

Sir Alan Parker's speech at the opening of the 'Sir Alan Parker Building'

Dame Alice Owen's School, July 1st, 2015

I have to thank Dr Davison and the Board of Governors for this great honour.

When it was announced that they were naming this building after me, my old Owenian school friend, Stephen Spratt, who lives in Paris, emailed me to say how absurd it was, as I was always rubbish at languages (he used a stronger word than 'rubbish'), but on the other hand, he said, I was always a bit of a drama queen.

On my first day at Owen's I made my first friend, Andros Epaminondas. And sixty years later, I'm pleased to say he's still a friend and here today. Please stand up, Andros. (Andros takes a bow).

I have said on numerous occasions that, blessed as I have been with a fulfilling, creative career, the one single thing I can attribute to my progress was the day I was accepted at this wonderful school.

Not that I was a stellar student, but I learned to love learning and acquired a work ethic that stays with me. Neither was I a stellar actor: walk on parts in the annual school play were my speciality and, true, I did milk them for all it was worth. Mr Sparrow, the English teacher, said he feared for my digestion if I chewed any more scenery.

Of course, this magnificent school has changed and grown since the eccentric version I went to in that narrow alleyway at the Angel, Islington. The academic successes are now legendary. Sadly, I never went to university - I had set my heart on art school, but my less than enlightened father vetoed it saying I'd been in school long enough. Last year, aged seventy, I finally enrolled at my local art school -- I think it made me the oldest student in the UK.

I stand here as an example of what the mediocre Owen's students might achieve with a little hard work and a rather thick skin.

I wrote a line in my film, 'Fame,' which is, "No true artist should be afraid of what others think of their work, because a custard pie comes with the job."

And talking of custard pies, I leave you with some lines from my first film, 'Bugsy Malone.'

"Open your eyes and see that you can be anything that you want to be..."

And: "We're gonna be remembered for the things that we say and do. You give a little love and it all comes back to you."

So to all you students here I say, Give a little love to your teachers,

To your fellow students,

And, most importantly, give a little love to your parents.

And it will all come back to you, I guarantee it.

Thank you so much for this honour.