



I begin my report this year with some endings - paradoxical though that may sound. We bade farewell to 6 staff members whose time at Beaulieu came to an end.

Ms Moalusi joined our staff in 2019 and worked with precision, professionalism and commitment, all the while studying part time towards a teaching qualification. Ms Moalusi joined the intern programme at KPS this year and I have no doubt that she will go from strength to strength in her new role.

Ms Dodge, who joined our English department in 2019, left us to try her hand in the corporate sector. We wish her all the best with her future endeavours and thank her for the contributions she made in the past 3 years.

Mrs Gray retired at the end of last year, to well-deserved rest in the Western Cape. She has been a stalwart of the marketing department for over a decade. I am deeply grateful for the loyalty she has shown to our College and to the Kyalami Schools brand, and thank her for her unfailing commitment to our group, but most particularly to our College. I know that Lynette, even in retirement, will continue to proudly advocate for the Beaulieu College that she loves so much, and that it, and the people within it, will always occupy a special place in her heart.

Mrs Jacqui Smith or Ms Payne (as many of you still call her), was a ray of sunshine from her first day at Beaulieu. Eager, willing, kind and helpful she put her heart and soul into everything she did over the past 4 years. As a mathematics teacher, grade tutor, dance instructor or matric dance organiser, Mrs Smith has left her mark at the College for years to come. We wish her only good fortune as she joins her husband to take up residence in the United States. She may have the stars and stripes flying overhead, but her blood will always be green, and she will always be a blue and white of Beaulieu College. We hope her visits home will be frequent and regular in the years to come.

Ms Aldi Smith served Beaulieu for a decade as an outstanding teacher of all things mathematical. When Mr Ruiz Mesa became a Deputy, Ms Smith was appointed to lead our Mathematics department, and she did so with great success, and to very exacting standards, for 3 years. She is a much beloved teacher, colleague, boffin and star wars/marvel comics geek. Her great passion is Mathematics and the sense of awe and wonder she exudes for her subject every day will no doubt serve her well as she leaves us to take up the HOD maths position at Michaelhouse this year.

And then there is Mr Kenyon – how does one begin to pay tribute to a man who has done so much for this College? When he arrived at our school as the first Deputy Head of Co-Curricular, the programme was all but non-existent. He has grown it to be the thriving, comprehensive, offering of today. Being a man of many talents, he has, over the years, also taken on many other roles including overseeing the maintenance of the Buildings and Grounds and organising more school tours than I can count. He has taught Mathematics, Geography, EMS and Maths Literacy – or Maths Lite – as he likes to call it, but most significantly he has taught everyone who comes into contact with him how to laugh – at his incredibly bad jokes.

As Deputy Head Pastoral he has introduced many new initiatives – including the SRC, the overseas exchange and the pupil counselling service. He was a Deputy on whom I relied heavily and often, and without whose support I would never have survived the past decade.

Fortunately he will not be too far away as he takes up his new position as Group Facilities Manager. Never forget that Beaulieu College is your first born and must always remain your favourite school in our group, occupying the largest space of your heart. Thank you Mr Kenyon for everything you have done for the school, for the pupils, and for the staff - words will never be enough to thank you for the massive contribution you have made in this beautiful place.

Like 2020, 2021 was an extraordinary year. I didn't think it possible to be more exhausted than I was at the end of 2020 – yet when I reached the end of 2021 I was even more depleted than at the end of 2020. Yet, at the same time, I felt a sense of elation and deep pride at the tenacity, perseverance and astonishing achievements of our pupils in these unprecedented times. 2021 was a year in which I have learned the value of reflection and so this report is going to focus not on the many achievements which will be chronicled in the school magazine and were reported in the biweekly newsletters which went out over the course of last year, but rather on what we all may have learned in the past year - some of us without even realising it.

I must start by acknowledging the remarkable group of people whose efforts have brought us to this point. The staff continued to give every ounce of their energy to this College and the pupils within it throughout 2021. I know how exhausted they all were at the culmination of last year and I know how much they needed the rest which the December holiday brought.

