

Assembly 5 November 2007

New Experiences

This morning, I would like to tell you three personal short stories; one from the distant past, one from last year and one in the future. Through these stories I hope that you will understand why it is important to always be open to new experiences in life.

As you are probably aware by now, I really enjoy football. I watch the English Premier League on television each weekend and make sure that I read the newspaper summaries on Monday mornings. My enjoyment of soccer started when I was at school. I played in the midfield and was given the job of covering the backline as well as going on the attack. My coach told us that mid-fielders are the play-makers in the team.

In my school days, the soccer ball was made of thick leather, held together by laces. The ball was very heavy indeed when it became wet meaning that playing in the rain or snow was quite a challenge. Only the bravest (or foolish) of players dare head the ball and only the boys with the strongest kick would take a penalty; to make sure the ball reached the goal line.

On Saturday afternoons I would watch a professional football match in my home town and had a collection of magazines with team lists, match reports and photographs of my favourite players. Of course, a poster of the team that I supported held pride of place on my bedroom wall. My passion for football continued during my university days and then into my teaching career. Indeed, I always coached a soccer team in my younger years as a teacher.

In my opinion, no other game could be as good as football or worthy of my interest. It was while I was teaching in Cambridge, however, that a boy in one of my classes asked if I would like to watch the school rugby team. I had never watched a live game of rugby and had only occasionally seen a match on television. I did not know the rules nor knew the name of any professional rugby players. I did have something else planned on the morning that the school rugby team was playing but because the boy obviously wanted me to share his excitement for the game, I said “yes, thank you”.

So, along to the ground I went to watch the first XV rugby union team. As a result of that morning's new experience, I came to enjoy the game, to understand the rules and to follow the progress of the top international teams. I still believe that nothing tops soccer as a game but I now have an appreciation and respect for another code of football.

My second story is about music. I have always been interested in classical music, starting piano lessons when in primary school and progressing to Grade 8 when I was in Form 6. I also played the Church organ during my teenage years. As you can understand, I was brought up on a mixture of Bach, Beethoven and Mozart and with a very Western idea of what music is all about.

During my first weeks in Hong Kong, somebody asked if I would like to attend a concert being given by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra at the Concert Hall. I had no hesitation saying "yes, thank you" but I also had little idea what I would experience. I had no prior knowledge about the different instruments and the style of music. It was not until the curtain was raised did I notice that the orchestra was divided in four sections comprising bowed-strings, plucked-strings, wind and percussion instruments. Furthermore, it was not until the Chinese orchestra played did I realise that the scale has only five notes and that the structure is melodic rather than harmonic.

Over the past eighteen months, I have attended a number of concerts and listened to our College Chinese Orchestra on many occasions, the most recent being last Saturday afternoon. Rather like my new rugby experience, I have come to appreciate the skill required in playing a traditional Chinese instrument and the complexity of the music. My world is richer because of this experience.

My third story is about Church. I have attended a Church for as long as I can remember. My parents were Christian as were all members of my family that went before. I would say that I am a very traditional Christian; I go to Church each Sunday morning, sing the hymns, say my prayers and take Communion. I have come to know a number of the people who attend St. John's Cathedral each week and I feel safe and comfortable in such surroundings.

At the end of this month there is a Christian Rally being held at Hong Kong Stadium. The rally organisation committee is expecting the stadium to be full, if not overflowing. I have never been to a rally of this kind and have certainly never attended any activity where 40,000 people will be watching something other than soccer. I am interested to know what will happen at the rally, what will be said, what people will do, how people will react. Indeed, I am curious enough to want to go along and find out for myself.

The point of my three short stories is that life is about experiences and being prepared to do something different. It is about moving out of your comfort zone. I say to you, grasp opportunities when they come along for you never know where they might lead.