Good evening distinguished guests, my fellow Parramatta High students, past and present, teachers and friends of Parramatta High.

I am honoured and extremely humbled at being given the opportunity to speak to you tonight as the 2013 captain of Parramatta High School. May I begin by thanking each of you, on behalf of all the students of the school on the hill, for the loyalty, dedication and commitment that you have shown tonight as we join together to celebrate the Centenary of Parramatta High School, our school.

As the Girl Captain in the Centenary year, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for the opportunity and privilege to be a student leader of this magnificent school at such a momentous and historic time. These feelings are strengthened by the knowledge that in this room are so many former captains, male and female, who share with me the pride that goes with being captain of such a great place of learning.

Parramatta High School. These three words hold so much meaning for so many of us. Although it may be just the name of the school you only attended for a short while, you graduated from or taught and worked at, the power of the memories and experiences that we associate with those three words is phenomenal. For me, Parramatta High School has been a second home, a place where I not only received an outstanding education but a safe haven where I learnt so much more about life, people and my place amidst all of it. I have been proud to wear those three words each day on my school uniform and on my captain's badge, not only because it is a school which has a unique place in history as the first metropolitan coeducational high school in NSW, but because it has always been a school where true learning take place and all students have the opportunity to be the best they can be.

In my time as a student of PHS, I have been fortunate enough to have many outstanding teachers and opportunities that have not only aided my development as a learner, but have allowed me to develop my own personal values and a world view that has equipped me to meet the challenges of society. Parramatta High School programs such as the Global Citizens Initiative, run by the wonderful Dr Kate Sinclair, have inspired within many of us a clear vision of social justice and a desire for change. As students, we have been empowered through the school’s student leadership development activities and the many chances to share in decision making. We now believe we have a far bigger role to play within society and that we can indeed make the world a better place.

Parramatta High School is a place of learning. On one level, learning is about understanding the curriculum and getting great marks in exams. Our school certainly does strongly encourage these ideals of A-grade students and trying to achieve the best in all their studies. Our outstanding results are proof of this. I were to take you on a tour of 2013 Parramatta High, I imagine for many of you it would be quite a different spectacle compared with the PHS of your years. Imagine walking through the school gates and into the foyer outside the office. Mounted on the wall is a flat screen plasma TV that is on continual replay of images captured of Parramatta Highs most prized moments. School Spirit being displayed within the very first seconds of entering the hallways filled with history and promise. A visit to the
classrooms, the computer rooms, the science labs and library would see wonderful new tools of 21st century learning – netbooks, data projectors, smart boards and internet connectivity, all ensuring every student has the ability to access resources both online and interactively and to achieve to the best of their ability.

Perhaps more importantly, Parramatta High School also encourages another type of learning. It’s not just the type of learning that happens when you read a text book, research and write an essay or achieve through many hours of study. It is not just learning about things but about ourselves and our place in the world. It is learning that sometimes takes only a split second, a lesson which is forever stuck in your head, or even branded within your heart. It’s a lesson taught not with pen and paper, laptops or ipads but through the power of well-chosen words, values and integrity and can take place anywhere, the classroom, the playground or even in a group as large as the one assembled here tonight. It’s the lesson, the teaching, the learning and the understanding of one’s own capacity to not only stretch the boundaries placed on us by others, but to extend the boundaries we often put on ourselves. It’s the understanding that we all have the power to make a change, to live out our passions and to be urged not by the blaze of greed and materialism, but to be guided by the light of our own beliefs and ideals, of our own passions, and our own goals. And for this I thank Parramatta High School.

Distinguished ex-students, teachers and friends of Parramatta High School I have been asked tonight to share my life at the modern Parramatta High School. Put simply it has been an amazing journey. Every day, every week, every term and every year that I have spent at Parramatta High School, has held wondrous new surprises, exciting challenges and unforgettable memories. Even in my time there has been an explosion in the use of technology – it is an indescribable thrill to be able to skype from our classroom with students half way across the world. I have received an outstanding education in a school that celebrates diversity and embraces students from more than seventy different races and cultures. I have been privileged to witness and learn as a young woman from the leadership of our first female principal, Ms Splatt.

Our school motto refers to the torch of learning. I guess you can tell I love my school and what makes it that much more beautiful to me is that it allows its students to shine and sparkle in the spotlight of the torch of learning. Parramatta High School has helped the students of 2013 find their shine as individuals.

It is clear to me tonight that no matter how long ago you graduated, or how long ago you taught or worked at Parramatta High School, its powerful and lasting impression upon every single one of you is evident in the way that you are all still shining tonight.

Thank you Parramatta High.