

Growing Up

Assembly by Sally Rowley, Head of Sixth Form, October 2022

“When I grow up
I will be tall enough to reach the branches
That I need to reach to climb the trees
You get to climb when you're grown up

And when I grow up
I will be smart enough to answer all
The questions that you need to know
The answers to before you're grown up

And when I grow up
I will eat sweets every day
On the way to work and I
Will go to bed late every night
And I will wake up
When the sun comes up and I
Will watch cartoons until my eyes go square
And I won't care 'cause I'll be all grown up!

I will be strong enough to carry all
The heavy things you have to haul
Around with you when you're a grown-up

And when I grow up,
I will be brave enough to fight the creatures
That you have to fight beneath the bed
Each night to be a grown-up.”

I've decided to talk to you today about growing up, feeling grown up and being grown up. Those are three very different things although we often use those terms like they all mean the same thing. They don't and perhaps knowing that they don't is all part of growing up.

Let's start with growing up

Quite recently Mrs Murdoch and I were doing boarders' activities and were taking some of

the boarders' on a bracing country walk. As we strode along, one of the junior boarders' turned to Mrs. Murdoch and said that 'when she was young' she used to do something or other. The 'something or other' wasn't important. What was interesting was that a child in year 5 clearly thought of herself as not as young as she used to be.

I think that's something a lot of us can relate to. I may be 53 but I really vividly remember being about 5 and being firmly convinced that once I was 7, I would be grown up. I'm sure that many of you remember similar times when you thought that by turning a magic age 6,7 or 11 perhaps, you'd be all grown up.

What are the things that you thought you'd do once that happened? I thought that once I was 7, I'd be leaving home and buying my own house. I'd be going to work and choosing my own clothes. I planned to buy a pony and drive my own car.

Each of us experiences times when demands are put upon us because of our ages and sometimes we are ready for those demands. However, sometimes we're not. The year 7s have just joined the Senior School. Quite a lot of you have come from our own Junior school but others will have come from other primary schools. We've all made that leap to 'big school' but how many of us really stop to remember that period of adjustment when things seem strange, overwhelming, intimidating, exciting, different or unpredictable. Think back to when you were at a junior school or primary school; you spent most of the day in 'your' classroom with the same teacher. You might have to go to the lunch hall or the playground but fundamentally you were settled in one place with your peg, your desk, your teacher.

As soon as you arrive in Senior school you have to do things that are just bewildering. You have to read a timetable, you have to find your way from place to place, you have to get used to the strange people who are your teachers and you have to make sure that the books in your bag fit the information on your timetable. And that's even before to get yourself changed for games or queuing up for lunch. It can all feel overwhelming. However, will it help you if your mum packs your bag? Or if your dad notices you haven't got your PE kit and drives 15 miles to bring it for you? Or if you expect everything to be easy and familiar straightaway? Yes, it might be nice and comforting in the short term but will it help you in your mission to grow up? Probably not and sometimes these challenges are what we need to grow up.

And in year ten, you suddenly have to produce work which will have an impact on a qualification you won't get for another eighteen months. No longer can you rush preps just so you have something to hand in and keep the teacher off your back. Now there are consequences to the work you produce and that can feel very disconcerting.

It's just the same when you arrive in the sixth form. Suddenly you are wearing different clothes, your teachers treat you a bit differently and you are supposed to know how to manage your private study time and 'read around your subject'. All of this can feel a bit mystifying especially when you look so grown up but inside you feel no different to the way you felt when you started school in year 7.

But the sixth formers DO look very grown up don't they? I remember when I started at senior school. I couldn't tell who was a teacher and who was a sixth former. I expect that is true for a lot of the people sitting in the front rows of the cathedral this morning. When we are younger, we have expectations of how 'grown ups' behave. When they don't, it can be profoundly shocking and really upset the equilibrium of a child. I often remind the sixth form of the need to behave like grown ups, particularly in the presence of younger pupils. It is a hard lesson to learn because despite how often we use the phrase 'when I grow up' when we are growing up, there is no magic moment, no special day when you wake up and think 'Right, now I am a grown up!'

There are, though, moments in your life when you suddenly find yourself 'feeling' grown up and sadly these are often the times when you would just like to be a child again. It is quite grown up to find yourself having a meeting with a financial advisor. It is quite grown up to find yourself speaking on the phone to an insurance company. It's quite grown up to fill in your application for university. Bizarrely 'feeling grown up' has quite a lot of negativity attached to it. We don't want to talk about finance or insurance - at least, I don't...there are lots of things I'd rather be doing, but we have to, it's a duty, it is the responsible thing to do.

Likewise, we might love the idea of going to uni, but filling in the form is unfamiliar and when your parents nag you to get it done, you just want to do something else. Sure there is a sense of satisfaction that comes from getting things done, but for me, 'feeling like a grown up' is not something I embrace with unalloyed pleasure.

Never is this truer than when you find yourselves in situations where roles are reversed. When my parents were gravely ill and nearing the ends of their lives, being able to offer them the comfort and reassurance they needed was so important. It was the ultimate in being grown up and I would have given anything not to be a grown up if that was what it meant.

So *'feeling* like a grown up' is a bit of a mixed bag. But *being* a grown up? Much better.

I'm not suggesting that in order to be a grown up you have to rush out to Marks and Spencers to buy a nice pair of beige slacks. Nor would I advocate pie frill collar blouses and guernsey sweaters for all. When you're a grown up you don't have to wear Sketchers....although they are jolly comfy. Being a grown up is about having the confidence to know your own likes and dislikes, to recognise that some jobs are boring but need to be done...and do them. and to understand that when you are a grown up, the kitchen fairies will not empty the dishwasher, the dog will not walk itself, the rabbit won't clean itself out and the grubby ring around the bath will not disappear if you ignore it for long enough.

No-one is pretending for one second that these jobs are glamorous or exciting. They're not. Filling in a tax return is never going to set your heart on fire but once you've done it, the inland revenue won't keep pestering you and you can enjoy the stuff that real grown ups aren't supposed to like.

Practice being a grown up and soon you too will be able to reach the branches
That you need to reach to climb the trees
You get to climb when you're grown up.

You **will** be strong enough to carry all
The heavy things you have to haul
Around with you when you're a grown-up

And when you grow up,
you **will** be brave enough to fight the creatures that you have to fight beneath the bed each
night to be a grown-up.

And if you want to eat sweets on your way to work, I'm not going to be the one to stop you.

But as you grow up, take every opportunity to **be** a grown up so that when you
unexpectedly find yourself 'feeling like a grown up' you're ready for the challenge.