

Where were you when you heard the news?

I was at home in Perth, Western Australia, when I heard the news of the attack on the Twin Towers at the World Trade Centre in New York City. I had just sat down after clearing away the dishes from dinner when I turned on the television to catch up with the evening news headlines. The image that confronted me was of a burning skyscraper and a reporter's comment that a plane had crashed into the North Tower. A few minutes later a second plane flew into the South Tower and the reporter now spoke of a terrorist act rather than an accident. I sat in front of the television for the next six hours unable to move away and fearful that this event would be the start of a major world conflict. The date was the 11th September 2001 on a sunny autumn morning in New York.

You will find during your lives that there are significant events that will stay etched in your memory. People often ask 'where were you when you heard the news?' Sadly, many of those memorable events involve death or destruction and as you get older the number of events that you remember will increase. Thinking back over my life my first 'where were you when you heard the news?' event took place in November 1963. I was attending a scout meeting when the news came through that President John Kennedy has been assassinated in Dallas, Texas. I knew who President Kennedy was but had little other information about him given my young age. All I remember is that everybody was incredibly sad. The same was true seventeen years later when I heard the news that John Lennon had been shot and killed outside his apartment block in New York. I was listening to the radio when the programme was interrupted and the news broadcast around the world. John Lennon's death had a big impact on me. As a founder of the pop group The Beatles he had a significant part to play on how I viewed the world as a teenager. The news came as a great shock.

Yet not all news has been sad. I was with friends in July 1969 when we watched on television the moment Apollo 11 landed on the Moon and Neil Armstrong became the first person to step on the lunar surface. The pictures were in black and white, the images blurred and the sound distorted but the fact that a man was actually standing on the moon was astonishing. I also remember that summer's day in 1966 when I heard the news that England had won the football World Cup for the first time. Five decades later, that is still the only time that England has been the best in the world.

I wonder what events come to your mind when you first heard the news? Of course, last week's boating tragedy off Lamma Island will certainly be one example. Maybe you were at Victoria Harbour for the fireworks display when the news came through. Or maybe you, like me, heard the news the next morning on the television.

We would all hope that only good news comes our way. Many Christians around the world will be able to tell you when they first heard the good news of Jesus Christ. My parents took me with them to Church every Sunday morning and my earliest recollections of singing hymns and songs was probably around three years of age. Yet the first time that I really heard God's message came when I was sixteen years of age and decided that I wanted to be confirmed and accept Holy Communion. For many St. Paul's boys the first time that they heard the Christian message was here in this Hall during morning assembly. The first time that some of our boys and maybe even some teachers stepped inside a church was at the Form 1 Heritage Service at St. Paul's Church in Glenealy. Possibly the first time heard the good news was at a meeting of the SPC Christian Union (CU).

This week we have the Form 1 Heritage Service and the CU Orientation. The timing of these activities is not coincidental. After spending one month settling into a new school year the time is perfect to think about the Christian message of our College and to make preparation for a Christian Christmas. Maybe this week in this College will be the first time you hear the good news. If that is the case then this is an event you will remember for the rest of your life.

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