

REMINISCENCES ON THE OCCASION OF THE 151ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE METHODIST BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL—6TH APRIL 2025

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Good morning Senior and Junior school principals and the staff of the school.

Good morning Old Boys of our Nursery.

Good morning our distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me such an immense pride to come back about twenty-two years after to offer reminiscences about my time at the MBHS. Permit me to share with you highlights of my days at the school we all so dearly cherish.

Our Laboramus Exspectantes!

ADMISSION

I was in the first form—One Alpha and our class teacher was the late Mrs. Emma Dupigny (may her soul rest in peace—I'd come to her many times later). Back then, to be in the Alpha class was the desire of every High School boy. My first personal encounter with Rev. Olivia Wesley (we, the High School boys call her "Mamie Wesley"), back then the disciplinarian extraordinaire of our school, took place within my first few months at MBHSS. It was when she came to our class to select the reader for the nine lessons and carol in December 1996. As per tradition, the pupil who was first on the admission list was to read. However, that day, the first two pupils did not quite read to the liking of Mamie Wesley. She called me, the third on the list and after reading few verses of the select scripture, she appointed me to read for JSS 1. That was a defining moment in my MBHS days.

I was admitted to the Methodist Boys' High School in 1996. Perhaps because of proximity as our residence at Thunder Hill, Kissy Mess-Mess was just about five minutes from the school. My father who attended Yengema Secondary School in Kono, sent all his four boys to MBHS (our last brother—Michael, was to later enrol a year after my completion). Prior to my admission my two elder brothers (Stephen and Emmanuel) had thoroughly captivated me with stories about the long academic pedigree of Laboramus Exspectantes. I learnt a lot from my elder brothers about the academic triumphs of the school and that was how I came to know about pupils like the late Prince A. J. Kenny and Manuela Harding to name a few whom I did not get to meet at the school when I enrolled. In fact, I could still vividly recall the strike action against the award of the Head Girl honour to Manuela Harding because my primary school, St. Michael's was affected and we were dispersed early on that day.

I was originally fourth on the admission list in 1996 having scored 340 at the NPSE. However, the boy who took the first position didn't enrol and that was how Olushogo Davies became first and I, third. As it was the tradition then (I doubt if this is the same to date), the new admissions had to enrol into an orientation class to learn about the history, traditions and etiquettes of the school before the academic year commences in September. I recall during the orientation classes that one of the old boys who taught us about the school was in fact one of my altar boys' leaders in my catholic church at Kissy. Aaron T. Koroma, was not just an old boy, he was one of the scout masters. That day, he taught us the Holiday Hymn "The happy days have come again that give us sweetest pleasures". He taught us the pitch cane-fully. I thought he would spare me, since he knew me as one of his altar-boy-mentees in church. His rod landed on every back accurately and indiscriminately.

LIFE AT THE MBHS (*Labour and Expect*)

Mrs. Dupigny, our JSS 1 class teacher, was more than just a teacher, she was a mother figure to us. My father, who himself was a teacher with long years of experience and who had three boys, in the school, was known personally by our principal, Mr. Nathaniel Williams, my class teacher, and most if not all of the teachers in the entire school. Mamie Dupigny as we used to call her taught us Integrated

Science but was available at all times to backstop whenever a teacher for any subject was absent. She did not only teach us virtually all subjects, but she would also pray for us at all times, for all reasons. At one point, Shogo Davies, who was top of the class in at least two assessments, reported to her that a classmate took a strand of his hair and put it in his pocket. Mamie Dupigny got us to pray for Shogo Davies for nearly half an hour that he would not be stripped of his brilliance by evil manipulations. However, by the time we got to JSS 2 and 3, I took the baton from him until he left the school after our BECE in 2000.

I was part of both the English and French drama teams. At one point in JSS2/3. I played a female role, with Alhaji Abu Komeh, as my brother, a role which was assigned to me by Monsieur Fofanah and Hannel Cole-Lewis. Monsieur Fofanah inspired my love for French. Doing French at JSS1 for the first time in my life was challenging. I did not quite understand, so I had to cram everything including long compositions. That was how I ended with a One in French at BECE. However, when he left the school I never had a French teacher for WASSCE. Few months before the exams, Mr. Pearce, our principal asked Monsieur Kenny, one time Senior Prefect, who was a French lecturer at FBC then to offer me few lessons. It was the only subject I scored a D at, at the WASSCE.

Mr. Nathaniel Pearce, our principal, the legend, was my very first inspiration in the love for good grammar and public speaking. I would look forward to all the times he would conduct devotions to leave me with new words and expressions. I recall that the very first poem I wrote, I submitted to him for his reviews. Mr. Pearce is a master wordsmith with creativity that has been probably unsurpassed in my worldview. He wrote masterful plays that I have not seen or witnessed elsewhere in Sierra Leone for the last two or three decades. I recall the play he wrote about mobile phones in 2001 or 2002. I acted in that play as one of the two main characters depicting the merits and abuse of the new mobile phone communication phenomenon. A friend who video-recorded a snippet of that play more than twenty years ago, has promised to share.