I am immeasurably grateful to each and every one of them. I marvel at their resourcefulness, patience and care, and at their willingness to

face every new challenge with positivity and resolve. Thank you for always going above and beyond in order to maximise learning opportunities for our pupils. Thank you for caring for one another, for supporting your peers through thick and thin. 2021 brought many changes and challenges and you have, as always, pulled together as a unit to weather whatever storms you had to face. I salute you and I thank the powers that be daily that I have you all by my side each working day.

2021 was the year in which we regularly hoped things would return to normal, then steadily realised that they wouldn't any time soon! What followed was some in depth questioning whether we really did want the old normal back, and, if not, what the new normal should look like now. This sparked the realisation that we are never really going to return to the old normal again.

It was a year of waiting for things to get better, while making the unbearable bearable and the unimaginable workable on a daily basis. A year where we all learned the art of multi scenario planning - of being ready with at least 3, usually more, alternate plans to do any one thing at any given time.

2021 was a year of agility, elasticity and adaptability.

And just when we thought we would get to the end of the year without another run around the mulberry bush, the fourth wave took us with a speed and force that none could have predicted. If we had not learned to be so agile, we would simply have been overwhelmed at that point, so close to the finishing line. But like all of the other changes throughout the year, many of us took the last 2 weeks of 2021 in our stride – even though plans C, D and E were having to be revised and changed at the last second, never mind the last minute.

In October last year, circumstances dictated that I change the venue of the Valediction just 24 hours before the function. Knowing the overwhelming logistics of doing so, I expected chaos to ensue. However, I received nothing but calm, accepting, can-do attitudes from the staff arranging said function. It dawned on me then that this pandemic had not just taken things away from us, but that it was no doubt also giving things back.

If I had been faced with this kind of upheaval, with this kind of short notice a couple of years ago when I was organising the valediction – I have no doubt that I would have run for the hills or taken immediate early retirement – or both. But there we were, post 2020 and most of 2021, brave enough to take such decisions without hesitation and strong enough, calm enough and experienced enough to enact major change at a moment's notice without hesitation, panic, or even a slight fuss. COVID has taught us to do that.

Which really got me thinking – what are the other things we have learned and gained, thanks to COVID.

As the good old SWOT analysis tells us, there are not only threats, but also opportunities in every crisis. By opportunities I don't mean that the crisis provides extra business for companies like Zoom and Amazon. I mean general opportunities that are available for most people affected by the crisis. The current COVID crises offers at least a few: that I can think of.

Opportunity 1: Reflect and reconsider

The fact that the ongoing pandemic disrupts our day-to-day lives provides an opportunity to reflect on those things with which we fill our time and to reconsider what we do, how we do it and why we do it. This offers a great opportunity to rethink our habits and routines and make positive changes. While the virus may have forced us to

make changes to our daily lives – we might find that we actually want to keep a lot of these changes, even after the crisis has passed.

Opportunity 2: Speed and innovation

Many organizations, schools included, suffer from slow procedures, complex bureaucracies and rigid hierarchies making organizational life less than pleasant. The coronavirus has forced us to break through these rigid systems in order to act more instantly. Suddenly procedures can be skipped or accelerated, rules can be side-tracked and decisions can be made more autonomously. Which makes us wonder, why did we need these onerous systems in the first place? I am convinced that post COVID there will be a simpler, more efficient way of getting most things done.

COVID has also shown us that, as soon as there is a strong enough stimulus, things CAN change. This leads to remarkable innovations. Not being allowed to open their doors, restaurants, for example, shifted to delivery mode. And schools suddenly do much of the teaching and even some of the testing online. This brings the opportunity to create innovations now that can be maintained after the crisis. I am certain that most organisations, schools and societies will strive to maintain the current speed and innovation mode post COVID.

Opportunity 3: Reconnect and help

Challenging times offer a great opportunity for social bonding and other ways of connecting to and helping people. Of course, not being able to visit friends or family has increased isolation and feelings of loneliness in some cases. But the feeling of “we’re in this together” has also triggered interesting ways of connecting. Some of those went viral—such as Italians singing together from their windows and balconies—but there are many small, local initiatives too that connect

to and help people in need. The PTF COVID army was just one such initiative at the College, where parents reached out to assist and support families who had suffered loss.

