

While thinking about this speech I found this quote.

'You have to pick up Ariadne's thread and follow it until you come across the smallest, shyest intuitions of your imagination and then take the test of forming your ideas and bring them back into the light of day'

Here is the beginning of my thread. Since the last founder's day, in April 2019.

- Theresa May resigned as Prime Minister,
- Brexit was completed,
- Notre Dame burned,
- Boris Johnson became Prime Minister,
- The Amazon burned,
- Eating disorder rates increased 200%
- California burned,
- Anti-Asian hate crimes increased 1900%,
- The Taliban regained power in Afghanistan,
- Joe Biden became President,
- Britney Spears won her freedom
- Texas passed a law to ban abortions after six weeks of pregnancy
- July 2021 was announced as the new hottest month on record,
- Scotland became the first country in the world to provide free access to period products
- Greta Thunberg sailed to America and became Time's Person of the Year
- Lizzo released her first album
- Season two of Fleabag was released,
- Breonna Taylor was murdered,
- Sarah Everard was murdered,
- George Floyd was murdered,
- Over three million women experienced domestic abuse
- Russia invaded Ukraine
- Over six million people died of Covid 19

And... Camden school for girls celebrated its 150 year anniversary.

I have a bit of a record with founder's days; two years ago at the last one, I was placed in the top tier of the choir. I had the worst cold in history. The days when a cough and a headache didn't mean 7 days in isolation.

So, I stood in the third row, singing and sniffing, next to my sister, Bea, who I would snarl at every so often for not singing properly or loud enough or the wrong harmony.

Midway through the seven fold amens, I began to feel worse, my head felt heavier, my eyes fuzzed out and black spots dazzled my vision. On the sixth of the sevenfold amens, I fainted.

It might have been less of a drama had I not been twice the height of everyone around me, and if my sister hadn't, kindly, stepped aside to allow me to faint and fall 3 levels down onto two year sevens.

I didn't at that time realise how much time would be spent with my sister in the coming months. The long hours of lockdown meant I began to think about education in a different way. We as young people have had a unique experience. School without school. We had to learn to study independently with only limited instruction from our disembodied teachers flickering on screens.

I was already aware how different my sister and I were. That time at home highlighted the vast disparities between my needs and her's. It was clear my sister required a very different education to me. I know she won't mind me saying she hated school. And would've hated any school. In her own words 'dodgeball has traumatised me for life'.

Having a sister with a different learning style has acutely demonstrated to me the complexity of educational needs. As we are attempting to return to some kind of normal, and looking forward into the future of education, I hope we can bring fresh insight into the advances needed to make our education system more accessible and accepting of all.

But this is a big anniversary, not just the last two years. to truly understand the eminence of this school we must reflect on the past 150 years! So another list! Since the first founder's day in April 1871:

- Women are able to go to University on the same terms as men.
- Women fought for the right to vote. New Zealand first. Others slowly followed. Switzerland was 1971.
- Marie Curie won the Nobel Prize
- Nancy Astor became an MP
- Women legally became 'persons' in their own right
- The contraceptive pill was invented
- Abortion was legalised (in some places)
- Women were allowed to get mortgages in Britain
- Women were appointed to the US Supreme Court
- Equal Pay Acts were passed
- Sex Discrimination Acts were passed
- Rape in marriage was made a crime – in 1994
- Malala Yousafzai won the Nobel Prize

- over 45% of academics are women
- And yet only 22% of professors

Frances Mary Buss was at the forefront of huge leaps for women. Miss Buss coined the term headmistress in her early years leading this school. She was an ardent campaigner, believing with immense conviction in the power of educating women.

The reason we are here today is because women never stopped campaigning, never gave up, battled against heavy odds and never stopped fighting.

I realised, as I was writing, there was a lot of fighting and battling. Given the current horrific situation in the Ukraine using this warrior style language gave me pause. There is undoubtedly a fight ahead for women regarding so many things which should be indisputable rights. But I wonder if for us, the young people who are lucky enough to inherit Frances Mary Buss' legacy, peaceful protest might be a more powerful way to stride into our futures.

Rosa Parks refused to budge and sparked a civil rights movement. The work of the suffragists. Ms Buss' quiet but crucial work educating young women in her society.

We owe so much to the women who have come before us.

And today, there are two women I'd like to thank. Two women who embody the sentiment behind my head girl campaign posters – my face plastered on Rick Astley in his 'never gonna give you up' music video.

The first is my mum, for giving me power, for believing in me, always, for fighting for me, for pushing over all those year sevens to get to me when I fainted, for understanding, for being my shoulder to cry on, for making me stronger and better and for your love. I will never be able to let you know how profoundly you inspire me and how deeply I love you.

And to all of the mothers; we are grateful. Even as we ignore your advice and slam our bedroom doors. You have raised us, supported us and loved us. Recently, you have educated us; motivating us to keep going, even when we were encompassed by the walls of our bedrooms, only allowed out for a walk a day.

And the second woman I'd like to thank. Miss Frances Mary Buss. A woman striving for better education for young women.

Miss Buss was at the head of campaigns allowing girls to sit public exams and attend universities. She was a suffragist; participating in the Kensington society, a women's discussion group responsible for the first campaigns for female suffrage, higher education and property holding.

We must honour Miss Buss' fight. Her drive, and thank her. For having complete and utter faith in the determination and abilities of young women. For believing in the potency of young, female power.

Even if you do not feel it, every student at Camden will forever be indebted to Frances Mary Buss for her impact on their lives. We must hold onto the ever present sense of gratitude to Miss Buss in this school. And gratitude to the women and mothers who preceded us.

*My* mother who has constantly challenged this system to get my sister's educational needs met. Although school didn't suit my sister, Bea, she got an education and a good one.

We don't all need the same kind of education but we do all need an education.

It is a human right. But in Syria, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Algeria, South Sudan, Afghanistan and so many more countries, female education is almost unheard of. Worldwide over 130 million girls aged 6-18 are not in education.

It is a privilege to be here today; to attend school. This school. It is horrifying and saddening that 150 years after Frances Mary Buss started this school, the fight for female education is still so necessary. We must continue Miss Buss' work. We must be educated and be educators.

This school is more than an academic institution; it is a place where girls can grow up into young women, and young people can grow into remarkable adults. A place where we learn to understand the reality of life at this moment in time. Both the positives and negatives.

We must hold onto Miss Buss' vision. And continue her work to make education non-selective. We as students, staff and supporters of this school, set up to educate and embrace everyone; must strive for inclusivity and celebrate differences.

Ariadne's threads. The threads we all clung to in the days of lockdown; the threads our ancestors grasped in their struggles to equal rights for women. And it will be these threads – gripped tight – which will lead us forward into an incredible future.

The quote I found detailing the power of Ariadne's threads was from my grandmother's diary and read by my mum at her funeral.

Lastly, I'd like to make it clear that my sister did apologise for her lack of intervention in my fainting fall. And, even gave me one of her sacred jammy dodgers and her wilting posy on our way out of the gates.

So thanks Bea, and may you never play dodgeball again.

Thank you