

This evening is an evening of appreciation – a chance to recognise the incredible impact of a few, but also to celebrate the collective achievement of all Adult Scout Volunteers across Gloucestershire. Without you, this organisation, and the countless lives that it benefits would cease to exist overnight.

I cannot tell you what an honour it is to have been asked by the County Commissioner to speak tonight – I am purely an interloper who should be sitting in the crowds applauding you all on the stage.

I was 7 or 8 when I joined my local cub scout pack in Tetbury – ably led by our Akela, Francis Peter Clarke. I still have fond memories of evenings spent in the Scout Hall, doing activities, learning skills (such as knot tying – something which would come in handy for me later on in life) and making friends. Proudly being awarded badges (probably in exchange for a sweaty 50p piece). The build up to the epic Farriers' Challenge – an epic 3 mile hike one Saturday – treasured walking sticks, stung knees from tripping into stinging nettle bushes, KitKats and weak orange squash as our sustenance on this treacherous expedition to Long Newnton and back. The excitement of one light and warm summer's evening spent out on the grass learning how to put up a tent.

Remember – two good lessons to bear in mind when selecting a good pitching spot – I remember our Akela informing us. Firstly, make sure the ground is nice and flat, and secondly make sure you clear away all the stones and twigs from underneath the groundsheet area before you start putting the tent up. Wise words indeed – and in fact, those words were still ringing in my ears 14 years later as I approached the top camp on Everest, at 8200m on our summit attempt.

I'm sure you can imagine my chagrin to find a 30 degree slope, festooned with jagged boulders where we would have to be pitching our tents. Somehow I wished that Akela could have been there to see just how inconvenient our camp site was, and how comically irrelevant his wise words were in this situation. Perhaps I should have been more prepared.

I think about another person who influenced and inspired me greatly during my formative years – Rupert Rosedale, my outdoor activity instructor at secondary school. It is a strange contradiction, to be an adult charged with keeping young people safe, whilst encouraging them to take part in risky

pastimes like climbing, kayaking, scuba diving and expeditions. However it is this controlled exposure to risk which I still believe is absolutely key to young people's development, and helps to build vital character traits such as courage, resilience, discipline, self-reliance and patience – and doing so in an environment which requires ultimate demonstrations of leadership, teamwork and trust.

When I was 16, Rupert helped a group of us from school to organise an expedition to Mt Aconcagua in Argentina. At 6962m high, Aconcagua is the highest mountain in South America as well as the highest mountain in the southern and western hemispheres. It was an epic undertaking for a young school group, and my excitement at the chance to conquer another of the 7 summits (having welcomed the millennium dawn from the summit for Kilimanjaro the year before) was a huge driving factor in my desire and determination. At 16 years old, I was filled with a youthful sense of invincibility – that I could conquer the world, and nothing could stand in my way. Perhaps there is truth in the saying that 'pride comes before a fall'. Fast forward to day 16 on the mountain – we were on our summit push, and had just arrived at the top camp at around 6000m – and would spend the night there preparing for our final push to the top the following day. Having felt fine during the climb to the top camp, a few hours after I arrived at the camp, I started to feel unwell... headaches and nausea – the tell-tale signs of altitude sickness. I tried to hide the signs, to put on a stoic face, and not accept my body's reaction to the altitude. I barely ate that evening, I certainly didn't sleep that night, and as we rose at midnight to get ready for our alpine start, I ended up throwing up in my tent-mates boot. With that final indignity, I recognised that there was no way I'd be heading up with the rest of the team. I'd rest in camp for a few hours, and then start heading back down the mountain when the sun came up.

In the end, none of our team reached the summit. The weather changed several hours into their ascent – the wind picked up furiously, and they were forced to come back down. Whilst there was an element of shared acceptance that it wasn't meant to be for any of us – I couldn't shake the bitter taste of defeat – that sense that I had personally failed. I'd come all the way to South America to climb Aconcagua and it had defeated me. I'd failed. I'd lost. I was a loser.

I started catastrophising. If I couldn't get up something like Aconcagua, how on earth would I climb the other 7 Summits. That was it. The dream was over.

It was sitting in Mendoza airport getting ready to fly home that Rupert came and sat next to me and had a heart to heart. How was I feeling about the expedition. Where was my head at? I relayed my sense of inadequacy. Of defeat. Of failure. He looked at me with a twinkle in his eye, and a supportive smile spreading over his face:

“But Jake – you haven't failed at all. You're coming home safe and sound. All of us are coming home safe and sound. We may not have reached the top of a mountain, but by golly we've had an adventure haven't we? This expedition has been nothing but a success then!”

