen, fellow Regentonians.

I would like to thank the Old Boys Association for giving me the honour and privilege of delivering this year's reminiscence speech.



I entered the Sierra Leone Grammar School in January 1953. As was customary in those days, I had been looking forward to following in my father's footsteps, and marching to Thanksgiving Service together, just like this one today. The anticipation of my first day was great. The night before, I was unable to sleep due to my excitement, anxiously awaiting the morning, which seemed an age. When it finally dawned, I quickly got dressed in my new school uniform, had some

breakfast, put books and lunch in my bag, said my good-byes, and set out. I joined the throng at Eastend Police Station and made my way to school. The throbbing of my heart as I went through the gates! What an experience!! I remember it well.

And, so my first day began at the Grammar School. At assembly we were welcomed, both old and new, by the principal Frank Wood, vice-principal Kama Taylor, and the other members of staff. We then filed out to our various classrooms for roll call, all the while exchanging names and making friends.

I only knew a handful of my new classmates: Arnold Gooding (we were friends from Ebenezer School and had sat the common entrance together), Melvin Lisk from the Cathedral Choir, and George Tregson Roberts. Others in our class that day were Henry Ferguson, Bash Taqui, Imran Rahman, Lemuel Johnson, Farrell Cuthbert (now in South Africa), and Cyril Showers (our illustrious

Chairman's father), to name a few. But by the end of the day, we were all comfortable with each other and firm friends.

At lunch, we were chased around the playground by older pupils beating us with extensions from a huge tree by the canteen, as part of our initiation! It was surprisingly great fun and we looked forward to the next year, when we would be the ones with the extensions! We then returned to class relatively unscathed, till 2pm, when school ended. What a day! I had arrived! I was finally a Regentonian!

As you are aware, our school is well known for its academic and sporting prowess and in my day, we were very fortunate to have some excellent teachers: Mr West for Geography, Evan Johnson (history), Miss Hearst for English, Miss Northwood for Latin, Prof Ballanter, Rev Anderson, and many others. And to crown it all, Mrs Kellogg, an American of African descent with the sweetest voice you ever heard. All the male teachers were quite enamoured with her as you can imagine. She taught French!

We used to go on bi-lateral cricket match tours to Bo School and Magboruka, and had inter-school matches with Prince Wales the other boys' schools. Our team was quite good, with teammates like Teddy Jones and Ulric, John Kister, and an excellent and talented off-spinner (Zub), now Dr. Zubairu. I was the open batsman. We were coached by our the Biology teacher, Mr Dan Decker, a former Cambridge graduate. We had great times, made good friends and they visited us on alternate years. Over the years, many of the young men from these schools have been chosen to represent Sierra Leone's cricket team. Also, the annual sports day was always eagerly anticipated and hugely competitive between the various Houses. I was in Tertius (sky blue colours). I remember one year representing my House in the Dressing Competition and winning, which added points to our overall House score. We also

had a good athletics team, too: Emile Macauley, Oronto Pratt and many others.

On one occasion after our sports day, Pa Reffle who was responsible for sports, was giving a report on the day at assembly and when it came to the attendance, that is the number of pupils, who participated he said “420 boy took part”. The whole assembly could be heard going “ssssssss” after “boy” and great laughter ensued. That must have made our day.

Also, one memorable day in our lives happened in 1957 when a general strike was called by the Labour Movement, led by the then secretary and future president, Shaka Stevens. It turned into a riot and the inevitable looting. The army and police were mobilised with guns and real bullets. For us boys, it was both exciting and frightening, because the only gun fire we would have ever heard were those fired on special occasions like the King’s or Queen’s birthday, but never small arms fire. School was closed and we were sent home in groups, accompanied by teachers, who swiftly disappeared out the gates.

I could go for hours Ladies and Gentlemen, but above all else, apart from the educational side of things for which we were primarily at the grammar school, we enjoyed our time there and



left the school with a rounded education, and equally, rounded human beings. The friendships we forged there have been enduring and memorable through the years. As our school song says: “Comrades True”, a lasting bond.

Floreat Regentonia. God Bless our Grammar School.

Thank you.