In the individualized societies many of us live in, COVID provided opportunities to reconnect and create more social coherence, a chance to reach out and show others that we genuinely care. Not only during the crisis, but also afterwards.

Opportunity 4: Modesty and acceptance

COVID did nothing if not bring us all down to size. It created a real awareness of the moderate role we play on this planet and an acceptance that things cannot always go as we want them to go. The pandemic proved that no matter how well-planned and organized we are and no matter how much we live in the Anthropocene—the era characterized by significant human impact—we are not always in control.

One simple virus is disrupting everything. This offers a great opportunity. In almost every aspect of life we want to be in control. Whether it is health, airline safety or our calendars, we live in the illusion that full control is possible. The virus can help us understand and accept that many things are simply beyond our control. To let that go and to work with what we can control. It gives us renewed focus which has led to greater productivity.

Opportunity 5: Teens reconsidering digital life

In the past 2 years, we have suffered periods of lockdown and multiple occasions when people have been forced to isolate or quarantine. There have been several periods when schools have moved online and office workers have been told to work from home. This has left people

of all ages feeling a sense of dislocation and dependence on technology. In this regard, our teens are in a unique position.

Many people assume Gen Zeds prefer everyday interactions mediated by screens -- they have been using modern technology since before they could walk, so naturally they would not be as affected by social distancing. Whether it be Snapchat, Facetime or TikTok, our pupils had been actively choosing to communicate digitally long before COVID forced us to.

But even though they are digital natives, the assumption that they would be comfortable living a fully digital life is wrong. When online schooling became the norm our pupils slowly came to realise the value of in-person interactions. And when school returned to campus they were genuinely happy to be here! No-one was more shocked by this than them!

Studies have shown that social interaction is beneficial to our physical and mental health, and that relationships are particularly important in adolescence. Social isolation, by contrast, has a negative impact on brain development and behavioural patterns. These are not surprising facts. However, before this pandemic, many teens thought they could fulfil the need for human connection by communicating with others online.

Most, if not all, have realised that they were mistaken. Online schooling affects the way our pupils are feeling, behaving and sleeping. Many have told me they feel more anxious, lonely and unhappy when they cannot come to school. Facetime, Zoom, iMessage and other forms of digital communication do not have the same effect as being with their friends and loved ones in person, or being in a classroom with their teachers and classmates.

I think this genuinely surprised our teens. Going to school was hardly something they thought they would miss! But remote learning takes away much of what makes high school enjoyable and special. Although they were able to stay in touch with their close friends through technology, they really missed the spontaneous, unplanned interactions that occur in everyday, on campus, real life.

The joke and banter shared with the bus driver in the morning, the high five with the Gr 8 pupil from their vertical tutor group, the mentor who always looks out for them after the rugby match to ask how it went, the help given by the class maths whizz with those difficult homework equations, the kind words of their teacher at the end of a difficult lesson, the surprising feeling of warmth on hearing the choir practising in the hall, and the joy of sharing the moment when the hockey team scored the winning goal.

School is about more than just learning in the classroom, and it seems impossible to get this feeling of community and sense of belonging online. Close your laptop and you're alone again. COVID has made many of our pupils realize how much they need school, not just an education.

Most have realised that they want and need not only return to school but also to place an even greater emphasis on community, real life engagement and the now rare pleasure of human interaction off of a screen.

So, yes, of course the Covid-19 crisis has a large dark side. But as these 5 opportunities show, it has positive sides as well. Since all of these opportunities require a quite fundamental change in how we approach the world, seizing them may take substantial time. In that sense, and if we keep on looking at the brighter sides of life, the longer the crisis lasts, the larger the opportunities are and the greater the

chances are of actually making changes to our deeply rooted habits and convictions which sometimes hold us back.

My advice - appreciate the time you have, make hay while the sun shines, but always, I mean always, expect the unexpected and be prepared to roll with it. 2022 is upon us and who knows what it will bring.

Mrs Danielle Meikle
Headmistress