It was with those few powerful sentences that Rupert managed to completely turn around my mindset about the whole experience. To view it for what it had been, **not** what it hadn't been. He helped me reframe my perception of failure as an experience of learning. Churchill put it similar words – Success is not Final, Failure is not Fatal, it is the courage to continue that counts. Within a few minutes, my entire attitude had been turned around. My fear of failure and willingness to throw in the towel had now become my inspiration to pick myself up, dust myself off, and have another go. In that instant I vowed that I would return to Aconcagua. 2 years later – aged 18, I became the youngest person in the world at the time to solo Aconcagua.

That advice has stood me in good stead ever since. Rupert's inspirational legacy for me was a positioning that “the summit of a mountain may be the target, but the ultimate goal is to bring yourself, and your teammates all back safely” Every single step whilst climbing a mountain is an entirely legitimate turn around point – and if you happen to get to the ultimate arbitrary turn-around point (the summit), then lucky you. Although any climber would be very quick to point out that the summit is just half the journey.

After my first attempt on K2 in the summer of 2009 ended unsuccessfully, I remember visiting Rupert at his home in Marlborough. We sat together as I took him through the photo album, and he asked how I felt about not getting to the top. It was with no sense of irony, that I could look him squarely in the

eye and tell him that “I might not have got to the top, but I had an amazing experience, and my team and I all came home safe, and that’s all that counts”.

Rupert Rosedale was killed in an Avalanche on the Northside of Ben Nevis on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 2009. He was a father to two young children, and an inspiration to countless boys and girls who he had encouraged, tutored and cajoled to try outdoor pursuits whilst at school.

It took me two more attempts on K2, before I finally reached the top on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2018. Standing on the summit of the second highest mountain in the world I thought of Rupert, and the affect that he had had on my life. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was on the summit of K2, that I felt closest to him that I had in a long time, and I could almost imagine his pride at knowing what I’d achieved. It just goes to show that there are special people who can have such a profound effect on others that their words and actions continue resonating long after their echo has faded, like ripples on a pond.

This, of course is a day of celebration, rather than one of melancholic reflection. My example is hopefully a demonstration of the effect that one person can have on another – and yet I know that it would be swamped by all the similar stories that might be shared by the countless beaver, cubs, scouts, explorers, and families about all of you here tonight.

It’s been a strange year. A year of sacrifice, challenge and tragedy, but also a year of hope, togetherness and community. Like any expedition, our path is full of uncertainty, but we keep trudging together into the mist and claggage with a continued focus that we will prevail, whilst confronting the brutal facts of our current realities.

Life is full of uncertainty. It’s full of risks, of luck, happenstance and the downright bonkers moments. The importance of resilience as a character trait, has never been as significant as it is now. To be comfortable with being uncomfortable is something that will set the most resilient apart. For comfort itself is an illusion. It is a sense of self deception build from familiar things and familiar ways. Ultimately, it narrows the mind, weakens the body, and robs the soul of spirit and determination. Thankfully – I know that the scouting experience is not about comfort! The challenge and challenges that you provide to your charges is one of the greatest attributes of a Scout. A sense of

commitment, determination and perseverance – a willingness to get out of their comfort zones, to try new things, and to always, always be prepared.

It is perhaps clichéd to talk about great oaks growing from little acorns, however it is certainly not too far fetched to say that it is all of you who provide the vital nourishment which provides such an inspirational and supportive framework for the development of so many young people.

I am also reminded of the wonderfully inclusive environment which the scouting movement provides. All of you will have met and influenced young people from diverse backgrounds – and yet when they step through the threshold of your hall, or log on to that zoom call, their background or situation is of no consequence – they are all treated equally, and are all offered the same opportunities regardless of gender, age, colour, creed, orientation or any other divisions which society might deign to categorise them with. That sense of individuality, but within the context of one team is so key for young people, these days perhaps more than ever. We celebrate the authenticity of individuality, but at the same time promote the inclusivity of Integrity, Respect, Care and Believe.

Phrases such as ‘Enabling others’ and ‘life changing’ cannot be overused in your context. You are all part of something special and make a massive difference. What’s more you are all deeply special, respected and admired by those in your charge. You must not underestimate the positive impact that you have on those around you – the learning experience, the words of support, the safe environment you provide for young people to be themselves, but more importantly to better themselves.

Adventure and inspiration start from the smallest of acorns. They start with an adult saying: “You can do this”.

From me, as a former Gloucestershire Cub Scout, and on behalf of all beaver, cubs, scouts, explorers and their families. Thank you a thousand times over.