

Rachel Darling, 1996 - 2001

When I was six I wanted to be a deep sea diver. It took me to the age of seven to swim back to the surface, see the light and announce I wanted to be a doctor. Or a surgeon if I remember correctly. I made the same announcement some years later to Dr Barron, the then headmaster of Longridge Towers at my first meeting with him prior to starting at the school at the age of 13. He listened, smiled and told me that when the school waved me off to medical school in five years time they would get me my first stethoscope. Any surgeon would understand the irony there. A stethoscope is not a surgical implement. All that is required is a strong will and a sharp knife.

Five happy years at school followed. Years of fun and laughter, opportunity, encouragement and a fair sprinkling of hard work. I played a few games of hockey, sat some exams. I made best friends that remain best friends to this day.

I recall going up to school to receive my A-level results at the age of 18. Through tears of trepidation I saw the same knowing smile, "I think we'll be getting you that stethoscope after all..." Longridge bestowed on me not only an education, but instilled in me the concepts of hard work, enthusiasm and above all belief. Belief in myself and belief that my enthusiasm and hard work would get me where I wanted to be.

My 5 years of medical school were not without their challenges, but were again years of fun mixed with maybe more than a sprinkling of hard work. I didn't play much hockey (everyone got so much bigger and tougher than me) but did sit a good few more exams. I left university first in my year, with shins intact and ready to embark upon my medical career.

During my first two years as a doctor I again saw the light, the light of the anaesthetic machine. I am now in my sixth of seven years training to be a consultant anaesthetist. There are many common misconceptions about anaesthetists. To clarify: yes, we are real doctors. No, we don't spend our days doing crosswords. Yes, we do drink a lot of coffee. No, our job does not just involve putting people off to sleep for their operations.

So what does an anaesthetist do?

I care for people at their most joyous, assisting in the birth of their child; at their most frightened and vulnerable, reassuring them and seeing them safely through their surgery; at their sickest, looking after them in intensive care; at their most sad, helping them through the death of a loved one. There are long hours and have been several more exams along the way. Every day is different, but every day I can make a difference to someone. For that reason amongst many others, I enjoy it and consider myself very fortunate in that.

I may not have become a deep sea diver, but what pearls of wisdom have I managed to recover? If you have a good idea of what you want to do, believe in it and enthusiasm and hard work can see you there. But what if you haven't known what you wanted to be since the age of seven? I might humbly suggest find something you enjoy. Throw enthusiasm and hard work at that, and it might just take you somewhere.

As it happens Longridge still owe me that stethoscope. I think I'll maybe just keep that schtum. I probably owe the school a good bit more in return.