Academic competition at the Methodist Boys' High School was fierce during our time. I recall betting with now Dr. Joshua Coker, who was two classes ahead of me, that I would break his aggregate 8, BECE record. On the very day our BECE was announced, I was at Mamie Dupigny's house; she had called my father to inform him that the result would be out later that day. So, I hurriedly went to her house to await the announcement on radio. I scored an aggregate Nine—joint sixth nationally, and that was how I did not win against Dr. Coker. Mr. Pearce, my principal wanted me in the sciences because of my forte in maths but my father, was resolute on the arts stream because of my dream of becoming a lawyer. At SSS, my maths teacher would take me few times to the sciences to solve some math questions to provoke the science students to work harder in maths. Peter Bangura, who's currently Director of Mines at the National Minerals Agency, had joined us from another school at SSS. He was the top performer in the sciences, and he was trying very hard to demolish my records. But as a thoroughbred High School boy and also being the Head Boy, my records were already written in stones and so the typical science hegemony did not hold. At WASSCE, I got the best result with 3 As including in Mathematics and 3 Bs some twenty-two years ago when public examination results reflected almost immaculately the academic intellect of students.

Beyond the school, I recall participating in many fierce competitions with other schools. I recall meeting other students with whom I have forged lifelong friendships at such inter-secondary competitions or events. For instance, the first time I met Julian Cole, Claude Bhamee Davies, David Sengeh, Osman Timbo, Chornor Bah, Samzu Abaje, Tima Brewah, Kadiatu Kamara, Constance Cummings-John to name a few was at the Commonwealth Youth Parliament in 2002. In the second edition in 2003, I played the role of Majority Party leader. I also recall winning against the Prince of Wales School (with Julian Cole and David Sengeh on the team) in the Malaria Quiz Competition in 2002/2003. Earlier, they had eliminated us in the National Aids Secretariat quiz. It was a holy revenge and a clear message that they were our proteges, having given them in 1925 the very grounds on which their great school is built.

LIFE LESSONS FROM THE MBHS

Discipline: We had very dedicated teachers during our time. They were probably the best in their disciplines in the entire country. For example, the late Nelson Williams in Physics, the late Osho Williams in Literature, the late I. G. Bakarr and Mamie Moigura in Government, the late Sulaiman Sesay (aka Aspirilla) in History, and Lansana Konneh who was awarded last year as the longest serving teacher in Electronics. Unfortunately, most of our teachers were as good in their subjects as they were with the cane. Baba Neville, was known for the words “Back him up” and once he says that his cane would land in rapid succession for at least half a dozen times. I think it was Nelson Williams who preferred a baker’s dozen strokes when he meted out discipline. It was not that our teachers were mean or cruel to us. They were moulding us for the world. They knew that life was big before us and our prospects bright and so they had to ensure that we do and behave right.

Devotion: At the MBHS, I used to love the morning and after-school devotions. Maybe, not when Mamie Wesley, or Mamie Vincent or Mamie Dupigny were leading. They would force us to recite these Christian hymns. Later in life, as a Catholic now Pentecostal Christian, I would easily join in singing hymns at Anglican and Methodist services. Devotion was not just about ticking the box. It was a reminder that we begin our day with God and end it in God. As an High School boy, you are taught devotion to God is a prerequisite to start and a necessity to end. And this applies to other endeavours, whether in one’s career, business or other personal pursuits.

Journaling: Reading of the day’s journal was probably atop the list of my favourite memories of the MBHS. As a young pupil, I recall the upper and lower six and other senior pupils reading their journal entries to this day. Few names that I can recall were probably those ones who would read their entries in almost pin-drop silence: Quinton David, Paul Conteh, Bernadette, Juliet, Hannel Cole-Lewis, Sorie Conteh, Joshua Coker, Paulinus and Mark Kapuwa. Some of my year mates still recall their favourite lines from my own journal entries. One time, I wrote about the dominant echoes of “bra la ar bet” and “bra la ar suck” and pupils were left in stitches. Journaling was not just about getting pupils to write well and be descriptive. It was also about teaching a useful practice of documenting events and this has stuck with me to this day.

Labour and Expect: My favourite lines in our school song are “Long may be the tilling and the sowing late but the fruit will ripen if we toil and wait”. This explains the English interpretation of our motto “Laboramus Exspectantes”. At the MBHS, we are taught to work hard and expect the rewards of hard work. Whether in academics or other extra-curricular activities, we are taught that one should expect great rewards only if you have put in a great work. This has become a mantra in life.

As I conclude, I hope that my reminiscences of my time at the MBHS has inspired you, the current pupils and I hope that you would all strive to put the school and our country to the height of fame.

I hope you would at all times follow what the sages say.

LABORAMUS EXSPECTANTES!!!