

Mark Rosevear – Speech at Whole School Assembly – 13th September 2022

My whole life has been spent with Queen Elizabeth II as the monarch of United Kingdom. Last Thursday, 8th September, aged 96, she passed away. In the last week of her life, despite feeling tired and a little unwell, she did what she had done for 70 years, putting her country first. Two days before she died, she insisted on honouring her duties, meeting the outgoing Prime Minister, Mr Boris Johnson, and then welcoming his successor, Ms Liz Truss. Apart from the warmth that her people felt for her, it is her lifetime of service, dedicated to her country, that remains unparalleled in modern times. What has struck me as I have read the messages from rulers all over the world, is that no matter what political system their country has, the message of respect for her was sincere and heartfelt.

Earlier this year we planted trees just outside this gymnasium, as part of the celebrations for her Platinum Jubilee of 70 years ruling the country. I remember the Silver Jubilee of 1977, to celebrate 25 years of her reign, when as a young boy we had a street party. I am certain then that the adults talked about how long she had been Queen, yet looking back, she had hardly started.

She made an impression on people from a very early age. Sir Winston Churchill first saw her when she was two years old, and wrote, that she 'is a character. She has an air of authority and reflectiveness astonishing in an infant.' Her young life was typical of a Princess, and a happy one. Then came World War II. Showing the strength of character that later determined her reign, she wished to serve her country, although her father was unsure as she was the heir to the throne. She did enlist in the Army, and learned to drive large heavy military vehicles while working in the Auxiliary Territorial Service.

She had made clear her dedication to her role on the occasion of her 21st birthday when, as Princess Elizabeth, she made a moving declaration from Cape Town. 'I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong.'

Later that year she married Prince Philip, who provided loyal support until his death last year. In 1952, her father King George VI died. At just 26 years old, Princess Elizabeth became Queen Elizabeth II.

During her reign, there were 15 Prime Ministers. Britain is a constitutional monarchy, which means the real power lies with the Prime Minister and Parliament. The Queen always understood this, but many of those 15 Prime Ministers commented on her clever grasp of politics. There was one time, however, which showed both her strength of character as well as her sense of humour. In 2001, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, referred to 'the Golden Jubilee', only for the Queen to reply with the correction, 'I think you mean my Golden Jubilee'.

The Queen was very human. She could be seen wearing both the Crown and a pair of reading glasses, or discussing political matters dressed in horse riding trousers. The threat of assassination or disturbance she met with courage and composure. In Australia one time, the Queen was hit with an egg. 'I saw it coming,' she later confessed. 'I was grateful it was only an egg.' When a spectator at Trooping the Colour in 1981 pointed a pistol at her and fired six times, the Queen controlled her horse and rode on. She was not to know they were blank cartridges, but as a leader, she wanted to show she was not afraid.

Every Christmas, at 3pm, she spoke to the nation. As a young boy I remember my family watching without fail. Everyone listened to her speech, which was always about hope and the good in people. Her message was always followed by the Christmas special film, normally James Bond. She showed her sense of humour and willingness to be part of the celebrations of the 2012 Olympics in London by making a short, but very funny video, with Daniel Craig, the actor who played James Bond. I sent the links to all your teachers, so please ask them if you can watch it. I also sent them the video she made earlier this year with Paddington Bear, which is very moving.

The Queen was a unifying presence, and believed that leaders need to bring people together, not divide them. She loved her family, she loved her corgis, and she loved horses. She lived a true and full life, and honoured until the end what she said in 1947 about dedicating her life to serving her country.

No longer will we sing God Save The Queen. Now, to finish the assembly, and to show how the monarchy continues without her, we will be singing, for the first time since 1952, God Save The King.